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# AN EXPOSITION OF PSALM

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190 SERMONS  
ON PSALM 119

# 119

BLESSED ARE THE  
UNDEFILED IN  
THE WAY



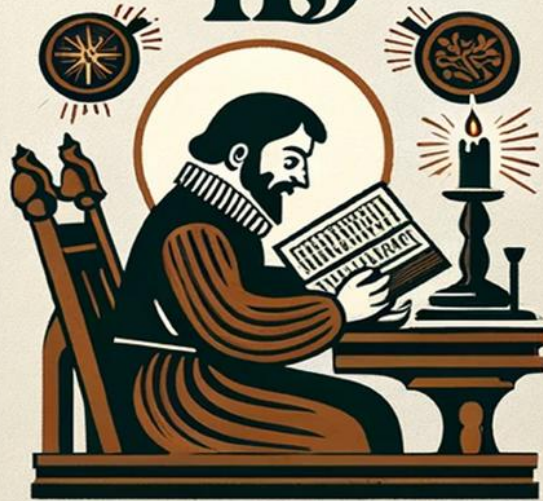
· THOMAS MANTON ·

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# **An Exposition of Psalm 119**

**by Thomas Manton**

LONDON: JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET 1872

## **TO THE READER**

IT is the honour of the evangelical ministry, that it was principally instituted for the service of God, not as he is the governor of the earth, but the Lord of heaven, and to prepare men by holiness for his eternal kingdom. And it is an excellent favour of God to his ministers when their labours are eminently useful for this blessed end. This singular grace and privilege God was pleased to confer upon his faithful servant Dr Manton, whose life was spent in the most precious work of converting souls to Christ, and preparing them for the celestial paradise; and since his retiring from the world by death, his soul now enjoying the blessed rest above, yet he remains with us in what was most valuable of him, his excellent sermons, the productions of his holy mind and heart; and the pen having a larger

extent than the tongue in communicating them, may be more beneficial to the church than before.

The following sermons were preached by him in his usual course of three times a week, which I do not mention to lessen their worth, but to show how diligent and exact he was in the performance of his duty. Indeed, his ordinary sermons, considering the substantial matter, clear order, and vigorous full expressions, may well pass for extraordinary. I cannot but admire the fecundity and variety of his thoughts, that the same things so often occurring in the verses of this psalm, yet by a judicious observing the different arguments and motives whereby the Psalmist enforces the same requests, or some other circumstances, every sermon contains new conceptions, and proper to the text. Some few verses were not handled by him. I earnestly pray that those who shall read these sermons may taste the sweetness of the divine truths opened in them, and may be transformed into the spirit of David, by an inward feeling of the affections, and verifying in their own breasts the words of the holy prophet.

W. BATES.

#### TO THE READER

CHRISTIAN READER,—It is somewhat difficult not to applaud that excellency which has first approved itself to our judgment. Hence is it that, though this work needs it not, I will so far gratify my own affections, and comply with obtaining custom, as to acquaint thee that, if thou hadst my eyes and taste, thou must admire its beauty, and confess its sweetness; much more when thou shalt use thy own more discerning eye and judicious palate.

The matter of these sermons is spiritual, and speaks the author one intimately acquainted with the secrets of wisdom. He writes like one that knew the Psalmist's heart, and felt in his own the sanctifying power of what he wrote. Their design is practice; beginning with the understanding, dealing with the affections, but still driving on the advancement of practical holiness. They come home and close to the conscience; first presenting us a glass, wherein we may view the spots of our souls, and then directing us to that fountain wherein we may wash them away. They are of an evangelical complexion, abasing proud corrupt nature, and advancing free and efficacious grace in the conversion of sinners. The exhortations are powerful, admirably suited to treat with reasonable creatures, yet still supposing them to be the vehicle of the Holy Spirit, through which he communicates life and power to obey them.

The manner of handling is not inferior to the dignity of the matter; so plain as to accommodate the most sublime truths to the meanest spiritual capacity, and yet so elevated as to approve itself to the most refined understanding. He knew how to be succinct without obscurity, and where the weight of the argument required it, to enlarge without nauseous prolixity. He studied more to profit than please, and yet an honest heart will then be best pleased when most profited. He chose rather to speak appositely than elegantly; and yet the judicious do account propriety the choicest elegancy. He laboured more industriously to conceal his learning than some others to ostentate theirs: and yet, when he would most veil it, the discerning reader cannot but discover it, and rejoice to find such a mass, such a treasure of useful learning, couched under a well-studied and artificial plainness. But let the reader take a taste of, let him concoct and digest, these spiritual discourses, and he shall say with the Sabean queen, 'It was a true report I heard in my own land; but behold the one-half was not told me!' Or with the men of Sychar,

'Now we believe, not because of thy saying, but because we ourselves have proved and experienced' their delicacies; as one taste of honey will more effectually commend its sweetness than the most elaborate oratory.

Those ancients that had seen the first temple wept bitterly when they saw the foundation of the second laid. And perhaps some pious souls who have 'sat with great delight' under the author's ministerial 'shadow, and have found his fruit sweet to their taste,' may secretly shed a tear, that though they here meet also the same divine truths, the same spiritual matter, yet they want the living voice, the grateful elocution, the natural eloquence, in which that heavenly matter dropped, or rather flowed, from his gracious lips. But let the same consideration which quieted the spirits of those Jews of old satisfy theirs: God can fill this house also with his glory; and though the second edition of the temple fall short of the former in the beauty and symmetry of the structure, yet can the Spirit flow from the press as well as the pulpit; with this advantage, that they may here in safety read what with great danger they formerly heard.

I have admired, and must recommend to the observation of the reader, the fruitfulness of the author's holy invention, accompanied with solid judgment; in that whereas the coincidence of the matter in this psalm might have superseded his labours in very many verses, yet, without force or offering violence to the sacred text, he has, either from the connection of one verse with its predecessor, or the harmony between the parts of the same verse, found out new matter to entertain his own meditation and his reader's expectation; nor do I observe more than twelve verses in this large psalm wholly omitted, if at least they may be said to be omitted, whose subject-matter is elsewhere copiously handled.

Had the reverend author designed these papers for public view, he could not have flattered himself, in a cavilling age, that he should escape the severe lashes of envy and malice (those fiends that haunt all things and persons excellent); he must have expected a snarl from the wolf's black mouth, or a kick from the dull ass's hoof. Yet on his behalf I demand this justice, that he be not condemned for the printers' crimes. Their venial errors will receive a pardon of course from the ingenuous reader; and for their mortal transgressions, whereof they are sometimes guilty, either clouding, altering, or perverting the scope of the author, enjoin them, gentle reader, a moderate penance, and then receive them to full absolution, who have voluntarily offered themselves to confession.

Thus much, Christian reader, it was thy interest and mine to have spoken; the rest must be to the God of all grace, that he would give thee and this book his blessing; which is the prayer of thy affectionate friend and faithful servant in our Lord Jesus,

V. A.

December 13, 1680.

# SEVERAL SERMONS UPON 119 PSALM

## SERMON I

**Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.—VER. 1.**

THIS psalm is a choice piece of Scripture. In the Hebrew there is much exactness of composure to be observed. It is divided into twenty-two parts, according to the number of the Hebrew letters; every part containeth eight verses, all beginning with one and the same letter; in which I should think there is nothing of mystery intended, only a help to attention and memory. I shall go over the several verses in their order, the Lord giving life and assistance. And because the same matter will be of frequent recourse, I shall endeavour to discuss each verse in a sermon.

The Psalmist beginneth with a description of the way to true blessedness, as Christ began his Sermon on the Mount, and as the whole Book of Psalms is elsewhere begun. Blessedness is that which we all aim at, only we are either ignorant or reckless of the way that leadeth to it; therefore the holy Psalmist would first set us right in the true notion of a blessed man: 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.'

In the words you have—



1. The privilege, blessed.

2. The manner and form of its consideration; not so much in the nature and formality of it, as the way that leadeth to it. Or,

First, Here is a way spoken of in the general.

Secondly, This way specified, the law of the Lord.

Thirdly, The qualification of the persons' sincerity, the undefiled; and constancy, who walk.

Doct. 1. That it standeth us much upon to have a true notion of blessedness and blessed men. David beginneth with that.

1. All desire it; Christians, pagans, all agree in this. When Paul was dealing with the heathens, he urgeth two notions wherein God might be taken up. That of a first cause: Acts 14:17, 'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' And a chief good, Acts 17:27. As in the one place, there must be a cause of showers of rain and fruitful seasons; so in the other, there must be a universal good, or else the inclinations of nature were in vain. Among Christians, the good and bad, that do so seldom agree in anything, yet agree in this, every man would be happy, and not miserable: Ps. 4:6, 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good?' Good, good, is the cry of the world. It is intended in the very nature of desire; for everything that is desired is desired as good, *sub ratione boni*. As God implanted in us affections of aversion to avoid what is evil, so affections of choice and pursuit to follow after what is good. Well, then, out of a principle of self-love, all would be happy; they would have good, and they would have it for ever. Inanimate creatures are, by the guidance and direction of

Providence, carried to the place of their perfection. The brute beasts seek the preservation and perfection of that life which they have; so do all men hunt about for contentment and satisfaction. To ask whether men would be happy or not, is to ask whether they love themselves, yea or nay; but whether holy, is another thing.

2. All without grace are much mistaken in it. (1.) Some mistake in the end. They desire good in common, not that which is indeed the true good; they seek happiness in riches, honours, pleasures; and so they fly from that which they seek, whilst they seek it. They intend happiness, but choose misery: Luke 16:25, 'Thy good things;' and Ps. 4:7, 'Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased.' Their corn, wine, and oil, not only possessed by them, but chosen by them as their felicity and portion. (2.) They fail in the means. They know them not, like them not, or else faint in the prosecution of the end by them. They discern them but weakly, as a spire at a distance; they see it so as they know not whether they see it, yea or nay, as the blind man saw men walking as trees. The light of nature being so dim, they consider them but weakly; the mind being diverted by other objects, they desire them but weakly; the affections being prepossessed and intercepted by things that come next to hand, velleities and cold inclinations they may have, but no serious volition or firm bent of heart. Or suppose a man under some conviction, both as to end and means, yet his endeavours are very cold and slack; they do not pursue it with that earnestness, exactness, and uniformity of endeavour which is requisite to obtain their happiness. They are like children that seem to desire a thing passionately, but are soon out of humour: 'The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing, for his hands refuse to labour.' When true happiness is sufficiently revealed, we like it not upon God's terms, John 6:34. The Jews, when our Saviour told them of the bread of God that came down from heaven to give life to the

world, said unto him, 'Lord, evermore give us of this bread.' But it is said, upon hearing the conditions of obtaining it, ver. 66, 'they murmured, went back, and walked no more with him.' All would live for ever; but when they must follow a despised Christ up and down the world, and incur censures and dangers, they like none of that: Ps. 106:24, 'Yea, they despised the pleasant land, and believed not his word.' The land was a good land, but the way to it was through a howling wilderness. When they heard of the strength and stature of the men, their fortifications, they fell into passion and murmur, and gave over the pursuit of Canaan. Heaven is a good place, but men must get to it with such difficulty, therefore they are loath to be at the cost. Men would be happy with that kind of happiness which is true happiness, but not in the way which God propoundeth, being prepossessed with carnal fancies. It is counted a foolish thing to wait upon God in the midst of straits, conflicts, and temptations: 1 Cor. 2:14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' More prejudices lie against the means than the end; therefore, out of despair, they sit down with a carnal choice, as persons disappointed in a match take the next offer. Since they cannot have God's happiness, they resolve to be their own carvers, and to make themselves as happy as they can in the enjoyment of present things.

3. Our mistakes about it will cost us dear. God is Very jealous of what we make our happiness, and therefore blasteth the carnal choice. Those that will try experiments, smart for it in the issue. Solomon came home by weeping-cross: Eccles. 1:14, 'I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.' He hath proved it to our hands. He had a large heart, and a large estate, and gave himself to pleasures, to extract happiness from the creatures, to hunt after worldly satisfactions in a more artificial

way than brutish sots, that merely act according to lust and appetite: Eccles. 2:1, 'I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure; and behold, this also is vanity.' He gave himself to pleasures, not merely upon sensual, but curious and artificial aims, yet found his heart secretly withdrawn from God. Whoever maketh trial will either run into utter mischief, or must come home again by a sound remorse. And so they learn it, and dearly to their cost.

Use. Let us study this point well.

1. That we may not take up with a false happiness, or set up our rest in temporal enjoyments, as height of honour, abundance of riches, favour of great men, &c.; things useful in their Sphere, and beneficial to sweeten and comfort the life of man, who hath placed his happiness in God. Pleasures being enjoyed, they do not satisfy; being loved, they defile; being lost, they increase our trouble and sorrow.

[1.] They cannot satisfy, because of their imperfection and uncertainty. They do not answer the whole desire of man, carry no proportion with the conscience. That which maketh a man happy must bear a thorough proportion with all the wants, desires, and capacities of the soul, so as conscience and heart and all may say it is enough. But, alas! these things cannot give us solid peace and contentment: Isa. 55:2, 'Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?' Till an hungry conscience be provided for, we cannot be happy. But besides their low use, consider the uncertainty of enjoyment. Nothing can give us solid peace, but what doth make us eternally happy. These flowers wither in our hands while we smell at them. Nothing but the favour of God is from everlasting to everlasting. We have not a sure possession of these things in the world. They are

possessed with fear, 1 Cor. 7:30, 31. It is the apostle's counsel, that 'they that buy' should have such remiss affections to the world, 'as though they possessed not; and that they use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away.' A man must look for changes, and lay forth for several conditions in the world: Ps. 39:11, 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth. Surely every man is vanity. Selah.' Like glass, brittle when most glistening.

[2.] Being inordinately loved, they defile. There is not only gall, but poison in them. They cannot make us better, but may easily make us worse, as they defile and draw the heart from God, and enslave us to our own lusts: 1 Tim. 6:9, 10, 'But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.'

[3.] Being lost, they increase our trouble and sorrow. A man that hath not learned to be abased, as well as to abound, his abundance maketh his case the more miserable. It is hard to go back a degree or two. They are apt to bring much trouble upon the heart of him that is conversant about them: 'All is vanity and vexation of spirit.' The more we make them our happiness, when lost they increase our trouble.

2. That we may not be prejudiced against the true happiness. Men think it a happiness to live without the yoke of religion, to speak, and think, and do what they please without restraint; but to be always in bonds, and held under the awe of the word, that they count unreasonable and grievous: Ps. 2:3, 'Let us break their bands

asunder, and cast away their cords from us.' In studying this point— (1.) 'Lean not to thine own understanding;' Prov. 23:4, 'Labour not to be rich; cease from thy own wisdom;' but seek direction from God by his word and Spirit. God only can determine who is the blessed man, in whose hand alone it is to make us blessed. (2.) Take the light of faith; sense and carnal reason will deceive you. Blessedness is a riddle which can only be found out by faith, 'which is the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. 11:1. That a poor godly man, who is counted the filth and offscouring of all things, should be the only happy man, and that the great men of this world, who have all things at will, should be 'poor, blind, miserable, and naked,' is a paradox will never enter into the heart of a natural man, that hath only the light of sense and carnal reason to judge of things, for to sight and reason it is nothing so. (3.) Wait for the light and power of the Spirit to incline and draw thy heart to God. Many times we are doctrinally right in point of blessedness, but not practically; we content ourselves with the mere notion, but are not brought under the power of these truths; that is the work of the Spirit. It is easy to prove that it is the beasts' happiness to enjoy pleasure without remorse; easy to prove the uncertainty of riches, and what unstable foundations they are for the soul to rest on; but to draw off the heart from these things to God is the work of the Holy Ghost: Ps. 49:13, 'This their way is their folly, yet their posterity approve their sayings.' Many a man who stands over the grave of his ancestors will say, Ah! how foolish were they to waste their time and strength in pleasure, and in hunting after worldly greatness and esteem and favour with men; what doth it profit them now? And yet their posterity approve the same—that is, they live by the same principles, are as greedy upon worldly satisfactions as ever those were that have gone before, that neglected God and heavenly things, and went down to the grave, and their honour was laid in the dust. Until the Lord take off our heart by the light and power of his grace, we remain as sottish and foolish and

worldly as they. Thus you see how much it concerns you to be right in the notion of true blessedness.

Doct. 2. That sincere, constant, uniform obedience to God's law is the only way to true blessedness.

This is called a way, and this way is said to be God's law, and in this way we must be undefiled; which implies not absolute purity and legal perfection, but gospel sincerity; and in this way we must walk, which notes both uniformity and constancy; it must be our course, and we must persevere therein.

Three things need to be opened:—

1. Speak to the rule.
2. Of conformity to the rule; that it must be sincere, uniform, and constant.
3. How this is the way to true happiness; what respect it hath to true blessedness.

First, The rule is the law of God. All created beings have a rule. Christ's human nature was the highest of all creatures, and yet it is to be in subjection to God; he is under a rule: Gal. 4:4, 'Made of a woman, made under the law.' The angels they have many immunities above man; they are freed from death, from the necessities of meat and drink; but they are not free from the law; they are not sui juris, at their own dispose; they 'obey his commands, hearkening unto the voice of his word,' Ps. 103:20. Inanimate creatures, sun, moon, stars, are under a law of providence, under a covenant of night and day: Ps. 149:6, 'He has also stablished them for ever; he hath made a decree which shall not pass.' They have their courses and appointed

motions, and keep to the just points of their compass. All creatures are under a law, according to which they move and act. Much more now is man under a law, because he hath election and choice. But if the law were not a rule to a Christian (as some Antinomians have that opinion), if it were not in force, then there should be no sin or duty; for 'where there is no law, there is no transgression;' for the nature of 'sin is the transgression of the law,' 1 John 3:4; Rom. 4:15. Certainly the law as a rule is a very great privilege; and surely Christ did not come to lessen or abolish the privileges of his people: Deut. 4:4, 'There is no nation hath such statutes;' Ps. 147:20, 'He hath made known his statutes to Israel,' was their prerogative. If the law might be disannulled as to new creatures, then why doth the Spirit of God write it with such legible characters in their hearts? This is promised as the great blessing of the covenant of grace, Heb. 8:10. Now, that which the Spirit engraves upon the heart, would Christ come to deface and abolish? The law was written upon tables of stone, and the great work of the Spirit is to write it upon the table of the heart; and the ark was a chest where the law was kept, and with allusion to it God saith, 'I will put my law into their heart.' Clearly, then, there is a rule, and this rule is the law of God. Now, this rule must be consulted with upon all occasions, if we would obtain true blessedness, both to inform us, and to awe us.

First, To inform us, that we may not act short or over.

1. Not short. There are many false rules with which men please themselves, and are but so many byways that lead us off from our own happiness. For instance, good meaning, that is a false rule; the world lives by guess and devout aims. But if good meaning were a rule, a man may oppose the interest of Christ, destroy his servants, and all upon good meaning: John 16:2, 'Those that kill you will think they do God good service.' Men may grossly err that follow a blind



conscience. Custom, that is another. It is no matter what others have done before us, but what Christ did before them all. If custom carried it, most of Christ's institutions would be out of doors. Example of others; that is no good rule. It is not for us to go where others have gone before; but what is the true way: Mat. 7:14, 'The broad way, that leads to destruction, and many walk therein.' The path to hell is most beaten; we are not always to follow the track; they are dead fishes which swim down the stream: we are not to be led away with custom and example, and do as others do. Our own desires and inclinations are not our rule. Oh, how miserable should we be if our lust were our law, if the bent of our hearts were our rule! Jude 16, 'Walking after their own lusts,' is the description of those that were monsters of men, that had outgrown all feelings of conscience. The laws of men are not our rule. It is too narrow and short to commend us to God, to be punctual to the laws of men and no more: Ps. 19:7, 'The law of God is perfect, converting the soul.' To convince us of sin, to humble the heart, to reduce and bring us back to God, there is no rule for this but the law of God. Men make laws as tailors do garments, to fit the crooked bodies they serve for, to suit the humours of the people to be governed by these laws; surely they are not a sufficient rule to convince us of sin, and to guide us to true happiness. A civil orderly man is one thing, and a godly renewed man another. It is God's prerogative to give a law to the conscience and the renewed motions of the heart. Human laws are good to establish converse with man, but too short to establish communion with God; and, therefore, we must consult with the rule, which is the law of the Lord, that we may not come short of true blessedness.

2. That we may not act over. There is a superstitious and apocryphal holiness which is contrary to a genuine and scriptural holiness, yea, destructive to it: it is like the concubine to the wife: it draws away respects due to the true religion. Now, what is this kind of holiness?

It is a temporary flesh-pleasing religion, which consists in a conformity to outward rites and ceremonies and external mortifications, such as is practised by the Papists and formalists, 'after the commandments and doctrines of men:' Col. 2:23, 'Which things indeed have a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.' God will not thank them that give more than he requireth. These things have a show of wisdom. As brass money may be fairer than true coin, though not of such a value, so this will-worship and superstitious holiness may seem to make a fair show, but it is destructive to true godliness and scriptural holiness, which guide us to communion with God. When men's zeal boils over in a false pretended holiness, it quencheth the fire and destroys true godliness and religion. Excess is monstrous, as well as defect. Therefore still we must consult with the law and rule, that we may not come short or over.

Secondly, As the law must be consulted with, that it may inform us, so that it may awe us, and hold us under a sense of our duty to God: 'By the law is the knowledge of sin,' Rom. 3:19. Usually most Christians live by rote, and do not study their rule. Would a man worship God so coldly and customarily, if he did consider the rule which requires such heedfulness of soul, fervency of spirit, diligent attendance upon God in his ordinances? Would a man allow himself liberty of vain speeches, idle talk, and suffer his tongue to run riot, if he did consult with the rule, and remembered that light words would weigh heavy in God's balance? These are condemned by the law of liberty: James 2:12, 'So speak, and so do, as those that shall be judged by the law of liberty.' Would a man be so slight in heavenly things? so disorderly and intemperate in the use of pleasure and pursuit of worldly profit, if he did consider the rule, and what a holy

moderation God hath required of us upon all occasions? This is the first thing, namely, the rule, which is the law of God.

Secondly, There is a conformity to this rule. If you would be blessed, there must be a sincere, constant, uniform obedience. The will of God must not only be known but practised. Many will conclude that God's law in the theory is the only direction to true blessedness; but now, to take it for their rule, to keep close to it, not one of a thousand doth that.

1. Then, sincere obedience is required: 'Blessed is the undefiled in the way.' At first hearing of these words, a man might reply, Oh, then, none can be blessed, if that be the qualification; 'for who can say, My heart is clean?' Prov. 20:9. I answer—This undefiledness is to be understood according to the tenor of the second covenant, which doth not exclude the mercy of God and the justification of penitent sinners; Ps. 130:3, 4, 'If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, who shall stand? But there is mercy with thee.' There is no escaping condemnation and the curse, if God should deal with us according to strict justice, and require an absolute undefiledness. Well, then, this qualification must be understood, as I said, in the sense of the second covenant; and what is that? Sincerity of sanctification. When a man doth carefully endeavour to keep his garments unspotted from the world, and to approve himself to God; when this is his constant exercise, 'to avoid all offence both towards God and man, Acts 24:16, and is cautious and watchful lest he should be defiled; when he is humbled more for his pollutions; when he is always purging his heart, and doth endeavour, and that with success, to walk in the way of God,—here is the undefiledness in a gospel sense: Ps. 84:11, 'The Lord will be a sun and a shield', &c. To whom? 'To those that walk uprightly.' This is possible enough; here is no ground of despair. This is that will lead us to blessedness, when we are troubled for our

failings, and there is a diligent exercise in the purification of our hearts.

2. A constant obedience. Wicked men have their good moods and devout pangs in the way to heaven, but they are not lasting. They will go with God a step or two. But it is said, 'He that walketh in the law of the Lord.' A wicked man prays himself weary of prayer, and professeth himself weary of holiness. A man is judged by the tenor of his life; not by one action, but as he holdeth on his way to heaven, Job 27:10. Many run well for a while, but are soon out of breath. Enoch walked with God three hundred and sixty-five years.

3. A uniform and an entire obedience: Exod. 20:1, 'God spake all these words.' He commandeth one thing as well as another, and conscience takes hold of all. To single out what pleaseth us is to make ourselves gods.

A servant doth not choose his work, but the master. A child of God is uniform in one place as well as another, at home and abroad, in all the passages of his life, in prosperity and adversity, 'whether he abound, or whether he be abased,' Phil. 4. He is not like Ephraim, as 'a cake not turned;' but there is a uniformity. Doth he make conscience of piety and worship, and will he not make conscience of honesty and just dealing with men? Will he make conscience of his actions, and will he not of his words? He doth not give up himself to idle speech and vain discourse. A hypocrite is best when he is taken in pieces, but a sincere man is best when he is taken altogether. A Christian is always like himself. It is notable in the story of the creation that God views every day's work, and God 'saw that it was good;' he viewed it altogether, 'and God saw all things that he had made, and behold it was very good.' When he did consider the whole correspondence of his works, how they answered one another, then

God was delighted in it. So a Christian is most delighted in the review of his course and walking according to the commandment.

Thirdly, What respect hath this to true blessedness? It is the way to it: 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.' This will appear in two respects—(1.) It is the beginning of blessedness. Likeness to God is the foundation of glory. Conformity to him will be carried on 'from glory to glory,' 2 Cor. 3:18. And as conformity unto, so communion with, God in the beauties of holiness is the beginning of happiness: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness,' Ps. 17:15. (2.) Sincere and constant obedience is the evidence of our right to future blessedness. A man hath somewhat to show for it, Mat. 5:8. It is an inclusive evidence: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;' and it is an exclusive evidence: Heb. 12:14, 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' Well, then, when this is our way and course, we may expect happiness hereafter.

The uses are—

1. To show you that carnal men live as if they sought misery rather than happiness: Prov. 8:36, 'He that sins against me wrongs his own soul; all that hate me love death.' If a man were travelling to York, who would say his aim was to come to London? Do these men pursue happiness that walk in such defilement? It is the way of God's law that leads to true blessedness.

2. To press you to walk according to this rule, if you would be blessed. To this end let me press you to take the law of God for your rule, the Spirit of God for your guide, the promises for your encouragement, and the glory of God for your end.

[1.] Take the law of God for your rule. Study the mind of God, and know the way to heaven, and keep exactly in it. It is an argument of sincerity when a man is careful to practise all that he knows, and to be inquisitive to know more, even the whole will of God, and when the heart is held under awe of God's word. If a commandment stand in the way, it is more to a gracious heart than if a thousand bears and lions were in the way—more than if an angel stood in the way with a flaming sword: Prov. 13:13, 'He that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.' Would you have blessings from God?—fear the commandment. It is not he that fears wrath, punishment, inconveniences, troubles of the world, molestations of the flesh; no, but he that dares not make bold with a commandment. As Jer. 35:6, Go, bring a temptation, set pots of wine before the Rechabites. Oh, they durst not drink of them. Why? 'Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine.' Thus a child of God doth reason when the devil comes and sets a temptation before him, and being zealous for God, dares not comply with the lusts and humours of men, though they should promise him peace, happiness, and plenty. A wicked man makes no bones of a commandment; but a godly man, when he is in a right posture of spirit, and the awe of God is upon him, dare not knowingly and wittingly go aside and depart from God.

[2.] Take the Spirit of God for your guide. We can never walk in God's way without the conduct of God's Spirit. We must not only have a way, but a voice to direct us when we are wandering: Isa. 30:21, 'And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk in it.' Sheep have a shepherd as well as a fold, and children that learn to write must have a teacher as well as a copy; and so it is not enough to have a rule, but we must have a guide, a monitor, to put us in mind of our duty. The Israelites had a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. The gospel church is not

destitute of a guide: Ps. 37:24, 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.' The Spirit of God is the guide and director to warn us of our duty.

[3.] The promises for your encouragement. If you look elsewhere, and live by sense, and not by faith, you shall have discouragements enough. How shall a man carry himself through the temptations of the world with honour to God? 2 Pet. 1:4, 'Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruptions that are in the world through lust.' When we have promises to bear us up, this will carry us clear through temptations, and make us act generously, nobly, and keep close to him.

[4.] Fix the glory of God for your aim; else it is but a carnal course. The spiritual life is a living to God, Gal. 2:20, when he is made the end of every action. You have a journey to take, and whether you sleep or wake, your journey is still a-going. As in a ship, whether men sit, lie, or walk, whether they eat or sleep, the ship holds on its course, and makes towards its port; so you all are going into another world, either to heaven or hell, the broad or the narrow way. And then do but consider how comfortable it will be at your journey's end, in a dying hour, to have been undefiled in the way; then wicked men that are defiled in their way will wish they had kept more close and exact with God. Even those that now wonder at the niceness and zeal of others, when they see that they must in earnest enter into another world, oh, then that they had been more exact and watchful, and stuck closer to the rule in their practice, discourses, compliances! Men will have other notions then of holiness than they had before. Oh, then they will wish that they had been more circumspect. Christ commended the unjust steward for remembering that in time he should be put out of his stewardship. You will all fail within a little

while; then your poor, shiftless, naked souls must launch out into another world, and immediately come to God. How comfortable will it be then to have walked closely according to the line of obedience!

Doct. 3. That a close walker not only shall be blessed, but is blessed, in hand as well as in hope.

How is he blessed?

1. He is freed from wrath. He hath his discharge, and the blessedness of a pardoned man: John 5:24, 'He that believeth on Christ hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, for he hath passed from death to life.' He is out of danger of perishing, which is a great mercy.

2. He is taken into favour and respect with God: John 15:14, 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' There is a real friendship made up between us and Christ, not only in point of harmony and agreement of mind, but mutual delight and fellowship with each other.

3. He is under the special care and conduct of God's providence, that he may not miscarry: 1 Cor. 3:23, 'All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' All the conditions of his life are overruled for good; his blessings are sanctified, and his miseries unstinged: Rom. 8:28, 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.'

4. He hath a sure covenant-right to everlasting glory: 1 John 3:1, 'Behold, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be,' &c. Is a title nothing before we come to enjoy the estate?



We count a worldly heir happy, as well as a possessor; and are not God's heirs happy?

5. He hath sweet experiences of God's goodness towards him here in this world: Ps. 17:15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' The joy of the presence and sense of the Lord's love will counterbalance all worldly joys.

6. He hath a great deal of peace: Gal. 6:16, 'And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.' Obedience and holy walking bringeth peace: 'Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them,' Ps. 119:165; as there is peace in nature when all things keep their place and order. This peace others cannot have. There is a difference between a dead sea and a calm sea. A stupid conscience they may have, not a quiet conscience. The virtue of that opium will soon be spent; conscience will again be awakened.

Use. Oh, then, let us put in for a share of this blessedness! There are two encouragements in the service of Christ—our vails and our wages. Our wages should be enough, the eternal enjoyment of himself. But oh! we cry out of the tediousness of the way. We have our vails also, that are not contemptible. If a man should offer a lordship or farm to another, and he should say, The way is dirty and dangerous, the weather very troublesome; I will not look after it—would you not accuse this man of folly, that loves his ease and pleasure? But now, if this man were assured of a pleasant path and good way, if he would but take a little pains to go over and see it, this were gross folly indeed to refuse it. Our Lord hath made over a blessed inheritance to us upon gospel terms; but we are full of prejudices, in that to keep close to the rule may bring trouble, and

deprive us of many advantages of gain; and we think we shall never see good day more. But we are assured there is a great blessing goeth along with God's yoke; and we having a promise of the enjoyment of God's presence where there are pleasures for evermore, this should make us rouse up ourselves in the work of the Lord.

## SERMON II

### **Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, that seek him with the whole heart.—VER. 2.**

IN this psalm the man of God begins with a description of the way to true blessedness. In the former verse a blessed man is described by the course of his actions, 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way.' In this, by the frame of his heart, 'Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, that seek him with the whole heart.' The internal principle of good actions is the verity and purity of the heart.

Here you may take notice of two marks of a blessed man:—

1. They keep his testimonies.
2. They seek him with the whole heart.

Doct. 1. They that keep close to God's testimonies are blessed.

By way of explication, two things take notice of:—

1. The notion that is given to precepts and counsels in the word: they are called his testimonies.

2. The respect of the blessed man to these testimonies, to keep them.

First, The notion by which the word of God is expressed is testimonies, whereby is intended the whole declaration of God's will, in doctrines, commands, examples, threatenings, promises. The whole word is the testimony which God hath deposed for the satisfaction of the world about the way of their salvation. Now, because the word of God brancheth itself into two parts, the law and the gospel, this notion may be applied to both. First, To the law, in regard whereof the ark is called 'the ark of the testimony,' Exod. 25:16, because the two tables were laid up in it. The gospel is also called the testimony, 'the testimony of God concerning his Son:' Isa. 8:20, 'To the law, and to the testimony;' where testimony seems to be distinguished from the law. The gospel is so called, because there God hath testified how a man shall be pardoned, reconciled to God, and obtain a right to eternal life. We need a testimony in this case, because it is more unknown to us. The law was written upon the heart, but the gospel is a stranger. Natural light will discern something of the law, and pry into matters which are of a moral strain and concernment; but evangelical truths are a mystery, and depend by the mere testimony of God concerning his Son. Now, from this notion of testimonies we have this advantage:—

[1.] That the word is a full declaration of the Lord's mind. God would not leave us in the dark in the matters which concern the service of God and man's salvation. He hath given us his testimony, he hath told us his mind, what he approves and what he disallows, and upon what terms he will accept of sinners in Christ. It is a blessed thing that we are not left to the uncertainty of our own thoughts: Micah 6:8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good.' The way of pleasing and enjoying God is clearly revealed in his word. There we may know

what we must do, what we may expect, and upon what terms. We have his testimony.

[2] Another advantage we have by this notion is the certainty of the word; it is God's testimony. The apostle saith, 1 John 5:9. 'If we take the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater.' It is but reason we should allow God that value and esteem that we give to the testimony of men, who are fallible and deceitful. Among men, 'in the mouth of two or three witnesses everything is established,' Deut. 19:15; 'Now there are three that bear witness in heaven, and three that bear witness on earth,' 1 John 5:8. We are apt to doubt of the gospel, and have suspicious thoughts of such an excellent doctrine; but now there are three witnesses from heaven, the Father, Word, and Spirit; the Father by a voice: Mat. 3:7, 'And lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son,' &c. And the Son also by a voice, when he appeared to Paul from heaven, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' And the Holy Ghost gave his testimony, descending upon him in the form of a dove, and upon the apostles in cloven tongues of fire. 'And there are three that bear record on earth;' for he saith, 1 John 5:10, 'He that believeth, ἔχει τὴν μαρτυρίαν, he hath the testimony in himself.' What is that? The Spirit, water, and blood in the heart of a believer; these give testimony to the gospel. The Spirit bears witness to the gospel when it illuminateth the heart, enabling us to discern the doctrine to be of God, to discern those signatures and characters of majesty, goodness, power, truth, which God hath left upon the gospel; and water and blood testify when we feel those constant and sensible effects of God's power coming with the gospel (1 Thes. 1:5), both by pacifying the conscience, and bringing joy and satisfaction, and by sanctifying and freeing a man from the bondage of sin. Water signifies sanctification: John 17:17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth.' The sanctifying power of God, that goes along with the gospel, is a clear confirmation of the divine testimony

in it: John 8:32, 'The truth shall make you free.' By our disentanglement from lust we come to be settled in the truth. God's testimony is the ultimate resolution of our faith. Why do we believe? Because it is God's testimony. How do we know it is God's testimony? It evidenceth itself by its own light to the consciences of men; yet God for the greater satisfaction to the world, hath given us witnesses, three from heaven and three on earth. Every manifestation of God hath signatures and characters of God enough upon it to show from whence it came. The creation is a manifestation of God; now, whoever looks upon it seriously and considerately, may find God there, may track him by his footprints, 'By the things which are made, his invisible being and power,' Rom. 1:20. The creation discovers itself to be of God; and if the lower testimony hath plain evidences, much more the gospel. Why? For 'he hath magnified his word above all his name,' Ps. 138:2. The name of God is that by which he is made known. Now, there are more sensible characters and impressions of God left upon the word, that doth evidence it to be of God, than upon any part of his name.

[3.] This advantage we have by this notion, a testimony is a ground of self-examination, or a rule whereby we may judge of our state and actions; for it witnesseth not only de jure, what we must do; or de eventu, what we may expect; but de facto, whether we do good or evil, what we are, and what we may look for from God upon our obedience or disobedience: Mat. 24:14, 'The gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, εἰς μαρτύριον, for a witness unto all nations;' first to them, next against them, Mark 13:9. The word is a testimony to them of God's will in Christ, if they receive it; against them if they reject, neglect, or believe it not. Hereby we may judge of our condition by our conformity, or difformity and contrariety, to the word of God. Christ saith at the day of judgment Moses will accuse you: John 5:45, 'There is one that accuseth you, even Moses in whom

ye trust.' The gospel will accuse. What is now an offer will then be an accusation. God will not be without a witness at the day of judgment. The creatures, which had an evident impression of God upon them, they will witness against the Gentiles, 'so that they are without excuse,' Rom. 1:20; and the Jews, that were under the dispensation of Moses, he will accuse them; there was light sufficient to convince them. So the gospel, which is God's testimony concerning his Son, will accuse you if it be not received. Therefore it is good to see what the word doth witness or testify; doth it testify good or evil? for accordingly shall we be treated with in the day of judgment. It is sad when we can only say of the scripture, as that king of the prophet of the Lord, 'He witnesseth nothing but evil against me,' 1 Kings 22:8. Let us see what God's testimony speaks, whether it will plead for us or against us at the great day of the Lord.

[4.] It upbraids our unbelief, that when God hath not only given us a law, but a testimony, still we are backward and careless. If the word of God were no more but a law, we were bound to obey it, because we are his creatures; but when it is his testimony, we should regard it the more, for now God stands not only upon the honour of his authority, but of his truth: 1 John 5:10 'He that believeth not hath made God a liar, because he believeth not the testimony which God hath given concerning his Son.' We may urge it thus upon our hearts—What! shall we make God a liar, after he hath so solemnly given his word, that word which hath many signatures, characters, and stamps of God upon it? Carelessness now is not only disobedience, but unbelief; it puts the highest affront upon God, to question his veracity and truth, and does not only unlord him, but ungod him, by making him a liar.

So much for the first thing, the testimony of the Lord.

Secondly, The respect of the blessed man to these testimonies; they keep them. What is it to keep the testimonies of God? Keeping is a word which relates to a charge or trust committed to us. Christ hath committed his testimonies to us as a trust and charge that we must be careful of. Look, as on our part we commit to Christ the charge of our souls to save them in his own day, 2 Tim. 1:12, so Christ chargeth us with his word—(1.) To lay it up in our hearts. (2.) To observe it in our practice. This is to keep the word.

[1.] To lay it up in our hearts. In the heart two things are considerable—the understanding and the affections. God undertakes in the covenant for both: Heb. 8:10, 'I will put my law in their mind, and write it in their hearts.' The meaning is, that he will enlighten our minds for the understanding of his will, and frame our affections to the obedience of it. Well, then, you must keep it in your minds and affections.

(1.) In your minds. We must understand the word of God, assent to it; we must revolve it often in our thoughts, and have it ready upon all occasions. Understand it we must if we would be blessed: 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me,' John 14:21. We cannot make conscience of obedience till we know our duty. He that would keep a thing must first have it; we have the law in possession when we get knowledge of it: Mat. 13:23, 'He that receiveth the word into good ground is he that heareth the word and understands it;' and Luke 8:13, 'They that hear the word and keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.' It is not enough to hear the word, but we must understand it; and yet that is not all: an adversary may understand a truth, or else he cannot rationally oppose it. There is assent required, that we believe it as God's testimony, and accordingly embrace it, and give it place in the heart. Faith is a receiving of the word, Acts 2:41; nay, we must have it ready upon all

occasions. Rational memory belongs to the mind or understanding; therefore we keep the word in our minds when it is ever ready with us, either to check sin, or warn us of our duty, Ps. 119:9. Forgetfulness is an ignorance for the time: Prov. 3:1, 'My son, forget not my law; and let thine heart keep my commandments.' We should be ready to every good word and work, as occasion is offered to us.

(2.) To keep it in our hearts is to have an affection to it. Keeping the word relates to our chariness and tenderness of it, when we are as chary of the word as a man would be of a precious jewel: Prov. 6:20, 21, 'My son, keep thy father's commandments; bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.' Sometimes it alludes to the apple of the eye: Prov. 7:2, 'Keep them as the apple of thine eye.' Such tender affections should we have to the testimonies of the Lord, as a man has for his eye. The least offence to the eye is troublesome; a man should be as chary of the commandment as he would be of his eye. Sometimes it implies the similitude of keeping a way: Josh. 1:7, 'Turn not to the right hand or to the left.' A traveller is very careful to keep his way; so when we are thus careful, tender, chary of God's commandments and testimonies, this is an argument of a blessed condition. Thus we are to keep it in the heart.

[2.] We are to observe it in practice: Luke 11:28, 'Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it;' that is, not only that hear it, but do it. Many have this word in their mind and memory, but not in their lives. Without this, hearing is nothing; liking, knowing, assent, pretended affection is all in vain: 1 John 2:4, 'He that saith I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.' Our actions are a better discovery of our thoughts than our words. When we get a little knowledge, and make a little profession, we think we observe his commands; but he is a liar if he be not exact, and walk close with God. It is not enough to



understand the word, to be able to talk and dispute of the testimonies of God, but to keep them. It is not enough to assent to them that they are God's laws, but they must be obeyed. The laws of earthly princes are not obeyed as soon as believed to be the king's laws, but when we are punctual to observe them. This is to keep the commandment of God; it implies both exactness and perseverance: Rev. 3:8, 'Thou hast kept my word;' that is, thou hast not apostatised as others have done; and Prov. 6:20, 'Keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother,' that is perseverance. You see by the first note who are the blessed men; they which own God's testimony in his word, and accordingly look upon it as a great charge and trust Christ hath reposed in them and given to them that they should keep his law. Now, certainly these are blessed. Why?

(1.) They are blessed or cursed whom Christ in the last day will pronounce blessed or cursed. Now, in the last day to some he will say, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father;' to others, 'Go, ye cursed;' and he hath told us beforehand, that it is he that keepeth his testimonies whom he will own in that day, Mat. 7:20–22. Many will come and challenge acquaintance with Christ: 'Lord, we have prophesied in thy name,' &c.; 'Thou hast taught in our streets' (so it is in Luke); but Christ will disown them: 'I know you not; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity' Many will pretend to be of Christ's side take up the opinions of the country wherein they live, frequent ordinances &c.; but because they kept not his testimonies, Christ will not own them. When men are to be posed, they count it a favour to know the questions aforehand. God hath told us what will be the great evidence according to which he will proceed in the day of judgment—Have you kept my testimonies? He that keeps close to God's word will find acceptance.

(2.) They are blessed for whom Christ mediateth. Now, Christ mediateth for those that keep his word: John 17:6, 'They have kept thy word.' It is a grief to your advocate when he cannot speak well of you in heaven. But as soon as he seeth any fruits of obedience, where they consult often with God's testimony, though they have many failings, yet are careful as much as in them lies, then he goes to the Father, and acquainteth him with it.

(3.) Those that are taken into sweet fellowship and communion with God, certainly they are in a blessed condition. Those to whom God will be intimate, and manifest himself in a way of gracious communion, are blessed. Now thus he doth to those that keep his testimonies: 'If any man love me, and keep my commandments, my Father will love him, and we will make our abode with him.' The whole Trinity will come and dwell in his heart.

But now you must know, there is a twofold keeping of God's testimonies—legal and evangelical. Legal keeping is in a way of perfect and absolute obedience, without the least failing; so none of us can be blessed. Moses will accuse us; there will be failings in the best. But now evangelical keeping—that is, a filial and sincere obedience—is accepted, and the imperfections Christ pardoneth. If God's pardon help us not, we are for ever miserable. The apostles had many failings; sometimes they manifested a weak faith, sometimes hardness of heart, sometimes passionateness when they met with disrespect, Luke 9; yet Christ returns this general acknowledgment of them when he was pleading with his Father, 'Holy Father, they have kept thy word.' When the heart is sincere, God will pass by our failings, James 5:11, 'Ye have heard of the patience of Job.' Ay! and of his impatience too, his cursing the day of his birth; but the Spirit of God puts a finger upon the scar, and takes notice of what is good. So long as we bewail sin, seek remission of

sin, strive after perfection, endeavour to keep close and be tender of a command, though a naughty heart will carry us aside sometimes, we keep the testimony of the Lord in a gospel sense. Bewailing sin, that owns the law; seeking pardon, that owns the gospel; striving after perfection, that argueth sincerity and uprightness. Well, then, here is the discriminating note; if we would know whether we come within the compass of David's blessed man, if we have a dear and tender esteem of God's testimonies, when we would fain have them impressed upon our hearts, and expressed in our lives and conversations, 'They keep his testimonies.'

The next now is:—

2. They seek him with the whole heart.

This is fitly subjoined to the former for a double reason; partly, because the end of God's testimonies is to direct us how to seek after God, to bring home the wandering creature to its centre and place of rest; partly, because whoever keeps the commandments of God, he will be forced to seek God for light and help.

Obedience doth not only qualify us for communion with God, but (where it is regarded in good earnest) necessitates us to look after it; for we cannot come to God without God; and therefore, if we would keep his testimonies, we must be seeking of God. Well, then—

Doct. 2. Those that would be blessed must make this their business, sincerely to seek after God.

1. Observe the act of duty; they seek the Lord.

2. The manner of performance, with the whole heart.

First, What it is to seek the Lord.

1. To seek the Lord presupposeth our want of God: for no man seeks what he hath, but for what he hath not. All that are seeking are sensible of their want of God. For instance, when we begin to seek him at first, it begins with a sound remorse and sense of our natural estrangement from him. The first work and great care of returning penitents is to inquire after God. So long as men lie unconverted, they are wholly neglectful of him, and think they do not want God: Ps. 14:2, 'There is none that understands and seeks after God.' They have no affection or desire of communion with God. They seek such things as their hearts lust after, but it is not their desire or care to enjoy God. But when the conversion of the Jews is spoken of, Hosea 3:5, it is said, 'They shall return and seek the Lord their God.' At first conversion men are sensible of their great distance from God, and are troubled they have been so long strangers to him. Go to another sort of seekers, they are sensible of the same thing; in case of desertion it is clear: Cant. 5:6, 'My beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone; I sought him, but I could not find him.' They never begin to recover until they are first sensible of their loss; when they see Christ is gone, they are left dead and comfortless; yea, all believers, their seeking or looking after communion with God is grounded upon a sense of want in some degree and measure; it is little they have in comparison of what they want and expect; and therefore still the children of God are a generation of seekers, that 'seek after God,' Ps. 24:6; whatever they enjoy, they are still in pursuit of more. They are always breathing after God, and desire to enjoy more communion with him. A wicked man is always running from God, and is never better than when he is out of God's company, when he is rid of all thoughts of God. He runs from his own conscience, because he finds God there; he runs from the company of good men, because God is there—holy conference is as a prison; he runs from ordinances, because they bring God near to his conscience, and put him in mind of God: he avoids death, because he cannot

endure to be with God. But men that have a sense and want of God upon them, will be inquiring and seeking after him.

2. This seeking may be known by the things sought. What do we seek for? Union and communion with God: Ps. 105:4, 'Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face for evermore.' It is an allusion to the ark, which was a pledge of God's favourable and powerful presence; so that which we seek after is God's favourable and powerful presence, that we may find the Lord reconciled, comforting and quickening our heart. Communion with God is the main thing that we seek after, as to the enjoyment of his favour in the acceptance of our persons and pardon of our sins. This is that the man of God expresseth, in his own name and in the name of all the saints: Ps. 4:6, 7, 'Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us;' that God would display his beams of favour upon the soul. So Ps. 63:3, 'Thy favour is better than life.' And then his strength too, that he may subdue our corruptions, temptations, enemies, Micah 7:19; and that he may supply our wants inward and outward by his all-sufficiency, Phil. 4:19. God telleth Abraham, 'I am God all-sufficient; walk before me, and be thou perfect.'

3. The formality of the duty may be explained with respect to graces and ordinances. It consists in the exercise of grace, and in the use of ordinances.

[1.] The exercise of grace—faith and love. (1.) Faith is often expressed by terms of motion—coming, running, going, seeking. Thus is the whole tendency of soul towards God expressed by terms that are proper to outward motion. Coming notes our serious resolution and purpose to make after God. Going notes the practice or progress in that resolution. Running notes the fervour and earnestness of the soul to enjoy God. And seeking, that notes our diligence in the use of

means. That faith is implied in seeking appears by comparing these two scriptures: Isa. 11:10, 'To it shall the Gentiles seek.' Now when this is spoken of in the New Testament, it is rendered thus, Rom. 15:12, 'In him shall the Gentiles trust.' so that it notes confidence and hope. (2.) It notes love, which is exercised herein, which puts upon sallies and earnest egressions of soul after the party loved: Ps. 63:8, 'My soul follows hard after thee.' It is grievous to those who love God to think of separation from him, or to forbear to seek after him. The great care of their souls is to find God, that he may direct, comfort, strengthen, and sanctify them, and to have sweet experience of his grace. Thus the spouse 'sought him whom her soul loved,' and gave not over till she found him.

[2.] Again, it is exercised in the use of the ordinances, as the word and prayer. God will be sought in his own ordinances. Christ walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks. If you would find a man, mind where is his walk and usual resort. When Christ was lost, his parents sought him in the temple; there they found him. If you would find Christ, look to the shepherds' tents in the assemblies of his people, Cant. 1:7, 8; there shall you meet him. Only let me tell you, in these ordinances it is not enough to make Christ the object of them, to worship Christ, but he must be made the end of them. To serve God is one thing, to seek him another. To serve God is to make him the object of worship, to seek God is to make him the end of worship, when we will not go away from him without him: Gen. 32:16, 'I will not let thee go unless thou bless me.' It is not enough to make use of ordinances, but we must see if we can find God there. There are many that hover about the palace, that yet do not speak with the prince; so possibly we may hover about ordinances, and not meet with God there. To go away with the husk and shell of an ordinance, and neglect the kernel, to please ourselves because we have been in the courts of God, though we have not met with the living God, that

is very sad. A traveller and merchant differ thus:—A traveller goes from place to place only that he may see; but a merchant goes from port to port that he may take in his lading, and grow rich by traffic. So a formal person goes from ordinance to ordinance, and is satisfied with the work; a godly man looks to take in his lading, that he may go away from God with God; that he may meet God here and there, in this duty and in that, and go away from God with God. A man that makes a visit only by constraint, and not by friendship, it is all one to him whether the person be at home or no; but another would be glad to find his friend there: so, if we from a principle of love come to God in these duties, our desires will be to find the living God.

Again, if God be not found in an ordinance, yet we must continue seeking; you may find him in the next. Sometimes God will not be found in public, that he may be found in private ordinances. The spouse 'sought him upon her bed,' then in every street of the city: Isa. 55:6, 'Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.' In prayer we come most directly to enjoy God, and do more especially call him in to our help and relief; there all graces are acted. If you cannot find God in prayer, look for him in the supper, and in the word; if he be not comfortably present in the word, seek him by meditation: Cant. 5:6, 'My soul failed when he spake;' that is, when I considered his speaking, for his wooing was over, my beloved was gone; but when I thought of his speaking my soul failed David consults with Nathan, but he could give him no clear answer; what then? 2 Sam. 7:4, 'The word of the Lord came that night unto Nathan, saying, Go and tell my servant David,' &c. So when we have been inquiring after God all day in public worship, all this while the oracle is silent; but at night, when going over these things again, God may be found. Acts 17:12, it is said, 'Therefore many of them believed.' How?—when they searched the word; though in the hearing they did not discern the impressions of God upon the word;

but when they searched and studied, going over them in private duties, God appeared. Heb. 11:11, it is said, 'She judged him faithful that had promised.' How so? at first hearing? No; Sarah laughed when God promised her a son (for it was the Son of God that was in company with the angels, Gen. 18); but afterwards, when she considered of it, she judged him faithful.

Thus we must follow God from ordinance to ordinance. It argues a great deal of pride in carnal men, that if God doth not meet them presently they throw off all. Now and then they will see what they shall have for calling upon God; but if God do not answer at the first knock, they are gone.

## SERMON III

**Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, that seek him with the whole heart.—VER. 2.**

Use 1. To press you to seek God. The motives are:—

1. It was the end of our creation. We do not live merely to live; but for this end were we sent into the world, to seek God. Nature is sensible of it in part by the dissatisfaction it finds in other things; and therefore the apostle describes the Gentiles to be groping and feeling about for God, Acts 17:27. God is the cause of all things, and nature cannot be satisfied without him. We were made for God, and can



never enjoy satisfaction until we come to enjoy him; therefore the Psalmist saith, Ps. 14:2, We are 'all gone aside, and altogether become filthy.' Nature is out of joint; we are quite out of our way to true happiness. We are seeking that for which we were created, when we seek and inquire after God.

2. We seek other things that we want with great solicitude and care; we are cumbered with much serving to obtain the world: and shall anything be sought more than God? We can least spare him. The chiefest good should be sought after with the chiefest care, and chiefest love, and chiefest delight; nothing should be so precious to us as God. It is the greatest baseness that can be, that anything should take up our time, our thoughts, and content us more than God. When we come to God we are earnest for other things: Hosea 7:14, 'They howl upon their beds for corn and wine.' If anything be sought from God above God, more than God, and not for God, it is but a brutish cry.

3. It is our benefit to seek God. It is no benefit to God if we do not seek him. The Lord hath no less, though we have less. He that hides himself from the sun, doth not impair the light. We derogate nothing from God if we do not seek him. He needed not the creature: he had happiness enough in himself; but we hide ourselves from our own happiness and our own peace. But what benefit have we by seeking God? A great deal of present benefit: Ps. 22:26, 'They that seek thee shall praise thy name.' You will have cause to bless God before the search he over. God hath passed his word, there are a great many experiences we taste. As they that continue in the pursuit of the philosopher's stone find out many experiences which are a satisfaction to their understandings, so, one way or other, we shall have cause to bless God. The God of Jacob hath openly professed we shall not seek him in vain, Isa. 44:19; that is, this is a truth God hath

written as it were with a sunbeam, that something will come in seeking of God. By seeking him in prayer we carry away a great deal of comfort and strength. As we read of that emperor that sent not away any one sad out of his presence, so neither doth God; there is some comfort to be had in waiting upon him; and as it brings present comfort and satisfaction, so it brings an everlasting reward: Heb. 11:6, 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' If you would have the fruit of your holy calling, that which is the result of that religion you do profess, you must diligently seek him, so that in effect we never seek ourselves more than when we seek the Lord: Amos 5:6, 'Seek the Lord, and ye shall live.' It is the undoubted way to get eternal life, to live for ever. They that seek not his face here shall never see his face for ever. With what diligence will men court an outward preferment, which is yet very uncertain? Prov. 29:26, 'All men seek the ruler's face; but every man's judgment is of the Lord.' What a deal of observance and waiting is there for the ruler's face and favour! and yet God disposeth of every man's judgment. It is uncertain whether they shall obtain it, yea or nay; but now, if you seek the face of God in heaven, you shall live for ever.

4. If you do not sensibly find God, yet comfort thyself that thou art in a seeking way, and in the pursuit of him: Ps. 24:6, God's people are described to be 'the generation of them that seek him.' This is the true mark of God's chosen people; they make it their business to get the favour of God, and to wrestle through discouragements. It is better to be a seeker than a wanderer. Though we do not feel the love of God, nor have the comfort of a pardon, have no sensible communion with him; yet the choice and bent of the heart is towards him, and you have the character of God's people upon you.

5. You have misspent a great deal of time already, and long neglected God; therefore, now you should seek him: Hosea 10:12. 'It is time to

seek the Lord, until he come and rain righteousness upon you.' It is time, that is, it is not too late, while we are preserved and invited. And again, it is time, that is, it is high time; the business of your lives hath been too long neglected. It is such another expression as 1 Peter 4:3, 'The time past is enough to have wrought the will of the Gentiles,' &c. God hath been too long kept out of his right, and we out of our happiness. The night is coming upon us, and will you not begin your day's work?

6. This is the reason of affliction: we are so backward in this work that we need to be whipped unto it: Hosea 5:15, 'I will go and return to my place, saith God, till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face.' God knows that want is a spur to a lazy creature; and therefore doth God break in upon men, and scourge them as with scorpions, that they may bethink themselves, and look after God.

Use 2. For direction. If you would seek God—

1. Seek him early: Prov. 8:32, 'Blessed are they that seek me early.' We cannot soon enough go about this work. Seek him when God is nigh, when the Spirit is nigh: Isa. 55:6, 'Call upon the Lord while he is near.' There are certain seasons which you cannot easily get again; such times when God doth deal more pressingly with you, when the word bears in upon the heart, and when God is near unto us. David like a quick echo returns upon God: Ps. 27:8, 'Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' It would be a great loss not to obey present impulses and invitations, and not make use of the advantages which God puts into our hands.

2. Seek him daily: Ps. 105:4, 'Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face evermore.' That is, from day to day you must be seeking the face of God, in the strength of God. Every hour we need his direction,

protection, strength; and we are in danger to lose him, if we do not continue the search.

3. Seek him unweariedly, and do not give over your seeking until you find God. Wrestle through discouragements; though former endeavours have been in vain, yet still we should continue seeking after God. We have that command to enforce us to it: Luke 5:5, 'We have toiled all night; howbeit at thy command,' &c. Though we do not presently find, yet we must not cast off all endeavours. In spiritual things many times a man hears and goes away with nothing; but when he comes to meditate upon it, and work it upon the heart, then he finds the face of God, and the strength of God. Therefore, you must not give over your seeking.

4. Seek him in Christ. God will only be found in a mediator: Heb. 7:25, Those are accepted 'that come to God by him.' Guilty creatures cannot enjoy God immediately; and in Christ, God is more familiar with us: Hosea 3:5, 'They shall seek the Lord their God, and David their king.' None can seek him rightly but those that seek him in Christ. It is uncomfortable to think of God out of Christ. As the historian saith of Themistocles, when he sought the favour of the king, he snatched up the king's son, and so came and mediated for his grace and favour. Let us take the Son of God in the arms of our faith, and present him to God the Father, and seek his face, his strength.

5. God can only be sought by the help of his own Spirit. As our access to God, we have it by Christ, so we have it by the Spirit: Eph. 2:18, 'For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.' As Christ gives us the leave, so the Spirit gives us the help. Bernard speaks fitly to this purpose: None can be aforehand with God, we cannot seek him till we find him in some sense: he will be sought that

he may be found; and he is found that he may be sought. It is his preventing grace which makes us restless in the use of means; and when we are brought home to God, when we seek after God, it is by his own grace. The spouse was listless and careless until she could take God by the scent of his own grace, when he 'put his finger upon the handle of the lock, and dropped myrrh.' By the sweet and powerful influences of his grace, she was carried on in seeking after God. Thus much for the first part of the duty, seek.

Secondly, Now the manner, with the whole heart.

Doct. Whoever would seek God aright, they must seek him with their whole heart.

Here I shall inquire—

1. What doth this imply?

2. Why God will be sought with the whole heart?

1. What doth this imply? It implies sincerity and integrity; for it is not to be taken in the legal sense, with respect to absolute perfection, but in opposition to deceit: Jer. 3:10, 'Judah has not turned to me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord.' It is spoken of the time of Josiah's reformation; many men whirled about with the times, and were forced by preternatural motions. The Father of spirits above all things requireth the spirit, and he that is the searcher and judge of the heart requireth the heart should be consecrated to him. Integrity opposeth partiality. There are indeed two things in this expression, the whole heart; it notes extension of parts, and intension of degrees.

[1.] The extension of parts; with the understanding, will, and affections. Some seek God with a piece of their hearts, to explain it either in the work of faith or love. In the work of faith; as Acts 8:37, 'If thou believest with all thine heart.' There is a believing with a piece, and a believing with all the heart. There is an inactive knowledge, a naked assent, which may be real, yet it is not a true faith; the devil may have this: Luke 4:34, the devil makes an orthodox confession there, 'Thou art Jesus, the Son of the living God.' This is only a conviction upon the understanding, without any bent upon the heart. It is not enough to own Christ to be the true Messiah, but we must embrace him, put our whole trust in him. There may be an assent joined with some sense and conscience, and some vanishing sweetness and taste by the reasonableness of salvation by Christ, Heb. 6:4; but this is not believing with all the heart; it is but a taste, a lighter work upon the affections, and therefore bringeth in little experience. There may be some assent, such as may engage to profession and partial reformation, but the whole heart is not subdued to God. Then do we believe with the whole heart, when the heart is warmed with the things we know and assent to; when there is a full and free consent to take Christ upon God's terms, to all the uses and purposes for which God hath appointed him: 1 Chron. 28:9, 'Know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind;' when there is an effective and an affective knowledge; when we can not only discourse of God and Christ, and are inclined to believe; but when these truths soak into the heart to frame it to the obedience of his will. When the Lord had spoken of practical obedience, 'Was not this to know me, saith the Lord?' Jer. 22:16. And this is to believe. So for love: Deut. 6:5, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.' Every faculty must express love to God. Many will be content to give God a part. God hath their consciences, but the world their affections. Their

heart is divided, and the evidence of it is plainly this: In their troubles and extremities they will seek after God, but this is not their constant work and delight. We are welcome to God when we are compelled to come into his presence. God will not say, as men, You come in your necessity. But we must then be sincere in our addresses, and rest in him as our portion and all-sufficient good.

[2.] For intension of degrees. To seek God with the whole heart, is to seek him with the highest elevation of our hearts. The whole heart must be carried out to God, and to other things, for God's sake. As harbingers, when they go to take up room for a prince, they take up the whole house, none else must have place there; so God, he will have the whole heart.

Again, it may be considered as to the exaction of the law, and as a rule of the gospel.

(1.) As an exaction of the law; and so Christ urged it to the young man that was of a pharisaical institution, to abate his pride and confidence: Mat. 22:37, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.' Certainly these words there have a legal importance and signification; for in another Evangelist, Luke 10:28, it is added, 'Do and live,' which is the tenor of the law. And Christ's intent was to abate the Pharisees' pride, by propounding the rigour of the first covenant. The law requireth complete love without the least defect; according to the terms of it, a grain wanting would make the whole unacceptable; as a hard landlord, when all the rent is not brought to the full, he accepteth none. It is good to consider it under this sense, that we may seek God in Christ to quicken us, that we may value our deliverance by him from this burden, which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear;

a straggling thought, a wandering glance, the least outrunning of the heart, had rendered us accursed for ever.

(2.) It may be considered as a rule of the gospel, which requireth our utmost endeavours, our bewailing infirmities and defects, but accepts of sincerity. There will be a double principle in us to the last, but there should not be a double heart. So that this expression of seeking the Lord with the whole heart is reconcilable enough with the weaknesses of the present state. For instance: 1 Kings 14:8, 'My servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, and did that only which was right in mine eyes.' David had many failings, and some that left an indelible brand upon him, in the matter of Uriah, yet because of his sincerity, and habitual purpose, God saith, 'He hath kept all my commandments.' So in Josiah: 2 Kings 23:25, 'Like to him there was no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might.' Yet he also had his imperfections; against the warning of the Lord he goes out with a wicked king, and dies in battle. So Asa: 2 Chron. 15:17, 'The high places were not taken away'—it was a failing in that holy king—yet it is said, 'The heart of Asa was perfect all his days.' Well, then, when the whole heart is engaged in this work, when we do not only study to know God, but make it our work to enjoy him, to rest in him as our all-sufficient portion, though there will be many defects, yet then are we said to seek him with the whole heart.

2. The reasons why God will be sought with the whole heart are—

[1.] He that gives but part to God doth indeed give nothing. The devil keeps an interest as long as one lust remains unmortified, and one corner of the soul is kept for him. As Pharaoh stood hucking,—he would fain have some pawn of their return; either leave your children behind; no, no, they must go and see the sacrifices, and be trained up



in the way of the Lord; then he would have their flocks and herds left behind; he knew that would draw their hearts back again,—so Satan must have either this lust or that; he knows by keeping part all will fall to his share in the end. A bird that is tied in a string seems to have more liberty than a bird in a cage; it flutters up and down, though it be held fast: so many seem to flutter up and down and do many things, as Herod; but his Herodias drew him back again into the fowler's net. Thus because of a sinner's danger.

[2.] Because of God's right. By creation he made the whole, therefore requires the whole; 'the Father of spirits' must have the whole-spirit. We were not mangled in our creation; God, that made the whole, must have the whole. He preserves the whole. Christ hath bought the whole: 1 Cor. 6:20, 'Glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.' And God promiseth to glorify the whole. Christians, it would be uncomfortable to us if God should only take a part to heaven. All that you have is to be glorified in the day of Christ; all that you are and have must be given to him—whole spirit, soul, and body. Let us not deprive him of any part.

Use. Well, do we serve God and seek after God with the whole heart? The natural mother had rather part with the whole than see the child divided, 1 Kings 3:26. God had rather part with the whole than take a piece. Either he will have the whole of your love, or leave the whole to Satan. The Lord complains, Hosea 10:2, 'Their heart is divided.' Men have some affections for God many times, but they have affections for their lusts too, the world hath a great share and portion of their heart.

Quest. But when, in a gospel sense, may we be said to seek God with the whole heart? Take it in these short propositions.

1. When the settled purpose of our souls is to cleave to God, to love and serve him with an entire obedience, both in the inward and outward man, when this is the full determination and consent of our hearts.

2. When we do what we can by all good means to maintain this purpose; for otherwise it is but a fruit of conviction, a freewill pang: Acts 24:16, 'Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards all men.'

3. When we search out our defects, and are ever bewailing them with kindly remorse: Rom. 7:24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?'

4. When we run by faith to Christ Jesus, and sue out our pardon and peace in Christ's name, until we come to be complete in him: Col. 1:10, 'That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.'

## **SERMON IV**

### **They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.—VER. 3.**

STILL the Psalmist continues the description of a blessed man. In the two first verses, holiness (which is the way to and evidence of blessedness) is considered with respect to the subject and the object of it, the life and the heart of man. The life of man, 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way.' The heart of man, they 'seek him with the whole heart.'

Now, holiness is considered, in the parts of it, negatively and positively. The two parts of holiness are an eschewing of sin and studying to please God. You have both in this verse, 'They also do no iniquity: they walk in His ways.'

First, You have the blessed man described negatively, they do no iniquity. Upon hearing the words, presently there occurs a doubt, how then can any man be blessed? for 'there is not a man that liveth and sinneth not,' Eccles. 7:20; and James 3:2, 'In many things we offend all.' To deny it, is a flat lie against the truth, and against our own experience. 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,' 1 John 1:8. The expression may be abused on the one side, to establish the impeccability and perfection of the saints. On the other side, it may be abused by persons of a weak and tender conscience, to the hindrance of their comfort and rejoicing in God. When they shall hear this is the character of a blessed man, 'they do no iniquity,' they are very apt to conclude against their own regeneration, because of their daily failings.

To avoid these difficulties, I shall inquire—

1. What it is to do iniquity.
2. Who are the persons among the sons of men that may be said to do no iniquity.

First, What it is to do iniquity? If we make it our trade and practice to continue in wilful disobedience. To sin is one thing, but to make sin our work is another: 1 John 3:9, 'He that is born of God doth not commit sin;' he doth not work sin; and Mat. 7:23, 'Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' That is the character of the reprobate workers of iniquity. So John 8:34, 'Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.' Sin is their constant trade: Ps. 139:24, 'See if there be any

wicked way in me.' None are absolutely freed from sin, but it is not their trade, their way, their work. When a man makes it his study and business to carry on a course of sin, then he is said to do iniquity.

Secondly, Who are those that are said to do no iniquity in God's account, though they fail often through weakness of the flesh and violence of temptation? Answer—

1. All such as are renewed by grace, and reconciled to God by Christ Jesus; to these God imputeth no sin to condemnation, and in his account they do no iniquity. Notable is that, 1 Kings 14:8. It is said of David, 'He kept my commandments, and followed me with all his heart, and did that only which was right in mine eyes.' How can that be? We may trace David by his failings; they are upon record everywhere in the word; yet here a veil is drawn upon them; God laid them not to his charge. There is a double reason why their failings are not laid to their charge. Partly, because of their general state; they are in Christ, taken into favour through him; and 'there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ,' Rom. 8:1; therefore particular errors and escapes do not alter their condition. Which is not to be understood as if a man should not be humbled, and ask God's pardon for his infirmities; no, for then they prove iniquities, they will lie upon record against us. It was a gross fancy of the Valentinians, that held they were not defiled with sin whatsoever they committed; though base and obscene persons, yet still they were as gold in the dirt. No, no; we are to recover ourselves by repentance, to sue out the favour of God. When David humbled himself, and had repented, then saith Nathan, 2 Sam. 12:13, 'The Lord hath put away thy sin.' Partly, too, because their bent and habitual inclination is to do otherwise. They set themselves to comply with God's will, to seek and serve the Lord, though they are clogged with many infirmities. A wicked man sinneth with deliberation and delight; his bent is to do

evil; he 'makes provision for lusts,' Rom. 13:12, and serves them by a voluntary subjection, Titus 3:3. But those that are renewed by grace are not debtors to the flesh; they have taken another debt and obligation upon them, which is to serve the Lord, Rom. 8:12. Partly, too, because their general course and way is to do otherwise. *Unumquodque operatur secundum suam formam*—everything works according to its form; the constant actions of nature are according to the kind. So the new creature, his constant operations are according to grace. A man is known by his custom, and the course of his endeavours, what is his business. If a man be constantly, easily, frequently carried away to sin, it discovers a habit of soul, and the temper of his heart. Meadows may be overflowed, but marsh ground is drowned with the return of every tide. A child of God may be carried away, and act contrary to the bent and inclination of the new nature; but when men are drowned and overcome with the return of every temptation, and carried away, it argues a habit of sin. And partly, because sin never carries it away clearly, but with some dislikes and resistances of the new nature. The children of God make it their business to avoid all sin, by watching, praying, mortifying: Ps. 39:1, 'I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue.' And then there is a resistance of the sin. God hath planted graces in their hearts; the fear of his majesty, that works a resistance; and therefore there is not a full allowance of what they do. This resistance sometimes is more strong; then the temptation is overcome: 'How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?' Gen. 39:9. Sometimes it is more weak, and then sin carries it, though against the will of a holy man: Rom. 7:15, 18, 'The evil which I hate, that do I.' It is the evil which they hate; they protest against it; they are like men which are oppressed by the power of the enemy. And then there is a remorse after the sin: 'David's heart smote him.' It grieves and shames them that they do evil. There is tenderness goes

with the new nature; Peter sinned foully, but he went out and wept bitterly.

Well, then, the point is this:—

Doct. 1. They that are and shall be blessed are such as make it their business to avoid all sin.

I may illustrate it by these reasons:—

1. Surely they shall be blessed, for they take care to remove the makebate, the wall of partition between God and them. It is sin which separates: Isa. 59:2, 'But your iniquities have separated between you and your God.' This was that which cast angels out of heaven; when they had sinned, God could endure their company no longer. This cast Adam out of paradise. This is that which hinders men from communion with God.

2. These are men fitting and preparing themselves for the enjoyment of their great hopes: Col. 1:12, 'Who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light;' 1 John 3:3, 'He that hath this hope purifieth himself, even as he is pure.' Esther, when she was chosen to be bride and spouse to that great king, had her months of purification. The time we spend in the world are the months of our purification; it is a sign they mind their business, they are fitting for eternal happiness. They remember they are shortly to appear before the great God, therefore they would not be uncomely. Joseph washed his garments when he was to go before Pharaoh. They have these hopes that they shall see God as he is, that they shall be like him, and he will appear for their comfort; therefore they are fitting themselves more and more.

3. In them true happiness is begun. There are degrees in blessedness; the angels they never sinned; the glorified saints they have sinned, but sin no more; the saints upon earth, in them sin reigns not; therefore here is their happiness begun. As sin is taken away, so our happiness increaseth; first God begins with us in a way of justification, ne damnet; he takes away the damning power that is in sin; and in sanctification the work goes on, ne regnet, that sin may not reign; afterward ne sit, that sin may not be; therefore these have begun their happiness, they are hastening towards it apace.

Use 1. For trial and examination, whether we may be reckoned among the blessed men, yea or nay. There are some think, because the children of God are liable to so many failings, and there being so many wiles and circuits in the heart of man, that there can be no judgment made upon the case between the sins of the regenerate and unregenerate. But surely there is a difference between the sinning of the one, and the sinning of the other, and such a difference as may be discerned: 1 John 3:9, 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.' Now mark, ver. 10, 'In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.' This is that which distinguished the children of God from the children of the devil. Well, then, how shall we manage this discovery, that we may be able to judge of our own estates?

First, Let us consider how far sin may be in a blessed man, in a child of God.

1. They have a corrupt nature, they have sin in them as well as others; it is their misery to the last: Rom. 7:24, 'O wretched man that I am,' saith the holy apostle. Sin, though it be dejectum, cast down in regard of regency, yet it is not ejectum, cast out in regard of inherency; their corrupt nature sticks by them to the last. One

compares it to a wild fig-tree, or to ivy in a wall; cut off the body, the boughs, sprigs, branches, yet still there will be something that will be sprouting up again until the wall be digged down. Such an indwelling sin is in us, though we pray, strive, and cut off the excrescences, the buddings out of it here and there, yet till it be plucked asunder by death, it continueth with us.

2. They have their daily failings and infirmities: Eccles. 7:20, 'There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.' Those that for their general state are just and righteous men, yet certain sins they cannot get rid of, and are unavoidable; as sins of ignorance, incogitancy, sudden surreption, indeliberate incursions, which we shall never be freed from as long as we are in this imperfect state. So also imperfections of duty, for we cannot serve God with that high degree of reverence, delight, and perfection which he requireth. There are unavoidable infirmities which are pardoned of course.

3. They may be guilty of some sins which by watchfulness might be prevented, as vain thoughts, idle, passionate speeches, and many carnal actions. It is possible that these may be prevented by the ordinary assistances of grace, and if we will keep a strict guard over our own hearts. But in this case God's children may be overtaken and overborne; overtaken by the suddenness, or overborne by the violence of temptation: overtaken, Gal. 6:1, 'If a man be overtaken in a fault, restore such an one,' &c.; and overborne, James 1:14, 'Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.'

4. They may now and then fall foully; as Noah by excess of drink, Lot's incest, David's adultery, Peter's denial. Failings and infirmities they are not determined either by the smallness or by the greatness of the act, but by other concomitant circumstances. Not by the



smallness of the act. There is as much treason in coining pence as shillings and pounds. Allowed affection to small sins is deadly and damnable: he that is unfaithful in little will be unfaithful in much. Christians, where temptations are weak and impotent, and of slight concernment and importance, they may be sooner confuted, and obedience is the more easy; so that our rebellion to God by small sins may be greater. A man may have great affections to small sins; so it may prove an iniquity, a damnable sin.

On the other side, great sins may be infirmities; as Lot's incest, David's adultery, when they are not done with full consent of soul, when their hearts are not wholly carried away with them. Iniquities are determined by their manner: Jude 15, 'Their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed:' when with full consent of will, and it is their course that argues an habitual hatred and contempt of God.

5. A child of God may have some particular evils, which may be called predominant sins (not with respect to grace, that is impossible, that a man should be renewed and have such sins that sin should carry the mastery over grace); but they may be said to have a predominancy in comparison of other sins; he may have some particular inclination to some evil above others. David had his iniquity, Ps. 18:23. Look, as the saints have particular graces; Abraham was eminent for faith, Timothy for sobriety, Moses for meekness, &c.; so they have their particular corruptions which are more suitable to their temper and course of life. Peter seems to be inclined to tergiversation, and to shrinking in a time of trouble. We find him often tripping in that kind; in the denial of his master; again, Gal. 2:12, it is said he dissembled and complied with the Jews, therefore Paul 'withstood him to his face, for he was to be blamed.' It is evident by experience there are particular corruptions to which the

children of God are more inclinable: this appears by the great power and sway they bear in commanding other evils to be committed, by their falling into them out of inward propensity when outward temptations are few or weak, or none at all; and when resistance is made, yet they are more pestered and haunted with them than with other temptations, which is a constant matter of exercise and humiliation to them.

Secondly, Wherein doth grace now discover itself, where is the difference?

1. In that they cannot fall into those iniquities wherein there is an absolute contrariety to grace, as hatred of God, total apostasy, so they cannot sin the sin unto death, 1 John 5:16.

2. In that they do not sin with the whole heart: Ps. 119:176, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments.' There was somewhat of God in the heart, when he was conscious to himself of strayings and wanderings; and David saith elsewhere, 'I have not departed wickedly from thy precepts.' When they sin, it is with the dislike and reluctancy of the new nature; it is rather a rape than a consent. Bernard saith, A child of God suffers sin rather than acts it, and his heart's protest is against it.

3. It is not their course; not constant, easy, and frequent. Relapses into gross sins, they argue an habitual aversion from God, for a habit is determined by the constancy and uniformity of acts; therefore it is but now and then under some great temptation. There is sin, and there is a way of sin: Ps. 139:24, 'Search me and see if there be any way of wickedness in me,' as Chrysostom glosseth.

4. When they fall they do not rest in sin: 'Shall they fall, and shall they not arise?' Jer. 8:4. They may fall into the dirt, but they do not

lie and wallow there like swine in the mire. A fountain may be mudded, but it works itself clean again. The needle that hath been touched with the loadstone may be jogged and discomposed, but it never leaves till it turns towards the pole again. God's children have their failings, but they sue out their pardon, run to their advocate, 1 John 2:1, humble themselves before God.

5. Their falls are sanctified. When they have smarted under sin, they grow more watchful and more circumspect. A child of God may have the worse in *prælio*, in the battle, but not in *bello*, in the war. Sometimes the carnal part may get the victory, and they may fall foul, but see the issue: Ps. 51:6, 'In the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.' David had sinned against the Lord, but I have learned wisdom, never to trust a naughty heart more, but to look to myself better.

6. Grace discovers itself by the constant endeavours which they make against sin. What is the constant course a Christian takes? They groan under the relics of sin; it is their burden that they have such an evil nature, Rom. 7:24. They fly to God's grace in Christ for daily pardon, 1 John 1:9. They are ever washing their garments in the Lamb's blood, Rev. 7, and every day are cleansing themselves from the filthiness and defilement they contract by sin: John 13:10, 'He that is washed, needeth not save to wash his feet.' An allusion to a man that hath been a journey, in those countries where they went barefoot, when he came home he must wash his feet. So a man that is reconciled to God, though he hath been in the bath, in the fountain which God hath opened for uncleanness, yet every day he must be washing his feet, cleansing himself by the blood of Christ more and more, because he contracts new defilement. Then by using all endeavours against it, Col. 3:5; as prayer, striving, watching, cutting off the provisions of the flesh, improving the death of Christ. They do

not voluntarily and without opposition live under sin, and the slavish tyranny of it. Their bent and habitual inclination is to do otherwise; therefore they are said to do no iniquity: whereas those that are reckless and careless of their souls, sin, and never lay it to heart; they are the workers of iniquity.

Use 2. If this be the character of a blessed man, to make it our business to avoid sin, then here is caution to God's people:

1. To beware of all sin.
2. To be very cautious against gross sins, committed against the light of conscience.
3. To beware of continuance in sin.

First, To beware of all sin. The more you have the mark of a blessed man: 1 John 2:1, 'These things I write unto you, that you sin not.' Though you have a pardon and cleansing by the blood of Christ, though you have an advocate, yet sin not. Now the motives to set on this caution are taken from God, from ourselves, from the nature of sin.

1. From God. Sin not. Why? Because it is an offence to God. Consider how contrary sin is to all the persons in the Trinity. To God the Father as a lawgiver, being a contempt of his authority, 1 John 3:4. Sin is ἀνομία, 'a transgression of the law,' that is, an act of disloyalty and rebellion against the crown of heaven. Open sin doth as it were proclaim rebellion and war against God; and privy sin is conspiracy against him. All creatures have a law: Ps. 148:6, 'Thou hast set to them a decree, beyond which they cannot pass.' And they are less exorbitant in their motions than we are. It is a greater violation to the law of nature for man to sin, than for the sea to break its bounds. The

creatures have not sense and reason, yet they do not pass beyond the law which God hath set them. This should prevail with the new creature especially, whose hearts God hath suited to the law, so that they offer a violence to their own conscience. Take heed of entering into the lists with God, of despising his authority. Every sin that is committed slights the law which forbids it: 2 Sam. 12:9, 'Wherefore despisest thou his commandments?' God stands much upon his law,—one tittle shall not pass away,—and you despise it, go about to make it void, when you give way to sin. Nay, it is an abuse of his love: 1 John 3:1, 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath showed us;' you are children and sons of God, and will you slight his love? Your sins are like Absalom's treason against his father. The Rechabites are commended for keeping their father's command, Jer. 35. Set pots before them, &c.—No, our father hath forbidden us to drink wine. Their father was dead, but ours is living; will you that are sons renounce God, and side with the devil's party, and commit sin,—you to whom the Father hath showed such love that you should be called his children? Then it is a wrong to Jesus Christ—to his merit, to his example. To his merit. Christ came to take away sin, and will you bind those cords the faster which Christ came to loosen? Then you go about to defeat the purpose of his death, and put your Redeemer to shame. You seek to make void the great end for which Christ came, which was to dissolve sin. And, besides, you disparage the worth of the price he paid down; you make the blood of Christ a cheap thing, when you despise grace and holiness; you make nothing of that which cost him so dear—you lessen the greatness of his sufferings. And it is a wrong to his pattern. You should be 'pure as Christ is pure,' 1 John 3:3; and ver. 7, be 'righteous as he is righteous.' You should discover what a holy person Christ was, by a conformity to him in your conversation. Now, will you dishonour him? What a strange Christ will you hold forth to the world, when his name is upon you—will you give way to sin and folly? And it is a wrong to

God the Spirit, a grief to him. His great and first work was to wash us from sin, Titus 3:5. You forget that such a work was past upon your hearts, and that you 'have been purged from your old sins,' when you return to them again, 2 Peter 1:9; and his constant residence in the heart is to check the lusts of the flesh, to prevent the actings of sin. 'If ye through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live,' Rom. 8:13; therefore you go about to make void his personal operation. Thus it is a wrong to God.

2. By an argument drawn from ourselves; it is very unsuitable to you. We profess ourselves to be 'regenerate' and born of God: 1 John 3:9, 'He that is born of God cannot sin.' It is not only contrary to thy duty, but to thy nature, as thou art a new creature. It were monstrous for the egg of one creature to bring forth a brood of another kind, for a crow or a kite to come from the egg of a hen. It is as unnatural a production for a new creature to sin; therefore you that are born of God, it is very uncomely and unsuitable. Do not dishonour your high birth.

3. Consider the nature of sin; if you give way to it, it will encroach further. Sins steal into the throne insensibly; and being habituated in us by long custom, we cannot easily shake off the yoke or redeem ourselves from their tyranny. They go on from little to little, and get strength by multiplied acts. Therefore we should be very careful to avoid all sin.

The second part of the caution is, beware of gross sins, committed against light and conscience. When we are tempted to sin, say with Joseph: Gen. 39:9, 'How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?' The more of deliberation and will there is in any action, the sin is the fouler. Consider, foul sins are a blot that will stick long by us. See 1 Kings 15:5; it is said, 'David walked in all the ways of the Lord,

and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.' Why, there were many other things wherein David failed; you read of his diffidence and distrust in God: 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' We read of his dissimulation, and feigning himself mad in the company of the Philistines. We read of his injustice to Mephibosheth, his fond affection to Absalom, his indulgence to Amnon. We read of his numbering the people, which cost the lives of thousands all on a sudden: all these are great failings, but these are not taken notice of; but the matter of Uriah left a scar and blot that was not easily washed off.

Thirdly, Beware of continuance in sin. How may we continue in sin? In what sense? Three things I shall take notice of in sin—culpa, reatus, macula; there is the fault, the guilt, the blot; and then we continue in sin, when the fault, the guilt, or blot is continued upon us.

1. The fault is continued when the acts of it are repeated, when we fall into the same sin again and again. Relapses are very dangerous, as a bone often broken in the same place; you are in danger of this, before the breach be well made up between God and you; as Lot doubling his incest: to venture once and again is very dangerous.

2. The guilt doth continue upon a man till serious and solemn repentance, till he sue out pardon in the name of Christ. Though a man should forbear the act, never commit it more; yet unless he retracts it by a serious remorse, and humbleth himself before God, and sueth out his pardon in a repenting way, the guilt continues. 'If we confess'—he speaks to believers—then sin is forgiven, not otherwise.

3. There is the macula, the blot, by which the schoolmen understand an inclination to sin again; the evil influence of the sin continueth until we use serious endeavours to mortify the root of it. When we have been foiled by any lust, that lust must be more mortified. For instance, Jonah, he repented for forsaking his call, when he was cast into the whale's belly; but the sin broke out again, because he did not mortify the root; what was that?—his pride. So that it is not enough to bewail the sin, but we must lance the sore, and discover the root and core of it before all will be well. A man may repent of the eruption of sin, the former act, but the inclination to sin again is not taken off. Judges 16:2. Sampson loves a woman of Gaza, and she had betrayed him; but by carrying away the gates of the city he saves his life: possibly upon that experience he might repent of his folly and inordinate love to that woman. Ay! but the root remains: therefore he falls in love with another woman, with Delilah. Therefore if you would do what is your duty, you must look to the fault, that that be not renewed; the guilt, that that be not continued by omission of repentance; and that the blot also do not remain upon you, by not searching to the root of the distemper, the cause of that sin by which we have been foiled. So much for the first part of the text, They do no iniquity.

The second note is, they walk in his ways. This is the positive part; not only avoiding of sin, but practice of holiness, is implied. Observe —

Doct. 2. It is not enough only to avoid evil, but we must do good.

'They do no iniquity;' then 'they walk in his ways.' Why?

1. The law of God is positive as well as negative. In every command there are precepts and prohibitions, that we might own God, as well as renounce the devil; and maintain communion with him, as well as



avoid our own misery: Amos 5:15, 'Hate the evil, and love the good;' Rom. 12:9, 'Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good.'

2. The mercies of God they are positive as well as privative. Our obedience should correspond with God's mercies. Now, God doth not only deliver us from hell, but he hath called us to glory. John 3:16, The end of Christ's coming is, that we should 'not perish' (there is the privative part), but 'come to everlasting life' (there is the positive). In the covenant God hath undertaken to be 'a sun and a shield,' Ps. 84:11; not only a sun, which is the fountain of life and vegetation and blessing, but a shield to defend us from danger in the world; therefore our obedience should be positive as well as privative.

Use. It reproves those that rest in negatives. As it was said of the emperor, he was rather not vicious than virtuous. Many men, all their religion runs upon nots: Luke 18:11, 'I am not as this publican.' That ground is naught, though it brings not forth briars and thorns, if it yields not good increase. Not only the unruly servant is cast into hell, that beat his fellow-servant, that ate and drank with the drunken, but the idle servant, that wrapped up his talent in a napkin. Meroz is cursed, not for opposing and fighting, but for not helping, Judges 5:23. Dives did not take away food from Lazarus, but he did not give him of his crumbs. Many will say, I set up no other gods; ay! but dost thou love, reverence, and obey the true God? In the second commandment. I abhor idols; but dost thou delight in ordinances? I do not swear and rend the name of God by cursed oaths; ay! but dost thou glorify God and honour him? I do not profane the Sabbath; but dost thou sanctify it? Thou dost not plough and dance; but thou art idle, toyest away the Sabbath. Thou dost not wrong thy parents; but dost thou reverence them? Thou dost not murder; but dost thou do good to thy neighbour? Thou art no adulterer; but dost thou study temperance and a holy sobriety in all things? Thou art no slanderer;

but art thou tender of thy neighbour's honour and credit as of thy own? Usually men cut off half their bill, as the unjust steward, when he owed a hundred, bade him set down fifty. We do not think of sins of omission. If we are not drunkards, adulterers, and profane persons, we do not think what it is to omit respects to God, and want of reverence to his holy majesty; to delight in him and his ways.

In the next place, take notice of the notion, by which the precepts of God are expressed; here they are called ways, 'that walk in his ways;' how is that?—not as he hath given us an example, to be holy as he is holy, just as he is just; but his ways are his precepts. Why are they his ways? Because they are appointed by God, and prescribed by him. Which shows the evil of defection and going astray from him. It is a despising God's wisdom and authority. The great and wise God hath found out a way for the creature to walk in, that he may attain true happiness; and we must still be running out into bypaths; yea, it is a despising of his goodness: 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good;' how to walk step by step. Then they are God's ways, as they lead to the enjoyment of him. From thence we may learn that many that wish to be where he is, shall never come there, because they do not walk in the way that leads to him. A man can never come to a place, that will not go in the way that will bring him thither: so they will never come to the enjoyment of God in a blessed estate, that will not take the Lord's way to blessedness, that follow not the course God hath prescribed to them in his word.

## SERMON V

**Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.—VER. 4.**

THE Psalmist having laid down the description of the blessed man by the frame of his heart, and the course of his life, and the integrity of his obedience, he comes now to another argument whereby to enforce the entire observation of God's law. The argument in the text is taken from God's authority enjoining this course, and he propounds it by way of address and appeal to God for the greater emphasis and force, 'Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.'

In the words take notice of two things—

1. The fundamental ground and reason of our obedience, which is God's command or will declared in his word.
2. The manner of this obedience. God will not be put off with anything, but served with the greatest diligence and exactness, 'to keep thy precepts diligently.' The Septuagint renders it, 'That thy commands should be kept exceeding much.'

In the first part take notice—

1. Of the lawgiver, thou.
2. His authority interposed, or positive injunction, hast commanded us. It is not left to our arbitrament whether we will take up the course which leads to true happiness, yea or nay.
3. The thing commanded, to keep thy precepts.

Doct. To gain the heart to a full obedience, it is good to consider the authority of God in his word.

There are many courses we must use to draw the heart to an obedience of God. We may urge—

1. The reasonableness of obedience; so that if we are left at our liberty, we should take up the ways of God rather than any other: Rom. 7:12, 'The commandment is holy, just, and good.' All that God hath required, it carrieth a great suitableness to the reasonable nature, so that if a man were well in his wits, and were to choose a law, he would of his own accord prefer the laws of God before liberty and any other service. Certainly there is an excellency in them which is in part discerned by carnal men; they admire those that practise the duties which God hath required, though they are loth to submit to them themselves. It is no heavy burden to live chastely, humbly, soberly, and to maintain a communion and correspondence with God; and whosoever doth so hath much the sweeter life of him that liveth sinfully. We may urge—

2. The profitableness of obedience, and how much it conduceth to our good: Deut. 10:13, 'The statutes which I command thee for thy good.' Our labour in the work of obedience is not lost or misspent. A godly course is refreshed with many sweet experiences for the present, and will bring in a full reward for the future.

3. The next motive is that of the text, to urge the command of God. It is a course enjoined and imposed upon us by our sovereign lawgiver. It is not in our choice, as if it were an indifferent thing whether we will walk in the laws of God or not, but of absolute necessity, unless we renounce the authority of God. This is the argument in the text, therefore let us see how it is laid down here.

[1.] Take notice of the lawgiver, thou. It is not our equal, or one that will be baffled, but the great God, upon whom thou dependest every moment. Men are easily carried away to please those that have power over them, even sometimes to the wrong of God and conscience: Hosea 5:11, 'Ephraim walked willingly after the commandment;'

meaning Jeroboam's law for the worshipping the calves in Dan and Bethel. When we depend upon men we consent to their commands, and study a compliance, though contrary to our own inclinations. And is not God's authority to be regarded? Surely he hath the greatest right to command us, for he made us—there is none hath such dominion and lordship over us as God hath; and our dependence upon him is more than can be upon any created being, for 'in him we live, and move, and have our being;' and therefore, thou hast commanded, this should be a powerful argument. And mark, none can enforce his command with such threatenings and rewards as he can. Not with such threats: Mat. 10:28, 'Fear not him that can kill the body, and after that hath no more,' &c. Men can threaten us with strapados, dungeons, halters, and other instruments of persecution; but God, with a pit without a bottom, with a worm that never dies, with a fire that shall never be quenched, with torments without end, and without ease. Then for rewards. As Saul said, 'Can the son of Jesse give you vineyards, and make you captains of fifties, of hundreds, and of thousands?' The world takes him to have most right to command that can bid most for our obedience. Who can promise more than God, who is a plentiful 'rewarder of them that diligently seek him'? Heb. 11:6. Who hath told us of a kingdom prepared for us; of a body glorious like unto Christ's body; of a soul enlarged to the greatest capacities of a creature; and yet filled up with God, and satisfied with the fruition of himself. This is the person spoken of in the text, to whom the Psalmist saith, 'Thou hast commanded us.' And surely if we would willingly walk after any commandment, we should after the commandment of the great God.

[2.] The second circumstance is, hast commanded; he hath interposed his authority. Besides the particular precept and rule of duty, there are general commands or significations of God's authority to bind all the rest, 'Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts.'

If the word of God, or rule of obedience, were only given us as a direction, we should regard it as coming from the wisdom of God. But now it is an injunction as coming from the authority of God; therefore in his name we may charge you, as you will answer it another day, that these precepts be dear and precious to you. Unless you mean to renounce the sovereign majesty of God, and put him besides the throne, and break out into open rebellion against him, you must do what he hath commanded: 1 Tim. 1:9, 'Charge them that be rich in the world,' &c., not only advise but charge them. And Titus 2:15, 'These things exhort, and rebuke with all authority.' God will have the creatures know that he expects this duty and homage from them.

[3.] Here is the nature of this obedience, or the thing commanded, to keep thy precepts. What is that?—to observe the whole rule of faith and manners. Believing in Christ, that falls under a command: 1 John 3:23, 'This is his command, that we should believe in him whom he hath sent.' Repentance is under a command: Acts 17:30, 'He hath commanded all men everywhere to repent.' Upon your peril be it, if you refuse his grace. So gospel obedience falls under a command, the great God hath charged us to keep all his precepts; to make conscience of all duties that we owe to God and man, Acts 24:6; the smaller as well as the greater, Mat. 5:19. God counts his authority to be despised and laid aside, and the command and obligatory power of his law to be made void, if a man shall either in doctrine or practice count any transgression of his laws so light and venial as not to be stood upon, as if it were but a trifle. Christians, if we had the awe of God's authority upon our hearts, what kind of persons would we be at all times, in all places, and in all company? what a check would this be to a proud thought, a light word, or a passionate speech?—what exactness would we study in our

conversations, had we but serious thoughts of the sovereign majesty of God, and of his authority forbidding these things in the word!

To offer some reasons of the point, why it is of so much profit to consider the authority of God in the command.

1. Because then the heart would not be so loose, off and on in point of duty; when a thing is counted arbitrary (as generally we count so of strictness), the heart hangs off more from God. When we press men to pray in secret, to be full of good works, to meditate of God, to examine conscience, to redeem time, to be watchful, they think these be counsels of perfection, not rules of duty, enforced by the positive command of God; therefore are men so slight and careless in them. But now, when a man hath learned to urge a naughty heart with the authority of God, and charge them in the name of God, he lies more under the awe of duty. Hath God said I must search and try my ways, and shall I live in a constant neglect of it? Hath God bidden me to redeem my time, and shall I make no conscience how I waste away my precious hours? Hath God bidden me keep my heart with all keepings, and shall I let it run at large without any restraint and regard? It is my debt, and I must pay it, or I shall answer it at my peril in the great day of accounts; it is not only commended but commanded: 2 Kings 5:13, 'If the prophet had bidden thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?'

2. We cannot be so bold and venturous in sinning, when we remember how the authority of God stands in the way: Prov. 13:13, 'He that fears the commandment, he shall be blessed;' not only the penalty, but the command. The heart is never right until we be brought to fear a commandment more than any inconveniencies whatsoever. To a wicked man there seems to be nothing so light as a

command, and therefore he breaks through against checks of conscience. But a man that hath the awe of God upon him, when mindful of God's authority, he fears a command. Jude 9, it is said of Michael the archangel, 'He durst not bring a railing accusation.' He had not the boldness, when the commandment of God was in his way.

3. Many times we are doubtful of success, and so our hands are weakened thereby. We forbear duty, because we do not know what will come of it. Now, a sense of God's authority and command doth fortify the heart against these discouragements: Luke 5:5, 'Master, we have toiled all the night, howbeit at thy command we will cast down the net.' A poor soul that hath long lain at the pool, that hath been labouring, following God from one duty to another, and nothing comes sensibly of it, yet 'at thy command,' &c., he will keep up his endeavours still. This is the very case in the text, 'Blessed is the man that keeps thy precepts, and that seeks him with the whole heart.' Then, presently, 'Thou hast commanded;' that is, though our obedience had no promise of reward, and our felicity were not proposed as the fruit of it, yet the command itself, and the authority of God, is a reason sufficient.

4. In some duties that are not evident by natural light, as believing and owning of Christ, the heart is more bound to them by the sense of a command, than by any other encouragement. It is God's pleasure it should be so: John 6:29, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent;' 1 John 3:23, 'This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.' It is enough to set a servant about his work, that it is his master's pleasure. Thou dost not stand disputing whether thou shouldst repent or not, obey or not, abstain from fleshly idols, yea or nay, or from fornication. And why should you stand aloof from the



work of faith, and doubt whether you should believe or not? We have many natural prejudices, but this, his command, is a mighty relief to the soul. It is his command we should believe in his Son. It is not only a matter of comfort and privilege, but also a matter of duty and obedience; and therefore, though we have discouragements upon us—I am unworthy to be received to mercy—yet this will bend the heart to the work. God is worthy to be obeyed; it is his commandment. Thou dost not question whether thou shouldst grieve for thy sins—why should you question whether you should believe in Christ? If God had only given us leave to believe, we could not have had such an advantage, as now he hath interposed his authority, and commanded us to believe: 'Rejoice in the Lord; and again I say, Rejoice,' Phil. 4. If God had only given us leave to refresh ourselves in a sense of his love, it were an invaluable mercy; but we have not only leave to rejoice, but a charge. It is our duty to work up our heart to a comfortable sense of the love of God, and a fruition of his favour.

5. Obedience is never right but when it is done out of a conscience of God's authority, *intuitu voluntatis*. The bare sight of God's will should be reason enough to a gracious heart. It is the will of God; it is his command, So it is often urged: 1 Thes. 4:3, the apostle bids them follow holiness, 'for this is the will of God, your sanctification.' And servants should be faithful in their burdensome and hard labours; 1 Peter 2:15, 'For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.' And 1 Thes. 5:18, 'In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.' That is argument enough to a godly Christian, that God hath signified his will and good pleasure, though the duty were never so cross to his own desires and interests. They obey simply for the commandment sake, without any other reason and inducement. There is indeed *ratio formalis*, and *ratio motiva*. There are encouragements to God's service, but the formal reason of obedience

is God's will. And this is pure obedience, to do what he wills, because he wills it.

The uses are:—1. To exhort thee to take this course with thy naughty heart. When it hangs back from any duty, or from any course of strictness, urge it with the authority of God. These precepts are not the advices and counsels of men who wish well to us, and who would advise us to the best, but they are the commands of God, who must and will be obeyed. Or, when thou art carried out to any sin, it is forbidden fruit; there is a commandment in the way, and that is as terrible to a gracious heart as an angel with a flaming sword.

To back these thoughts, let me propound a few considerations. Consider—

1. God can command what he will. He is absolute. His will is the supreme reason of all things. It is notable that God backs his laws with the consideration of his sovereignty. You shall do thus and thus. Why? 'I am the Lord.' That is all his reason, Lev. 18:4, 5. It is repeated in that and many places in the next chapter. The Papists speak much of blind obedience, obeying their superiors without inquiring into the reason of it. Surely we owe God blind obedience, as 'Abraham obeyed God, not knowing whither he went,' Heb. 11:8. John Cassian makes mention of one who willingly fetched water near two miles every day, for a whole year together, to pour it upon a dead dry stick, at the command of his superior, when no reason else could be given for it. And I have read of another who professed that, if he were enjoined by his superior to put forth to sea in a ship that had neither mast, tackling, nor any other furniture, he would do it; and when he was asked how he could do this without hazard of his discretion, he answered, The wisdom must be in him that hath power to command, not in him that hath power to obey. Thus do they place

merit in this blind obedience, in giving up their wills absolutely to the power of their superior. Certainly, in God's commands, his sovereignty is enough; the uttermost latitude of this blind obedience is due to him. If he hath said it is his will, how contrary soever it be to our reason, lusts, interests, it must be done. It is enough for us to know that we are commanded. To command is God's part, and to obey that is ours, whatever shall be declared to be his will and pleasure.

2. God can most severely punish our disobedience, and therefore his commands should have a power upon us: James 4:12, 'There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy;' with a destruction indeed, and salvation indeed. So there is but one lawgiver in this sense. He truly hath potestatem vitæ et necis. God hath the power of life and death. Why? Because he can punish with eternal death, and bestow eternal life.

3. He is neither ignorant nor forgetful of our prevarications and disobedience. The Rechabites were tender of the commandment of their dead father, Jer. 35, who could not take cognisance of their actions: 'Our father commanded us.' Certainly we should be tender of the commands of the great God: Prov. 15:3, 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.' He is not so shut up within the curtain of the heavens but that he takes notice how his laws are kept and observed. Saith the prophet to Gehazi, 'Went not my spirit with thee?' meaning his prophetic spirit. So doth God, as it were, appeal to the conscience of a sinner. Doth not my spirit go along with thee? Is not he conscious to our works, and observes all we do?

4. God stands much upon the authority of his law: Hosea 8:12, 'I have written to them the great things of my law,' &c. Mark, he calls

them 'the great things of his law;' they are not things to be slighted and contemned. They are not directions of little moment; there is no small hazard in contemning them, or not walking according to them. Indeed, we think it a small matter to stand upon every circumstance; but God doth not think so. Uzzah was struck dead in the place for failing in a circumstance—he would stay the ark, which shook. The Bethshemites, sinning in a circumstance, it cost them the lives of many thousands. Lot's wife, for looking back, was turned into a pillar of salt. Let these things beget an awe upon our hearts of the great God, and of what he hath enjoined us.

Use 2. It informs us of the heinous nature of sin. Of sin in general, it is ἀνομία, 'a transgression of the law,' 1 John 3:4; that is, a contempt of God's authority. It is an unlording of him and putting him out of the throne. Every sin is an affront to God's authority; it is a despising of the command, 2 Sam. 12:9; you rise up in defiance to God, and cast off his sovereignty in despising his command; more particularly, sins against knowledge, or against conscience. You may see the heinousness of these sins by this—all sins, they proceed either from ignorance, or from oblivion, or from rebellion. Sins of ignorance, they are not so heinous, though they are sins. A man is bound to know the will of his creator; but then ignorance of it is not so heinous. To strike a friend in the dark is not so ill taken as in the open light. So there are sins of oblivion, which is an ignorance for the time, for a man hath not such explicit thoughts as to revive his knowledge upon himself. He is overtaken, Gal. 6:1. This a great sin too. Why? For the awe of God should ever be fresh and great upon the heart, and we are to 'remember his statutes to do them.' But now, there are sins of rebellion, that are committed against light and conscience, whether they be of omission or commission. We are troubled for sins of commission against light; we should be as much for sins of omission, for they are rebellions against God, when we

omit a duty of which we are convinced: James 4:17, 'To him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to him it is sin.'

Secondly, Come we to the manner of this obedience, Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. From thence note—

Doct. That we should not only do what God hath required, but we should do it diligently.

1. Because the matter of keeping God's precepts doth not only fall under his authority, but the manner also. God hath not only required service, but service with all its circumstances: 1 Cor. 9:24, 'I so run that I may obtain.' It is our duty, not only to run, but so run, not as in jest, but as in good earnest: Rom. 12:11, 'Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' Not only serving the Lord, but seething hot in spirit, when our affections are so strong that they boil over in our lives. And James 5:16, 'The fervent effectual prayer;' that prayer which hath a spirit and a life in it. Not only prayer is required, but fervency, not dead and drowsy devotion. So Luke 7:18, not only it is required that we hear, but to 'take heed how we hear,' with what reverence and seriousness. And Acts 26:7, 'The twelve tribes served God instantly, day and night,' with the uttermost extension of their strength, so the word signifies. And for charity, it is not enough to give, but with readiness and freeness. Be 'ready to communicate;' like life-honey it must drop of its own accord.

2. The manner is the great thing which God requires; it is very valuable upon several grounds: Prov. 16:2, 'The ways of man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits.' What doth God put into the balance of the sanctuary when he comes to make a judgment? When he would weigh an action he weighs the spirits. He considers not only the bulk, the matter of the action, but the spirit, with what heart it was done. A man may sin in doing good, but he

cannot sin in doing well; therefore the manner should be looked to as well as the matter.

3. It is a good help against slightness. We are apt to put off God with anything, and therefore we had need to rouse up ourselves to serve him with diligence: Josh. 24:19, 'You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a jealous God,' &c. It is another matter to serve the Lord than the world thinks of. Why? For he is holy and jealous; he is holy, and so hates the least failing; and very jealous, sin awakens the displeasure of his jealousy—he will punish for very little failings. Ananias and Sapphira struck dead in the place for one lie; Zacharias struck dumb for an act of unbelief; Moses, for a few rash words, never entered into the land of Canaan; David, for a proud conceit in numbering the people, lost seventy thousand men with the pestilence; the Corinthians, many of them died for unworthy receiving. God is the same God still: he hates sin as much as ever; therefore we should not be slight.

4. It is a dishonour to God to do his work negligently: Mal. 1:14, 'Cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing, for I am a great king, saith the Lord;' implying that it is a lessening of his majesty. It is a sign we have cheap thoughts of God, when we are slight in his service. Christians, we owe our best to God, and are to serve him with all our might: Deut. 6:5, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might.' It is a lessening of his excellency in our thoughts when everything serves the turn.

5. Keeping the commandment, it is a great trust. God hath left this trust with us that we should keep his precepts, therefore it is to be discharged seriously. A man is very careful that hath taken a trust

upon him to preserve it. No men that have given up their names to Christ, but they have taken up this trust upon them to keep his precepts; therefore we should do it with all diligence and heedfulness of soul.

6. We have no other plea to evidence our sincerity; we are guilty of many defects, and cannot do as we would,—where lies our evidence then? When we set ourselves to obey, and aim at the highest exactness to serve him with our best affections and strength. A child of God, he doth not do all that God hath required, but he doth his best, and then that is a sign the heart is upright. For what is this diligence, but our utmost study and endeavour after perfection, to avoid all known evils, and to practise all known duties, and that with as much care as we can? Now, this is an argument of our sincerity, and then our slips are but failings which God will spare, pity, pardon: Mal. 3:17, 'I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him,' &c. Where a man is careless, and failings are allowed, then they are iniquities. A father, out of indulgence, may pass by a failing when his son waits upon him, suppose when he spills the wine and breaks the glass; but surely will not allow him to throw it down carelessly or wilfully. We have no other plea to evidence our sincerity but this.

Use. It presseth us, whatever we do for the great God, to do it with all our might, Eccles. 9:10. There is no weighty thing can be done without diligence; much more the keeping the commandment. Satan is diligent in tempting, and we ourselves are weak and infirm; we cannot do the least thing as we should. And the danger of miscarrying is so great, that surely it will require all our care. Wherein should we show this diligence and exactness? When we keep all the parts of the law, and that at all times and places, and that with the whole man.

1. When we strive to keep the law in all the points of it. This was Paul's exercise: Acts 24:16, 'To keep a good conscience void of offence both towards God and man.' Mark, here was his great business; this is to be diligent, when a man labours to keep a good conscience always. And saith he, Herein, or upon this do I exercise myself; that is, upon this encouragement, upon hope of a blessed resurrection, for that is spoken of there. There are wages and recompenses enough in heaven, therefore we should not grudge at a little work, that we may not be drawn willingly from the least part of our duty.

2. When we do it at all times and places, and in all company, then it is a sign we mind the work, then are we diligent: Ps. 106:3, 'Blessed is he that doth righteousness at all times.' Not only now and then, but it is his constant course. We do not judge men's complexions by the colour they have when they sit before the fire. We cannot judge of men by a fit and pang when they are under the awe of an ordinance, or in good company; but when at all times he labours to keep up a warmth of heart towards God.

3. When he labours to do this with his whole man, not only in pretence, and with his body, or outward man, but with inward affections: Rom. 1:9, 'My God, whom I serve in the spirit.' And the true people of God are described: Phil 3:3, 'To worship God in the spirit.' When they labour to bring their hearts under the power of God's precepts, and do not only mind conformity of the outward man, this is to keep the precepts of God diligently. All this is to be understood, not in exact perfection; but it is to be understood of our striving, labouring, watching; of our praying, and of our exercising ourselves hereunto, that we may with our whole man come under the full obedience of the law of God, and may manifest it upon all



occasions, at all times, in all companies and places; and this is an evidence of our sincerity.

## **SERMON VI**

## **Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!—VER. 5.**

IN the former verse he had spoken of God's authority; now he beggeth grace to obey: 'Thou hast commanded;' and 'Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!'

1. Note, that it is the use and duty of the people of God to turn precepts into prayers.

That this is the practice of God's children appeareth: Jer. 31:18, 'Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.' God had said, 'Turn you, and you shall live;' and they ask it of God, 'Turn us,' as he required it of them. It was Austin's prayer, *Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis*, Give what thou requirest, and require what thou wilt. It is the duty of the saints; for—1. It suiteth with the gospel-covenant, where precepts and promises go hand in hand, where God giveth what he commandeth, and 'worketh all our works in us,' and for us. They are not conditions of the covenant only, but a part of it. What God hath required at our hands, that we may desire at his hands. God is no Pharaoh, to require brick where he giveth no straw. *Lex jubet, gratia juvat*. The articles of the new covenant are not only put into the form of precepts, but promises. The law giveth no strength to perform anything, but the gospel offereth grace. 2. Because by this means the ends of God are fulfilled. Why doth God require what we cannot perform by our own strength? He doth it—(1.) To keep up his right; (2.) To convince us of our impotency, and that upon a trial; without his grace we cannot do his work; (3.) That the creature may express his readiness to obey; (4.) To bring us to lie at his feet for grace.

Now, when we turn precepts into prayers, all these ends are accomplished.

[1.] To keep up his right. If we have lost our power, there is no reason God should lose his right. A drunken servant is under the obligation and duty of a servant still; he is unable to do his master's work, but he is bound to it. It is unreasonable that another should suffer through my default. Well, then, God may well command the fallen creature to keep his precepts diligently. Now, when we deal earnestly with God about it, it argueth a sense of his authority upon our hearts. If we were not held under the awe of the commandment, why should we be so earnest about it? If men were more sensible, of their obligations, we should have more prayers in this kind. This is the will of God, and how shall I do to observe it?

[2.] To convince us of our impotency, and that upon a trial. Practical conviction is best. We may discourse of the weakness and insufficiency of the creature, but we are not affected with it till we try. A diseased man as long as he sits still feels not the lameness of his joints, but upon exercise it is sensible. Now, these prayers are a profession of weakness upon a trial: Rom. 7:18, 'For to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not.' That presupposeth a search, not I cannot, but I find not, and then we run to prayer. Every prayer is an acknowledgment of our weakness and dependence. Who would ask that of another which he thinketh to be in his own power?

[3.] That the creature may express his readiness. God will have us will, though we cannot do. It is true he giveth both: Phil. 2:13, 'For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.' But the one by preventing, the other by assisting grace, Rom. 7:18. Though we are unable to do what we should, yet it is the

desire of our hearts. Prayer is the expression of our desire. When we heartily beg grace, it is a sign the commandment is not grievous, but our lusts. It much discovereth a man's heart, what he counteth to be his bondage and the yoke: 1 John 5:3, 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.' Which do we groan under? the burden of the law, or the body of death? That is best seen by our heartiness in prayer.

[4.] To bring us to lie at his feet. God will be owned not only as a lawgiver, but as a fountain of grace. The precept cometh from God to drive us to God; his sovereignty maketh way for his grace. He calleth upon us for obedience, that we may call upon him for help. First, he giveth us a law, that he may afterwards give us a heart. God's end is to bring us upon our knees. As hard providences conduce to bring God and us together, so do hard commandments. Till we be reduced to a distress, we never think seriously of dealing with God.

Use. It teacheth us what to do when we meet with anything that is difficult and impossible to us; as to repent, believe, to renounce a bewitching lust, or perform a spiritual duty. Two ways we are apt to miscarry in such a case; either by murmuring against God, as if he were harsh and austere, and had 'reaped where he hath not sown, and gathered where he hath not strewed;' or by casting off all out of a foolish despondency: cut at heart, or else wax faint. These are the two evils. I shall never get rid of this naughty heart. Or else we fret against God: Prov. 19:3, 'The foolishness of man perverteth his way; and his heart fretteth against the Lord.' Now to prevent these evils, spread the case before the Lord in this manner—

(1.) Acknowledge the debt. God will keep up the sense of his authority; his command must be the reason of our care, as well as his promise the ground of our hope. (2.) Confess your impotency: 2 Cor.

3:5, 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.' This is to empty the bucket before we go to the fountain. When we are full of self, there is no room for grace. (3.) Own God's power: Mat. 19:26, 'But Jesus beheld them, and saith unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.' The difficulties that we meet with in the way to heaven should serve only to make us despair of our own strength and abilities, not of God's, with whom nothing is impossible. It is a relief to consider of the divine power, from whence we fetch all our supplies necessary to life and godliness. (4.) Deal with God earnestly about help. The command showeth how pleasing such requests are to God, and you own God not only as a lawgiver, but author of grace. Do not come in a lukewarm, careless fashion, but 'Oh that my heart were directed!' Sluggish wishes will do no good; you bespeak your own denial when you ask grace as a thing of course: Jer. 31:18, 'I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.'

2. The next thing that we may note, is the serious desire that is in God's people after holiness. Mark, it is not a velleity, but a volition, Oh that, noteth the vehemency and heartiness.

It is his first desire. David had hitherto spoken assertively; when he cometh to speak supplications, his first and chief request to God is, 'Oh that my ways were directed!' &c.

Mark again, it is not a desire of happiness, but holiness; not 'Oh that I were blessed!' but 'Oh that my ways were directed!' A mind to know, a will to obey, and a memory to keep in mind God's precepts.

It is practical holiness: 'Oh that my ways!' God hath his ways: 'They walk in his ways,' ver. 3. And we have our ways: 'Oh that my ways were directed!' that is, all my thoughts, counsels, inclinations, speeches, actions, were directed by thy statutes. Every commandment is a royal edict, a statute which God hath made for the governing of the world.

Now the saints have this desire of holiness—

[1.] From the new nature that is in them. The appetite followeth the nature: Gal. 5:17, 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.' Desires being the vigorous bent of the soul, discover the temper of it. The carnal nature puts forth itself in lustings, so doth the new nature. The main thing we have by grace is a new heart, that is, new loves, new desires, and new delights: Rom. 8:5, 'For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the spirit the things of the spirit.'

[2.] Out of love to God, which implieth subjection and conformity to him. Love to God is testified by a desire of subjection; for his love is a love of bounty, ours a love of duty: 1 John 5:3, 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.' It is the great desire of their souls that they may be subject to God. As he that loveth would not offend the party loved, so it is their desire to please God in all things; and as holiness implieth a conformity to God, they study to be like him. It is their hope, their desire, their care. Their hope: 1 John 3:2, 'But we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.' It is their desire and care in every ordinance: 2 Cor. 3:18, 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed

into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' And it is their constant endeavour: 1 Peter 1:15, 'But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.'

[3.] Out of experience of the ways of God, of that goodness and enlargement of heart that is to be found in them. They have tasted and seen how good his laws are. They can answer God's appeal, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' Yea, doubtless, it is good: Ps. 19:10, 11, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward.' The spiritual life is interlined and refreshed with many sweet experiences.

The use here is, first, a note of discovery; for men are judged by their desires, rather than their practices, as being freest from constraint; and this is humbly represented by the children of God, to incline his favour and compassion to them: Neh. 1:11, 'Let thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name.' They come short in many things, but they desire to fear God: Isa. 26:8, 'The desires of our soul are to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee.' They could speak little of what they had done for God. Paul was better at willing than performing, till freed from 'this body of death:' Rom. 7:18, 'For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.' This will be our best evidence to the last, 'Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!'

But may not wicked men have good desires?

Ans. They may have a loose inclination to good things, but not a full resolution for God. Wicked men have an enlightened conscience, but no renewed wills. This enlightened conscience may carry them so far, as to some general approbation of the things of God, which may produce a wish that they were so and so; but this doth no good to the heart. Sparks do not kindle the fire, but coals: a spark is enough to set us on fire in carnal matters, but not in spiritual. More distinctly—

[1.] Wicked men may desire their own happiness, though not upon God's terms: Num. 23:10, 'Oh that I might die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!' At oportuit sic vixisse. John 6:34, 'Evermore give us of this bread' of life. Every man would be blessed, and go to heaven, if it were left to his option and choice; they like the end, but not the means. There was not a murmuring Israelite but would count Canaan a good land; but the giants and sons of Anak were there.

[2.] They may have some languid and vanishing motions towards the means as well as the end, being convinced of the necessity of holiness; yea, they may draw out their wishes into a cold prayer that God would make them better; as lazy persons sometimes express their desires, Would I were at such a place, and never travel! Would I had written such a task, and never put pen to paper!—Vellent sed nolunt. When it cometh to trial, they do not set themselves in good earnest to get that grace they wish for.

What is the difference between a volition and a velleity?

(1.) Such desires as are not waving, but resolute and fixed. Aquinas saith, *Velleitas est voluntas incompleta*, a half will. They have a month's mind to that which is good, but not a thorough resolution; as Agrippa, almost persuaded, but not altogether; such a desire as will bear up against a strong tide of opposition. It is called the



'setting of the heart:' 1 Chron. 22:19, 'Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God.' Whatever cometh of it, they must and will have grace: Ps. 27:4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.'

(2.) Such desires as are absolute, and do not stand upon terms. There is an hypothetical and conditional will. We would, but with such conditions. I would have Christ, if it did not cost me so dear—to deny lusts, interests, friends, relations, much waiting, praying, watching, striving. So Mat. 22:5, they would come to the supper; but house, oxen, farm, merchandise—there was something in the way that hindered them: there was no full and perfect will. A chapman no doubt would have the wares he liketh, but will not come to the price. I will have heaven, whatever it cost me, is the voice of a desiring saint.

(3.) Such desires as are active and industrious; not a remiss will: Prov. 13:4, 'The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.' Cold, raw wishes are unuseful and fruitless; we must work as well as wish. Poor, languid, inactive desires come to nothing, when men do not put forth their endeavours, and apply themselves to the prosecution of what is desired. Faint and sluggish velleities do hurt: Prov. 21:25, 'The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuseth labour.' Whatever a man doth seriously desire to have, he will use proper means to procure it. Wishes are but the fruits of a speculative fancy, rather than an industrious affection.

(4.) Such desires as are constant, and not easily controlled by other desires. Idle, lazy wishes, ineffectual glances, sudden motions, while

their hearts are detained in the speculation of holiness, are like children's desires, soon put out of the humour. There may be vehement and sudden lustings in an unregenerated person; free-will hath its pangs of devotion. But the apostle declares: Rom. 7:18, 'To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.' It is a constant habitual will, not a volatile devotion, that cometh upon us now and then; but such a will as is present, as sin is present. He had said before, 'When I would do good, evil is present with me.' Whithersoever you go, you carry a sinning nature about with you. It is present, urging the heart to vanity, folly, lust; so should this will be present with you, urging the heart to good.

(5.) Such desires are joined with serious groans and sorrow for our defects. He cannot be so good as he would, but desireth and complaineth; therefore God accepteth of the will for the deed: Rom. 7:24, 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' Though an unrenewed man seem to desire grace, yet he feeleth no grief in the want of grace, it never troubleth him; his desires do not break out into groans and bitter complaints, because of indwelling corruption. Now, by these things may you try your hearts.

3. The third thing observable from hence, is the necessity of directing grace, 'Oh that my ways were directed!'

I shall first premise some distinctions—

[1.] There is a general direction, and a particular direction. (1.) The general direction is in the word; there God hath declared his mind in his statutes: 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good,' Micah 6:8. (2.) A particular direction by his Spirit, who doth order and direct us how to apply the rule to all our ways: Isa. 58:11, 'The Lord shall guide thee continually.' Now, this particular direction is either to our

general choice: Ps. 16:7, 'I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel.' It is the work of God only to teach us how to apply the rule so as to choose him for our portion. Or secondly, as to acts and orderly exercise of any particular grace; so 2 Thes. 3:5, 'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.' Or thirdly, as to the management of our civil actions; as the pillar of the cloud went before the Israelites in their journeys, so doth God still guide his people in all their affairs, both as to duty and success. As to duty: Prov. 3:6, 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' Ask his counsel, leave, and blessing: in doubtful things ask his counsel; in clear cases ask his leave, 'Shall I go up or not?' and then ask his blessing. As to success: Prov. 16:9, 'A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps.' Events cross expectation; we cannot foresee the event of things in the course of a man's life, what is expedient, and what not: Prov. 20:24, 'Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man, then understand his own way?' We purpose and determine many things rightly, and according to rule, but God disposeth of all events: Rom. 1:10, 'Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God, to come unto you.' God brought Paul to Rome by a way be little thought of. Therefore we need to call God to counsel, and to inquire of the oracle in all matters that concern family, commonwealth, or church. We need a guide: Jer. 10:23, 'O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; neither is it in man that walketh to direct his steps.' Affairs do not depend on our policy or integrity, but on the divine providence, who ordereth every step, to give such success as he pleaseth.

[2.] Distinction. There is a literal direction, and an effectual direction. (1.) The literal direction is by that speculative knowledge that we get by the word: Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path,' sufficient not only for general

courses, but particular actions. (2.) The effectual direction is by the Holy Ghost applying the word, and bending the heart to the obedience of it: Isa. 61:8, 'I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them,'—that is, I will so show them their way, as to work their hearts to the sincere obedience of it.

Now, to give you the reasons for the necessity of this direction, three things prove it—

(1.) The blindness of our minds. We are wise in generals, but know not how to apply the rule to particular cases. The heathens were 'vain ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς, in their imaginations,' Rom. 1:21. And the same is true of us Christians: though we have a clearer knowledge of God, and the way how he will be served and glorified; yet to suit it to particular cases, how dark are we! A dial may be well set, yet, if the sun shine not upon it, we cannot tell the time of the day. The scriptures are sufficient to make us wise; but without the light of the Spirit, how do we grope at noonday!

(2.) The forgetfulness of our memories. We need a monitor to stir up in us diligence, watchfulness, and earnest endeavours: Isa. 30:21, 'And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.' The cares and businesses of the world do often drive the sense of our duty out of our minds. One great end of God's Spirit is to put us in remembrance, to revive truths upon us in their season. A ship, though never so well rigged, needs a pilot; we need a good guide to put us in mind of our duty.

(3.) The obstinacy of our heart. So that we need every moment to enforce the authority of God upon us; and to persuade us to what is right and good. The Spirit's light is so directive, that it is also persuasive; there needs not only counsel, but efficacy and power. We

have boisterous lusts, and wandering hearts; we need not only to be conducted, but governed. We have hearts that 'love to wander,' Jer. 14:10; we are sheep that need a shepherd, for no creature is more apt to stray: Ps. 95:10, 'It is a people that do err in their hearts:' not only ignorant, but perverse; not in mind only apt to err, but love to err. Thus you see the necessity of this direction, 'Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!'

The uses. Well, then, give the Lord this honour, of being your continual guide: Ps. 48:14, 'For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.' You do not own him as a God, unless you make him your guide: Ps. 73:24, 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.' In vain do you hope for eternal life else. Therefore—

1. Commit yourselves to the tuition of his grace. A man is to choose God for a guide, as well as to take him for a lord; to ask his counsel as well as submit to his commandments: Jer. 3:4, 'Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth?'
2. Depend upon him in every action. 'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord;' all his particular actions: Rom. 8:26, 'For we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.'
3. Seek his counsel out of a desire to follow it: John 7:17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' Still walk according to light received, and it will increase upon you. Such as make conscience of known truth shall know more. He that cometh with a subjected mind, and fixed resolution to receive and obey, shall have a discerning spirit. God answereth men according to the fidelity of their own hearts.

## SERMON VII

### **Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.— VER. 6.**

THE Psalmist had prayed for direction to keep God's commandments: here he showeth the fruit and benefit of that direction.

In the words two things are observable—

1. The description of sincere obedience: respect to all the commandments.
2. The fruit of it: then shall I not be ashamed.

First, Observe; a sincere heart aimeth at universal obedience to God's law. Here are to be illustrated—

1. 'All thy commandments.'
2. 'Having respect' to them. The object; and the act of the soul.

[1.] All the commandments must be taken notice of, small and great. (1.) Small, we cannot dispense with ourselves in the least: Mat. 5:19, 'Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.' We are apt to say, 'It is but a little one, and my soul shall live.' No sin can be little that is committed against the great God. It argueth the more wickedness and corruption to break with God upon every trifling occasion. A little force will make a heavy body move

downward. (2.) As small, so great. The ceremonialist is apt to stand much upon lesser things: John 18:28, the Jews would not enter into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled, yet they sought the life of the Lord of glory. Hypocrites make a great business about small matters, and in the meantime reject weighty duties, τὰ βαρύτερα τοῦ νόμου: Mat. 23:23, 'Ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone;' like one that cometh into a shop to buy a pennyworth and steals a pound's worth, or is punctual in paying a small debt that he may get deeper into our books, and cheat us of a greater sum, comply in circumstances and terms, which yet have their place, but make no conscience of greater.

[2.] Commandments that require public, and commandments that require private duties: 2 Cor. 7:1, 'Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' In times of trouble men content themselves that their hearts are right, as the libertines in Corinth, and think it is no matter whether they own God publicly, yea or nay. Then for private duties, some make a fair show to the world, but in their family converse are loose and careless: David saith, Ps. 101:2, 'I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.' If a man be truly holy he will show it at home as well as abroad; in his family, where his constant converse is, yea, in his closet and secret retirements. A Christian is alike everywhere, because God is alike everywhere. We strain ourselves to put forth our gifts in public; God will be served with our uttermost in secret also.

[3.] There are commandments that concern the inward as well as the outward man; we must make conscience of both: Isa. 55:7, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and

let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy,' &c. We must not only make conscience of our way, or outward actions, but also of our thoughts; as we must not do evil before man, so not think evil before God. Thoughts fall under a law as well as our actions: James 4:8, 'Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.'

[4.] There are commands that concern God, and commands that concern man. There is a first table and a second; some are very punctual in dealing with men, but neglectful of God: Rom. 1:18, 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.' Both the tables are owned from heaven. Some there are that will not wrong their neighbour of a farthing, yet stick not to rob God of that fear, faith, and love that is due to him. Many will not defile their bodies with promiscuous copulation, but are adulterers and adulteresses, James 4:4, running a-whoring from their spiritual husband, and doting on the creature. Many there are who condemned the rebellion of Absalom, but rise up against their heavenly Father; are not murderers, but strike at the being of God. Some there are who are very tender of wronging the reputation of men, yet dishonour God, and are never troubled for it. Others there are who are much in worship, but in their dealings with men are very unconscionable: they will not swear an oath, yet are very uncharitable, censuring their brethren without any pity or remorse. This is the fashion of the world, to be in with one duty, and out with another. The commandments are ushered in with this preface, 'God spake all these words;' he that hath enjoined one hath enjoined another. But now, as the echo rendereth but part of the speech, so do we in our return of obedience. God spake all, and we return but part.



2. Having respect unto the commandments; that needeth illustration also. Though we cannot keep all, or any one of them as we should, yet we must have regard to all, and that equally without any distinction.

When have we an equal respect to all? I answer, Three ways—(1.) Proposito; (2.) Affectu; (3.) Conatu.

[1.] Proposito, in vow and purpose. We must approve of all, and choose all for our rule, without reservation and indulgence. Some commands are more contrary than others to our lusts and interests, and are less in our power to perform. Now, a sanctified judgment must approve all, and a sanctified will accept and choose all as equally good, necessary, and profitable for us: Rom. 7:12, 'The law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good'—the law in general, nay, that commandment which had wrought such tragical effects in his heart. It is holy, as being the copy of God's purity; just, as doing us no wrong, being no infringement of our just freedom; good, as being very profitable to direct and perfect our operations, and to make us happy here and hereafter. But this approbation is not enough, there must be consent: ver. 16, 'I consent to the law that it is good,' though it is contrary to my natural inclinations. It is a good law, the heart must be engaged, 'I will write my laws upon their hearts, and put them into their minds.' God doth not only give us a knowledge, or a single approbation of his will, but a will to choose it as our rule to live by. The heart is suited and inclined to it, and a man giveth up himself faithfully and entirely to serve God according to the direction of his word.

[2.] Affectu. There must be a sincere affection to all, or a care to keep them. We must not entertain affection to any known sin: Ps. 66:18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me.' A man may have a great deal of sin in his heart, but if he cherish and dandle it,

and have a regard to it, he is one whom God will not accept. His desire is not to offend God, and it is his trouble when corruption gets the start of grace. If a king warneth a city of traitors, and calleth upon them to search them out, and send them away, and they never regard the message, but willingly give them harbour and entertainment, then it is a sign they are disaffected to him: to cherish a sin after warning is an open rebellion against God.

[3.] Conatu, in endeavour. We must keep all, conatu, licet non eventu; it is our labour, though not our success. Those that dispense with any commandment voluntarily and willingly, have never yet learned the way of true obedience to God: 2 Kings 5:18, 'In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.' This is to set up a toleration in our hearts, and to make Satan some allowance, to part stakes between God and the devil. There is something wherein we would be excused, and expect favour in fashions, customs, ways of profit and advantage. The endeavour must be to keep all, though the success be not answerable. A mariner that is beaten back by the winds, yet proveth to hold on his course to make his port. A man that would sit warm shutteth the door and windows, yet the wind will creep in, though he doth not leave any open passage for it.

Now, the reasons why we are to have respect to all the commandments are these following:—

1. Because they are all ratified by the same authority. There is a connection between them, as there is between links in a chain; take away one, and all falleth to pieces: James 2:10, 'For whosoever shall

keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' The authority of the law is lost if men may pick and choose as they please. He that said, 'Thou shalt do no murder,' hath also said, 'Thou shalt keep my Sabbaths.' A quatenus ad omne, the argument holds. Do one thing as a duty, and that will enforce the practice of all duties that we are convinced of: Col. 1:10, 'Walk worthy of God in all well-pleasing.' He that seeketh not to please God in all things, seeketh not to please God in anything.

2. Because in conversion grace is given to observe all. There is a universal principle to incline the heart impartially to all. God infuseth all grace together; not one particular only in the hearts of his children, but the whole law. There is a form of grace introduced into the soul that suits with every point of the law. The heart is framed to resist every sin, to observe all that God hath commanded. A new-born infant hath all the parts of a man, though not the strength and bulk; so every Christian in regeneration. Men may be born without hands or feet, but the new creature never cometh out maimed and imperfect. It is small and weak at first, but it groweth and gathereth strength. There is no commandment to which it is not suited. Well, then, not to have respect to all were to hide our talent in a napkin, and to receive one of God's best gifts in vain. The apostle inferreth it out of their calling: 1 Peter 1:15, 'But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy, ἐν πάσῃ ἀναστροφῇ, in all manner of conversation,' at home and abroad, among infidels and with their fellow Christians, in prosperity and in adversity, walk worthy of your calling. As the sun is placed in heaven, and spreadeth his beams everywhere, nothing is hidden from his light; or as the lines run from the centre to every part of the circumference, so doth grace distil itself in a uniform obedience.

3. A Christian can never be perfect in degrees if he be not perfect in parts. What is defective in the parts cannot be made up by any growth. If a man should be born without an arm or a leg, this cannot be supplied by future growth, he is a maimed man still; so if a man be not perfect in parts, hath not respect to all the commandments, he can never be perfect in heaven. You cannot be 'presented as perfect in Christ Jesus,' Col. 1:28.

4. They that do not obey all, will not long obey any; but where profit or lust requireth it, they will break all, as Mark 6:20, 'Herod heard John, knowing that he was a just man, and an holy, and observed him; and when he feared him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.' But one command stuck with him; being pleased with Herodias and the dancing damsel, that bringeth him to murder, &c. Keep but your passion a-foot, or your lust a-foot, or your worldliness a-foot, and it will carry you farther. One sin keepeth possession for Satan; allow but one lust and corruption in the heart, and that will undermine all, and become thine eternal ruin; as one leak may sink a ship. A bird tied by the leg, may make some show of escape. You never totally renounced Satan's government, and wholly gave up yourselves to God. By keeping a part, the whole falleth to his share.

Use 1. It reproveth those that make one duty excuse another. Two sorts there are,—some that go from sins to duties, and others from duties to sins, that antedate or postdate indulgences. (1.) Those that antedate, that hope to make amends for their evil course by their duties, as when men allow themselves in a present carnal practice, upon the purpose of an after-repentance. It is as if men should distemper the body by excess, and then hope to amend all by giving themselves a vomit; or contract a sickness voluntarily, because they will take physic. Certainly men would not sin so freely, if they were not borne up by promises of future reformation. (2.) That post-date.

They go from duties to sins: Ezek. 33:13, 'When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it.' If he shall commit a sin upon that confidence of his own righteousness. Josiah's breach with God, was after the preparing of the temple, 2 Chron. 35:20; even God's children take the more carnal liberty because of their duties.

Use 2. Is trial. Have we this sincere respect to all the commandments? This may be known—

1. By a constant desire, resolution, and endeavour to be informed of God's will: Rom. 12:2, 'And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, that acceptable and perfect will of God.' And Eph. 5:17, 'Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.' A man that desireth to follow God fully, would fain know the whole latitude and breadth of his duty. A child of God is inquisitive. He that desireth to keep all, doth also desire to know all. It is his business to study the mind of God in all things; gross negligence showeth we are afraid of understanding our duty.

2. By often searching and trying his own heart, that he may find where the matter sticketh: Lam. 3:40, 'Let us search and try our ways, that we may turn unto the Lord.' Complete reformation is grounded on a serious search. A chief cause of our going wrong is because we do not bring our hearts and ways together.

3. Desire God to show it if there be anything in the heart allowed contrary to the word: Job 34:32, 'That which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.' And Ps. 139:23, 24, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my

thoughts; and see if there be any wicked thing in me; and lead me in the way everlasting.' He would not hold on in any evil course. There is no sin so dear and near to him which he is not willing to see and judge in himself.

4. When they fail through human infirmity or imprudence, they seek to renew their peace with God: 1 John 2:1, 'My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not; and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' They sue out their discharge in Christ's name. If a man were unclean under the law, he was to wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water before evening, and not rest in his uncleanness. Now if we still abide in our filthiness, and do not fly to our advocate, and sue out our pardon in Christ's name, it argueth that we have not a respect to the commandment.

5. They diligently use all holy means which are appointed by God for growth in faith and obedience: 2 Cor. 7:1, 'Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God,' and coming up to a greater conformity.

6. A care of their bosom-sin, to get that weakened: Ps. 18:23, 'I was also upright before him; and I kept myself from mine iniquity.' Such as are most incident to us by temper of nature, course of life, or posture of interests; the right hand must be cut off, the right eye plucked out, Mat. 5:29, 30. If thou seekest to cross that sin that is most pleasing to thine own heart, seekest to dry up that unclean issue that runneth upon thee; by that and the other signs may we determine whether we have a sincere respect to all God's commandments.

Secondly, The next circumstance in the text is the fruit and benefit. They that have an entire respect to God's laws shall not be ashamed.

There is a twofold shame: the shame of a guilty conscience, and the shame of a tender conscience.

The one is the merit and fruit of sin; the other is an act of grace. This here spoken of is to be understood not of a holy self-loathing, but a confounding shame.

This shame may be considered either with respect to their own hearts, or the world, or before God at the day of judgment.

1. With respect to their own hearts; and thus the upright and sincere shall not be ashamed. There is a generous confidence bewrayed in duties, in troubles, and in death. (1.) In duties. They can look God in the face; uprightness giveth boldness; and the more respect we have unto the commandments, the greater liberty have we in prayer: 1 John 3:21, 'If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.' But when men walk crookedly and loosely, they sin away the liberty of their hearts, and cannot come to God with such a free spirit. A man that hath wronged another, and knoweth not how to pay, cannot endure to see him; so doth sin work a shyness of God. (2.) In troubles and afflictions. Nothing sooner abashed than a corrupt conscience; they cannot hold up their heads when crossed in the world; a burden sits very uneasy upon a galled back; their crosses revive their guilt, are parts of the curse; therefore they are soon blank. But now a godly man is bold and courageous. Two things make one bold, innocency and independency; and both are found in him that hath a sincere respect to God's commandments. Innocency, when the soul doth not look pale under any secret guilt, and when we can live above the creatures, it puts an heroic spirit or lion-like boldness into the children of God. (3.) In death. To be able to look death in the face, it is a comfort in your greatest distresses. When Hezekiah was arrested with the sentence of death in the mouth of the

prophet, here was his comfort and support, 'O Lord, thou knowest that I have walked before thee with a perfect heart.' And Job 13:15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.'

2. Before the world, a man will be able to hold up his head that is sincere. It is true, he may be reproached and scoffed at, and suffer disgrace for his strictness; yet he is not ashamed. Though we displease men, yet if we please God, it is enough, if we have his approbation: 1 Cor. 4:3, 'With me it is ἐλάχιστον, a very small thing, that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment.' To depend on the words of man is a foolish thing. There is more ground of rejoicing than of shame. You have the approbation of their consciences, when not of their tongues. In the issue God will vindicate the righteousness of his faithful servants: Ps. 37:6, 'He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.' There will be no cause in the issue for a Christian to repent of his strict observance of God's commands.

3. Before God at the day of judgment: 1 John 2:28, 'And now, little children, abide in him, that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.' He is the brave man that can hold up his head in that day. Wicked men will then be ashamed—(1.) Because their secret sins are then divulged and made public: 1 Cor. 4:5, 'Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, will who both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart, and then shall every man have praise of God.' (2.) Because of the frustration of their hopes. Disappointment bringeth shame. Some do many things, and make full account of their acceptance with God and reception to glory; but when all is disappointed, how much are they confounded! Rom. 5:5, 'Hope maketh not ashamed,' because it is not frustrated. (3.) By the contempt and dishonour God puts upon them, banishing



them out of his presence. They become the scorn of saints and angels: Dan. 12:2, 'And many of them that sleep in the dust shall arise, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.' But now the godly are bold and confident: Ps. 1:5, 'The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;' but the godly shall lift up their head with joy and rejoicing.

Now the reasons of this.

Where sin is not allowed, there is a threefold comfort. (1.) Justification: 1 John 1:7, 'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' It is an evidence that giveth us the comfort. He hath failings, but they are blotted out for Christ's sake. (2.) It is an evidence of sanctification, that a work of grace hath passed upon us: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward;' Heb. 13:18, 'We trust that we have a good conscience, willing in all things to live honestly.' A universal purpose and an unfeigned respect hath the full room of an evidence. (3.) A pledge of glory to ensue: Rom. 5:5, 'And hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.'

Use. It informeth us, by the rule of contraries, that we deceive ourselves if we look for anything from sin but shame: Rom. 6:21, 'For the wages of sin is death.' Sin and shame entered into the world together. How were Adam and Eve confounded after the fall! Sin is odious to God, it grieveth the Spirit; but the person that committeth it shall be filled with shame. In the greatest privacy, sin bringeth

shame. Men are not solitary when they are by themselves; there is an eye and ear which seeth and observeth them. There is a law in our hearts which upbraids our sins to us as soon as we have committed them—a secret bosom-witness.

2. It informeth us what hard hearts they have that have respect to no commandments, yet are not ashamed. They have outgrown all feelings of conscience, and so 'glory in their shame:' Phil. 3:19, 'Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.' Erubuit, salva res est. By how much less they are ashamed now, the more they shall be; their shamelessness will increase their shame: Jer. 3:3, 'Thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed.' The conscience of a sinner is like a clock, dull, calm, and at rest, when the weights are down; but wound up, it is full of motion.

3. Here is caution to God's children. The less respect you have to the commandments, the more shame will you have in yourselves. Partiality in obedience breaketh your confidence, and over-clouds your peace. Therefore, that we may not blemish our profession, let us walk more exactly. 'So shall we not be ashamed when we have respect to all God's commandments.'

## SERMON VIII

**I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.—VER. 7.**

IN this verse David expresseth his esteem of the word, by telling what he would give for the knowledge and practice of it. As we use to

tell a man how thankful we would be if he would do thus and thus for us; so, Lord, if thou wilt give me to learn thy righteous judgments, then I will praise thee, &c.

His promise of praise manifesteth his esteem, which should affect our stupid hearts. The canon is now larger, and the mysteries of the word are more clearly unfolded. If the saints of God were so taken with it before, when there were so scanty and dark representations in comparison of what is now, oh, what honour and praise do we now owe to God!

In this verse observe—

1. The title that is given to the word, thy righteous judgments.
2. His act of duty about it, or the benefit which he desireth, sound erudition, when I shall have learned.
3. The fruit of this benefit obtained, then will I praise thee.
4. The manner of performing this duty, with uprightness of heart.

First, The title that is given to the word, 'Thy righteous judgments,' or as it is in the margin, 'The judgments of thy righteousness.' Hence observe—

Doct. God's precepts are, and are so accounted of by his people as, righteous judgments, or judgments of righteousness.

There are two terms to be explained—

1. What is meant by judgments.
2. By righteousness.

For the first. Righteousness is sometimes put alone for the word, and so also judgments (as we shall find in this psalm); but here both are put together to increase the signification. The precepts of the word are called judgments for two reasons—

1. Because they are the judicial sentence of God concerning our state and actions.

2. Because of the suitable execution that is to follow.

1. They are the judicial sentence of God concerning our state and actions. The judicial sentence; that is, they are the decrees of the almighty lawgiver, given forth with an authority uncontrollable. A man may appeal from the sentence of men, but this is judgment. This is as certain as if he were executed presently. There is injustice and oppression many times in the courts of men, but 'there is a higher than the highest regards it, and there be higher than they,' Eccles. 5:8. There may be another tribunal to which we may appeal from the unjust sentences of men; but there is no appeal from God, for there is no higher judicature. Paschalis, a minister of the Albigenses, when he was burnt at Rome, cited the Pope and his cardinals before the tribunal of the Lamb. When we are wronged and oppressed here, we may cite them before the tribunal of God and Christ; but who can appeal from the tribunal of Christ himself?

And then this sentence is concerning our state and actions.

[1.] Our state, whether it be good or evil, The word sentenceth you now; for instance, if a man be in a carnal state: John 3:18, 'He that believeth not is condemned.' How condemned? 'already.' In the sentence of the law, so he is gone and lost. Every unbeliever, such as all are by nature, is condemned already, having only the slender thread of a frail life between him and the execution of it. The

sentence of the law standeth in force against him, since he will not come to Christ to get it repealed. This sentence standeth in force against all heathens which never heard of Christ, and are condemned already by the law. But now Christians, or those that take up such a profession, and have heard of the gospel, on them it is confirmed by a new sentence, since they will not fly to another court, to the chancery of the gospel, and take sanctuary at the Lord's grace offered in Jesus Christ: 'He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned,' Mark 16:16. Again, when it is good, the sentence of the word, it is judgment: Rom. 8:33, 'It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?' What hath the officer to do, when a man is absolved by the judge in court? Conscience is God's deputy, Satan is God's executioner. The witness is silenced; the executioner hath no more to do when the judge absolveth, as God doth all by the sentence of the gospel that are willing to come under Christ's shadow.

[2.] As the word judgeth and passeth sentence upon our states, so also upon our actions, thought, word, or deed; for all these in this regard come under the notion of acts.

(1.) Thoughts. They are liable to God's tribunal, which can be arraigned before no other bar, yet the word doth find them out. It doth not only discover the evil of them: Heb. 4:12, 'The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart;' but judgeth and sentenceth them: Jer. 6:19, 'I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts.' Men have only a process against others either for words or actions, but God hath a process against them for their thoughts. Though in men's courts

thoughts are free, as not liable to their cognisance, yet they are subject to another judicature.

(2.) Words. Idle words weigh heavy in God's balance. God, that hath given a law to the heart, hath also given a law to the lips, Mat. 12:36, 'Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment.' Words will come to be judged: either we are to give an account of them here, or hereafter; either to condemn ourselves for them, and seek pardon, or to be condemned hereafter before God. A loose and ungoverned tongue will be one evidence brought against men as a sign of their unrenewed hearts in the day of judgment.

(3.) All our actions. They are sentenced in the word. God hath declared his mind concerning them: Eccles. 12:14, 'God will bring every work into judgment;' things will not be huddled up in that day. God will not accept of a general bill of account by lump, but every action he will judge it according to the tenor of his word. This is an amplification of the first reason, why the word or precepts of God are called judgments, because they are judicial sentences of God the lawgiver, given forth with an authority uncontrollable concerning our estate and actions.

2. The next reason is, because of the suitable execution that is to follow in this world and in the next.

[1.] In this world. It is an easy matter to reconcile the word and providence together, for providence is but a comment upon the word; and you may even transcribe God's dispensations from the threatenings and promises of the law. The story of the people of the Jews might have been transcribed from the threatenings of the law, so that the comminations of the law were but as a calendar and prognostication what kind of weather it would be with that people.

So still the apostle makes the observation: Heb. 2:2, 'Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' Mark, it is notable to observe how God hath been punctual in executing the sentence of every command; the breach of it hath had a just recompense and reward—as I might instance in all the law of God. Moses and Aaron, if they will not sanctify God according to the first commandment, they shall be shut out of the land of Canaan; and if the people will have their false worship, how will God punctually accomplish it that he will ruin them and their posterity? So Rom. 1:18, you have this general a little more specified; God hath not only taken notice of the first table, but of the second: 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven,' not only 'against all ungodliness,' but 'unrighteousness of men,' &c. God from heaven hath owned both tables, and executed the sentence of the law against sinners: Hosea 7:12, 'I will chastise them as their congregation hath heard.' If a man would observe providence, he might find not only justice in God's dispensations, but truth. I rather note this, because God's children may smart in this life for breach of the law. Though sentence of absolution takes place as to their persons and state, yet in this life they may smart sorely for the breach of the law. In time of trial God will make the world know he is impartial, that none shall go free, but the sentence of the word shall be executed: Prov. 11:31, 'The righteous shall be recompensed in the earth, much more the wicked and the sinner.' Recompensed; that is, with a recompense of punishment: so Peter reads it out of the Septuagint, 1 Peter 4:18, 'And if the righteous scarcely be saved,' &c. It is a hard matter to keep a righteous man from falling under the vengeance of God: God stands so much upon the credit of his word, that he deals out smart blows and stripes for their iniquity here in this world.

[2.] In the next world, there is no other sentence given but what is according to the word: John 12:48, 'The word that I have spoken, the

same shall judge you in the last day.' God will pronounce sentence then according to what is said now, either to believers or unbelievers.

Well, then, upon these grounds you see the execution is not only judgment, but the very law is judgment. A man that is to be examined and tried for life and death would fain know how it would speed with him, and how matters shall be carried beforehand. God will not deal with you by way of surprise; he hath plainly told you according to what rule he will proceed: saith he, 'The word which I have spoken, the same shall judge you at the last day.'

Use. I would apply this first term, judgments, thus: to press us to regard the sentence of the word more. If you cannot stand before the word of God, how will you stand before Christ's tribunal at the last day? Many times there is a conviction in the ore, though not refined to full conviction, and that discovers itself thus, by a fear to be tried and searched: John 3:20, 'They will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov'd.' They that are loath to know are loath to search: you can have no comfort but what is according to the tenor of the word, and no happiness but what is according to the sentence of the word. What the word doth say to you, as sure as God is true it will be accomplished to a tittle. God stands upon his word more than anything: when 'heaven and earth shall pass away,' and be 'burned like a scroll,' 'not a jot of the word,' either law or gospel, 'shall pass away.' If we did think of this with seriousness, then one part of the word would drive us to another; we would run from the law to the gospel. Sinners could not lie in a carnal state: this law is not only my rule, but my judgment; and believers could not be so listless, and secure, and negligent as they are in their holy calling. Their doom in the word, this would make them seek more earnestly for pardon and grace, and make them strictly watch over their hearts and ways. Either we do not believe that the word is true, or that God will be so



punctual and exact as he hath declared. We dream of strange indulgences for which we have no cause, or else we would be more frequent at the throne of grace, and more exact and watchful in the course of our conversations.

Secondly, The next term to be opened is righteousness, another title given to the word in this psalm: it is so called, Heb. 5:13, 'Unskilful in the word of righteousness;' and 2 Tim. 3:16, 17, it is 'profitable for instruction in righteousness.' But why is the word called righteousness? Because it shows how a man shall be justified, and how a justified man should approve himself both to God and man.

1. It showeth how a man shall be justified and accepted as righteous before God; therefore the word is called righteousness. This is a great secret and riddle which was hidden from the wise men of the world; they could never have found it out by all the profound researches and inquiries of nature into natural things; unless the word of God had made it known, it should still have been in the dark. For righteousness to plead for you, and to find acceptance, alas we should be thinking of going up to heaven, and going down into the deep; no, no, 'the word is nigh thee,' Rom. 10:8. This notion of the righteousness of Christ was the best notion the world was ever acquainted with; that when we all lay guilty, obnoxious to the wrath of God, and to the revenges of his angry justice, that then the Lord should reveal a righteousness, 'even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all that believe;' as the apostle amplifies it, Rom. 3:22. What a rich and glorious discovery was this of the mind and counsel of God to poor sinners, that he hath revealed such a righteousness!

2. The word is called righteousness, because it shows how a justified man should approve himself both to God and man, by a holy

conversation. It is the rule of moral righteousness: 1 John 3:7, 'He is righteous that doth righteousness,' in the judgment of the word. There is not only righteousness wrought by Christ for believers, but also righteousness wrought by Christ in believers, when a man doth exercise himself in performing his duties to God and man.

Use. Well, then, if we would be skilful in the matters of righteousness —

1. Consult often with the word, which is the copy of God's most righteous will. A man need go no further either for direction, quickening, or encouragement. The world despiseth the plain directions of the word, and crieth up the notion of things, and looketh for quainter conceits, and things of a more sublime speculation. If we should only bring scripture, and urge men by God's authority, and call upon them in Christ's name, and by Christ's arguments, this would be too low for them. But this is to tax the wisdom of God. He that 'hath the key of David' knew what kind of wards would fit the lock—what directions, what quickening notions and encouragements were fittest to be used in the case, to gain men to a sense of their duty both to God and man, and bring them into a way of righteousness.

2. Do you manifest the word to be righteousness: 'Wisdom should be justified of her children,' Mat. 11:19. You should evidence it to the carnal world by taking off their prejudices, that the word may be justified. The world hath a suspicion; now evidence it to the conscience that it is a holy rule, a perfect direction for righteousness. The world prieth into the conversation of the saints; they live much by sensible things; therefore declare and evidence it to be a righteous thing.

So much for the title that is given to the word of God, thy judgments and righteousness.

Secondly, We come now to his act of duty about the word, or the benefit which he desired, 'When I shall have learned.' By learning he means his attaining not only to the knowledge of the word, but the practice of it. It is not a speculative light, or a bare notion of things: John 6:45, 'Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me.' It is such a learning as the effect will necessarily follow, such a light and illumination as doth convert the soul, and frame our hearts and ways according to the will of God; for otherwise if we get understanding of the word, nay, if we get it imprinted in our memories, it will do us no good without practice.

Doct. The best of God's servants are but scholars and students in the knowledge and obedience of his word.

For saith David, which had so much acquaintance, 'When I shall have learned.' The professors of the Christian religion were primitively called disciples or learners: Acts 6:2, τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν, 'The multitude of the disciples.' This seems to be the true definition of a church, the genus and difference; the genus is the community or multitude of men united among themselves, as a corporation, city, or household. The difference or form is disciples, those that gave up themselves to Christ to be taught and governed, and to be instructed in this way and doctrine. So Acts 11:26, it is said there, 'The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.' Christians are disciples, and to difference them from the disciples of other men, they are the disciples of Christ. (1.) The school, that is, the church, where there are public lectures read to all visible professors; but the elect getting saving knowledge, they are not only taught of men, but taught of God, they have an inward light. (2.) The book,

that is, the scripture, 'which is able to make wise to salvation,' to 'make the man of God perfect,' 2 Tim. 3:16, 17. Some run to tradition, others cry up their own reason to the wrong of the scripture; they make Christ to be their disciple rather than they his, when they will not receive things upon his testimony and revelation, as the Socinians. (3.) The teacher is either supreme or subordinate. The supreme teacher is Christ; he is the great prophet of the church: so it is said, John 6:45, 'They shall be taught of God.' This is, such a teacher that not only opens the scripture, but 'opens the understanding,' Luke 24:45. The subordinate teachers are the ministers of the gospel, whom God useth for this work; not out of any indigence, but indulgence; not for any efficacy in the preacher, but out of a suitableness to the hearer, as a means most agreeable to our frail estate, to deal with us by way of counsel. God can teach us without men, by the secret illapses of his Spirit; but he will use those that are of the same nature with ourselves, that have the same temptations, necessities, and affections, which know the heart of a man. He would use them who, if they deceive us, must deceive themselves; he would use men of whose conversation and course we are conscious; we know their walk and way; he would use them as 'ambassadors' to 'pray us in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God,' 2 Cor. 5:20. (4.) The lesson which we learn is not only to know, but to obey. Science without conscience will not fit our turn, nor suit with the dignity of our teacher. To be like children that have the rickets, swollen in the head, when the feet are weak; we do not learn truth as it is in Jesus till we be regenerated, for that is a truth for practice and walking, not for talk, Eph. 4:21. He is most learned that turns God's word into works: 1 John 2:4, 5, 'He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected.' In this school there is no man counted a proficient, but he that grows in practice. It is not the curious searcher that is the best

scholar, but the humble practitioner; when we are cast into the mould of this doctrine, and have the prints, the stamp and character of it upon our heart; as Rom. 6:17, 'Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.' In the original it is, 'Whereto ye were delivered.' When we come to a physician, it is not enough to know his prescriptions, but they must be followed. We do not come to Christ as students of physic, to be trained up in the theory, but as patients; not as one that minds the art, but the cure, to do what is prescribed, that we may know how to get rid of our soul-diseases. Therefore Christ saith, John 8:31, 'Then are ye my disciples indeed, if my word abide in you.' There are Christ's disciples in pretence, and Christ's disciples indeed; those that make it their work to get from Christ a power and virtue to carry on a uniform and constant obedience, these are the true learners. Therefore it will not fit our turn unless we labour to come under the power of what we learn, as well as get the knowledge; and it will not suit with the dignity of our teacher, who doth not only enlighten the mind, but change us by his efficacy, and leaves a suitable impression upon the soul. God writeth the lesson upon our hearts; that is, not only gives us the lesson, but a heart to learn it. Man's teaching is a pouring it into the ears. This is God's teaching, to inform our reason, and move our will: Phil. 2:13, 'It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.' He teacheth us promises so as to make us believe them; and commandments so as to make us obey them; and the doctrine of the gospel teacheth us so as to stamp the impression of it upon the soul, to change us into his image and likeness, 2 Cor. 3:18.

Use. It presseth us to give up ourselves to this learning. Study the word, but take God for your teacher. Look to him that speaks from heaven if you would learn to purpose, otherwise our natural blindness will never be cured, nor our prejudices removed, nor our

wills gained to God; or if they should be gained to a profession of truth, it will never hold long. When men lead us into a truth, we shall easily be led off again by other men; and all a man's teaching will never reform the heart. Man's light is like a March sun, which raiseth vapours, but doth not dispel and scatter them; so it discovers lust, but doth not give us power to suppress it; therefore our main business must be to be taught of God.

Further, Observe your proficiency in this knowledge: Heb. 5:14, To 'have your senses exercised to discern both good and evil.' We should every day grow more 'skilful in the word of righteousness.' John 14:9, 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?' To be backward in the knowledge of grace after long teaching, and to be still conflicting with fleshly lusts, which is the exercise of beginners—so much means and so small experience, and get no further—this is sad!

Thirdly, The fruit of this benefit obtained, 'Then shall I praise him.' From hence observe—

1. Upon receipt of every mercy we should praise God. We are forward in supplication, but backward in gratulation. This is a more noble duty, and continueth with us in heaven. It is the work of glorified saints and angels to praise God. All the lepers could beg health, yet but one returned to give God the glory. This is sad when it is so; for this is a more sublime duty, therefore it should have more of our care. This is a profitable duty: Ps. 67:5, 6, 'Let the people praise thee, O Lord, let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us.' The more vapours go up, the more showers come down; and the more praises go up, the more mercies. There is a reciprocal intercourse between us and God, by mercies and praises, as there is between the earth and

the lower heavens, by vapours and showers. There are two words by which our thankfulness to God is expressed, praising and blessing: Ps. 145:10, 'All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee.' What is the difference? Praise respecteth God's excellences, and blessing respecteth God's benefits. We may praise a man that never hath done us good, if he be excellent and praiseworthy; but blessing respecteth God's bounty and benefits; yet they are promiscuously taken sometimes, as here praise is taken for blessing.

2. Observe: We should praise God especially for spiritual blessings, Eph. 1:3. Why? Partly because these come from the special love of God. God bestows corn, wine, and oil in the general upon the world; but now knowledge, and grace, and blessed experiences of communion with God, these are special things, he bestows them upon the saints, therefore deserves more thankfulness. Protection, it is the common benefit of every subject; but preferment and favour is for friends, and those that are near to the prince; so this is the favour of his people, called so Ps. 106:5, 'Show me the favour of thy people.' This is a special blessing God bestoweth upon his own children. Again, these concern the better part, the inward man, the spirit, the soul, which is the man. He doth us more favour which heals a wound in the body than he that only seweth up a rent in our garment (for the body is more than raiment); so he that doth good to our souls is more than he that doth good to our bodies, which gives outward blessings, because these are above the body. Again, these are pledges of eternal blessings in heavenly places: 'He hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places.' But why is it said, 'He hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places'? Why, there they began, and there they are consummated; there was their first purpose, and there is the final accomplishment. A man may have the world, and yet never the nearer heaven; but when he hath grace, and

learned God's statutes, and his heart is gained to obedience of God's will, this is more than gold, silver, and great riches. Again, these dispose the heart to thankfulness. There is an occasion to praise God, and a heart to praise him; outward mercies give us an occasion, but spiritual mercies give a disposition. Other things are but motives to praise God, but these are preparations. And then other things, they are given in judgment; these things cannot. A man may have an estate in judgment, but he cannot have Christ and grace in judgment. These things are always given in mercy.

Use. Well, then, the use is to reprove us that we are no more sensible of spiritual benefits. We love the body more than the soul, and therefore have a quick sense of bodily mercies. But now, in soul concernments we are not the like affected. It is for want of observation to descry the progress of grace, and God's dealings with the inward man: Col. 4:2, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.' And it is for want of affection. We are wrought upon by carnal arguments, mercies of flesh and blood, and showers of rain, food, and gladness. These things make us praise God; but that which we get from God in an ordinance, we are not so sensible of.

3. I observe again, those that have learned God's righteous judgments, they are only fit to praise God: Ps. 33:1, 'Praise is comely for the upright.' It is unseemly in a wicked man's mouth that he should be praising of God. It is his duty, but it is not so comely; but praise to the upright, this is suitable. *Canticum novum et vetus homo male concordant*, saith Austin. The new song, the psalm of praise, and the old man, make but ill music. We need a new heart, if we would go about this work. It is an exercise becoming the godly. We should be reconciled to God, and have his grace and favour. Under the law they were to bring their peace-offering, and lay it on the top



of the burnt-offering, Lev. 3. When we come to offer a thank-offering to God, we should be in a state of amity and friendship with him. That is the clear moral of that ceremony: 'Sing with grace in your hearts,' Col. 3:16. Others have not such matter nor such hearts to praise God; they are but tinkling cymbals. But those that have grace, it is acceptable and comely for them.

4. I observe again, 'I will praise thee when I shall have learned,' &c. Those that profit by the word, they are bound to praise God, and acknowledge him as the author of all that they have got. The grace of a teachable heart, we have it from him, therefore the honour must be his. He that gave the law, he it is that writes it upon the heart. Alas! we in ourselves are but 'like the wild ass's colt,' Job 11:12, both for rudeness of understanding, and also for unruliness of affection. Well, then, if we be tamed and subdued, he must have all the glory and the praise: Ps. 16:7, 'Blessed be God that gave me counsel in my reins.' It was God which made the word effectual, and counselled us how to choose him for our portion. We were as indocile and incapable as others. If God had left us to our own swing, what fools should we have been!

Use. It reproves us because we are so apt to intercept the revenues of the crown of heaven, and to convert them to our own use, like rebels against God. This proud pronoun ego, I, I, is always interposing: 'This Babel which I have built.' We are sacrificing to this proud self: This I have done; and if God be mentioned, it is but for fashion's sake, as those women in the prophet Isaiah, 'Only call us by thy name; we will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel'—I allude to it. God must bear the name, but we sacrifice to ourselves in all we get, as if it were our own acquiring. 'God, I thank thee,' saith the Pharisee; yet he trusted in himself that he was righteous, Luke 8. Oh, learn, then, the commendable modesty of God's servants, of

ascribing all to God: Luke 19:16, he doth not say my industry, but 'thy pound hath gained another.' And 'by the grace of God I am what I am.' And 'I laboured more abundantly than they all.' He corrects it presently, 'Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me,' 1 Cor. 15:10. So again: Gal. 2:20, 'I live;' and then, presently, 'not I, but Christ liveth in me.' Thus should we learn to be faithful and loyal to God, and deal with him as Joab did to David when he was like to surprise Rabbah, and take it: 2 Sam. 12:28, 'Encamp against the city, and take it, lest I take the city, and it be called after my name.' Let us be very jealous that we do not get into God's place, and self interpose, and perk up with what we have attained unto; for the Lord must have all the glory, the praise must be his.

The fourth circumstance in the text is the manner of performing this duty of rendering praise; with an upright heart. I shall not discourse of uprightness in general, but uprightness in praising God. God must be praised with a great deal of uprightness of soul; that is the note. This uprightness in praising lieth in two things,—not only with the tongue, but the heart; not only with the heart, but the life.

1. Not only with the tongue, but with the heart: Ps. 103:1, 'Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name.' Mark, not only with my tongue, 'with my glory,' as he calls it, but with my soul. Formal speeches are but an empty prattle, which God regards not: Ps. 47:7, 'Sing ye praises with understanding.' It is fit the noblest faculty should be employed in the noblest work. This is the noblest work, to praise God; therefore all that is within us must be summoned. Church adversaries took up a customary form: Zech. 11:5, 'Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich.' And in Nehemiah it is said, 'Your brethren that hated me said, Let God be glorious.' In instruments of music, the deeper the belly of the instrument, the

sweeter the melody; so praise, the more it comes from the heart, the more acceptable to God.

2. This uprightness implies the life as well as the heart. Honour given to God in words is many times retracted and disproved by the dishonour we do to him in our conversations. This is the carrying Christ on the top of the pinnacle, as the devil did, with an intent he might throw down himself again. So we seem to advance and carry him high in praises, that we may throw him down in our lives: Titus 1:16, 'They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him.' Empty compliments God accepteth not, as long as there is blasphemy in their lives. Our lives must glorify him: Mat. 5:16, 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'

Use. It reproves us that we are no more hearty and serious in the praises of God. In our necessities, when we want, then we can howl upon our bed. Our necessity doth put a shrill accent upon our groans, and sharpen our affections in prayer; but in praise, how cold and dull are we! Surely we should be as warm in the one as in the other. Then it may press you to live praises, and show forth the praises of him in your conversation, 1 Peter 2:7. Hezekiah had been sick, God recovered him, he penned a psalm of thanksgiving, Isa. 38:9. Yet it is said, 'He rendered not according to what he received,' &c., 2 Chron. 32, because his heart was proud and lifted up. If you do not walk more humbly and closely with God, it is not praise with uprightness of heart; it must issue and break out in our actions and course of our conversation.

## **SERMON IX**

## **I will keep thy statutes. O forsake me not utterly.—VER. 8.**

THIS verse, being the last of this portion, is the result of his meditation concerning the utility and necessity of keeping the law of God. Here take notice—

1. Of his resolution, I will keep thy statutes.
2. His prayer, O forsake me not utterly.

It is his purpose to keep the law; yet because he is conscious to himself of many infirmities, he prays against desertion. In the prayer there is a litotes, more is intended than is expressed. O forsake me not. He means, strengthen me in this work. And if thou shouldst desert me, yet but for a while, Lord, not for ever; if in part, not in whole.

Four points we may observe from hence—

1. That it is a great advantage to come to a resolution in a course of godliness.
2. Those that resolve upon a course of obedience had need to fly to God's help.
3. Though we fly to God's help, yet sometimes God may withdraw, and seem to forsake us.
4. Though God seem to forsake us, and really doth so in part, yet we should pray that it may not be a total and utter desertion.

The notion of statutes I have opened, and also what it is to keep them in mind, heart, and life. That which we are now to take notice of is David's resolution. Hence observe—

Doct. 1. That it is a great advantage to come to a resolution in a course of godliness.

Negatively, let me speak to this point.

1. This is not to be understood as if our resolutions had any strength in themselves to bear us out. Peter is a sad instance how little our confidence and purposes will come to: and therefore David here, when he was most upright in his own resolution, is most diffident of his own strength; 'O forsake me not:' implying, if God should forsake him, all would come to nothing. God must enable us to do what we resolve.

2. Nor is it to be understood that it is in a man's power to resolve; this would put grace under the dominion of our will; it is by preventing grace that we are brought to a serious purpose: Phil. 2:13, 'He giveth to will and to do.' Man's will is the toughest sinew in the whole creation. The very purpose and bent of the heart is the fruit of regeneration. Free-will hath its pangs, its velleities, which are like a little morning-dew, that is soon dried up: Hosea 6:4, 'Our righteousness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.' But the will and resolution that we are to understand here is the fruit of grace.

3. Not as if the obligation to obedience did arise from our own purpose and promise, rather than from God's command; this were to set man's authority above God's, and to lay aside the precept, which is the surer bond and obligation, and to bind the soul with the slender thread of our own resolutions. When we purpose and

promise obedience, we do but make the old bond and engagement of duty the more active and sensible upon the soul, so that it is not to jostle out God's authority, but to yield our consent. However, the obligation is the greater; for to disobey after we have acknowledged an authority, among men it is counted a more heinous crime than standing out against the authority itself. A thing that is not due before, yet when we have promised or dedicated it to God, then it is not in our power; as in the case of Ananias, Acts 5. But now we are not free before the contract, we have bonds upon us; and the business of our promise and resolution is only to make our obligation more powerful upon the conscience.

4. Not as if it were an arbitrary thing thus to do, and practised by the saints only for the more convenience of the spiritual life. No; but it is a thing required: Acts 11:23, He 'exhorteth them that, with full purpose of heart, they would cleave to the Lord.'

Positively: 1. It is a course which God will bless; he hath appointed ordinances for this end and purpose that we might come to this resolution. The promise is first implicitly made in baptism; therefore is it called, 1 Peter 3:21, 'the answer of a good conscience towards God.' How so? Why, the covenant binds mutually on God's part and on ours, and so do the seals which belong to the covenant. It doth not only seal pardon and sanctification on God's part, but there is a promise and answer on our part. An answer to what? To the demands of the covenant. In the covenant of grace God saith, I will be your God; baptism seals that, and we promise to be his people. Now our answer to this demand of God, and to this interrogatory he puts to us in the covenant, it is sealed by us in baptism, and it is renewed in the Lord's Supper. Look, as in the old sacrifices, they were all a renewing of the oath of allegiance to God, or confirming their purposes and resolutions, you have the same notion to the

sacrifice that is given to the Lord's Supper, for it is called 'the blood of the covenant,' Exod. 24:7, 8. In the ordinance of the Lord's Supper there we come to take an obligation upon us; half of the blood is sprinkled upon us. And this purpose and resolution to it is still continued and kept afoot in our daily exercise, invocation, and prayer, wherein either we explicitly or implicitly renew our obedience; for every prayer is an implicit vow, wherewith we bind ourselves to seek those things we ask, or else we do not engage God to bestow them. Thus it is a course that God will bless.

2. It is of great necessity to prevent uncertainty of spirit. Until we come to resolution we shall be liable to temptation; until we fully set our faces towards God, and have a bent and serious purpose of heart, we shall never be free from temptation from the devil, and from evil men, or from ourselves. From the devil: James 1:8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' As long as we are wavering, and suspensive, we can never carry on uniformity of obedience. While we halt between God and Baal, Satan hath an advantage against us. So from evil men: David doth express himself as coming to a resolution in this psalm, ver. 115, 'Depart from me, ye evil-doers, for I will keep the commandments of my God.' There is no way to shake off those evil companions and associates till there be a bent seriously towards heaven. So from ourselves: we have changeable hearts, that 'love to wander,' Jer. 14:10. We have many revoltings and reluctancies; therefore, until a sanctified judgment and will concur to make up a resolution and holy purpose, we shall still be up and down. The saints, being sensible of their weakness, often bind this upon themselves: Ps. 119:57, 'I have said that I would keep thy words;' there was a practical decree past upon the conscience. And ver. 106, 'I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.' An oath is the highest assurance among men, and most solemn engagement, and all little enough to hold a backsliding heart

under a sense and care of our duty. As long as the Israelites had a will to Canaan, so long they digested the inconveniences of the wilderness. Every difficulty and trouble will put us out of the way, and we cannot be secured against an unsteady heart, but by taking up such a course, a serious resolve of maintaining communion with God. And as it is useful to prevent temptation, so to excite and quicken our dulness: we forget our vow and purpose, and therefore we relapse into sin. The apostle saith, 2 Peter 1:9, 'He hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins;' that he did renounce these things in baptism. And Paul puts us in mind of our engagement: Rom. 8:12, 'We are not debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh.' You make vows and promises to God, to renounce the flesh and vanities of the world, and to give up yourselves to God's service; and these things are forgotten, and therefore we grow slight, cold, careless in the profession of godliness.

Use. The first use is to press us to come to a declared resolution to serve and please God, and to direct us in what manner.

First, Make it with a full bent of heart. Rest not upon a Shall I? shall I? but 'I will keep thy statutes.' As Agrippa was almost persuaded to be a Christian, but not altogether, so men stand hovering and debating. You should resolve, Ps. 119:112, 'I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes alway to the end.' It is God's work to incline the heart; but when the work of grace is passed upon us, then the believer doth voluntarily incline himself; his will is bent to serve God, not by fits and starts, but alway to the end: 1 Chron. 22:19, 'Now set your hearts to seek the Lord;' that is, resolve, be not off and on.

But, secondly, In what manner shall we make it?

1. Seriously and advisedly, not in a rash humour. The people, when they heard the law, and were startled with the majesty of God, Deut.



5:28, 29, answered, 'All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.' It was well done to come to a purpose and resolution; but 'Oh, that there were such a heart within them,' saith God, 'that they would fear me,' &c.: Josh. 24:19, 'We will serve the Lord,' say the people; 'You cannot serve the Lord,' saith Joshua. Do you know what it is? Rash undertakings will necessarily be accompanied with a feeble prosecution; and therefore count the charges, lest you repent of the bargain, Luke 14:23.

2. Make Christ a liberal allowance, if you would come to a resolution: Mat. 16:24, 'He that will come after me,' he that hath a heart set upon this business, let him know what he must do; 'let him deny himself,' &c. When we engage for God, he would have us reckon for the worst, to be provided for all difficulties. A man that builds, when he hath set apart such a sum of money to compass it, while he keeps within allowance, all is well; but when that is exceeded, every penny is disbursed with grudging. So if you do anything in this holy business, make Christ a liberal allowance at first, lest we think of returning into Egypt afterward, when we meet with fiery flying serpents, and difficulties and hardships in our passage to heaven. Let it be a thorough resolution, that, come what will come, we will be the Lord's. There should be a holy wilfulness. Paul was resolved to go to Jerusalem, because he was bound in spirit; and though they did even break his heart, yet they could not break his purpose.

3. Resolve as trusting upon the Lord's grace. You are poor weak creatures; how changeable in an hour! not a feather so tossed to and fro in the air; therefore we shall fail, falter, and break promise everyday, if we go forth in the strength of our own resolutions. Resolve as trusting in the direction and assistance of God's Holy Spirit: if God undertake for us, then, under God, we may undertake. To resolve is more easy than to perform, as articles are sooner

consented to than made good; a castle is more easily built in time of peace than maintained and kept in a time of war; and therefore still wait, and depend upon God for his grace.

4. You cannot promise absolute and thorough obedience, though you should strive after it, for this you will never be able to perform; and your own promises, purposes, and resolutions will but increase your trouble, though you are still to be aiming after it.

Doct. 2. Those that will keep God's statutes must fly to God's help.

As David doth here, 'Oh, forsake me not utterly;' that is, Oh, strengthen me in this work. Three reasons for this—

1. We are weak and mutable creatures.

2. Our strength lies in God's hands.

3. God gives out his strength according to his own pleasure.

1. We are weak and mutable creatures. When we were at our best we were so. Adam in innocency was not able to stand without confirming grace, but gave out at the first assault. And still we are mutable, though we have a strong inclination for the present. When the precepts of God are propounded with evidence, and backed with promises and threatenings, and a resolution follows thereupon, the fruit of rational conviction and moral suasion, which is not for the present false and hypocritical, yet it will not hold without the bottom of grace. It hath not supernatural, yet it may have moral sincerity. Such a resolution was that of the Israelites after the terrible delivery of God's law. They promised universal obedience, and did not lie in it; for God saith, They have done well in their promise; there was a moral sincerity, but there wanted a renewed sanctified heart. And

those captains which came to Jeremiah, chap. 42:5, intended not to deceive for the present, when they called God to witness that they 'would do according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us.' And Hazael, 'Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?' Certainly he had abomination of it, when the prophet mentioned that cruelty of ripping up women with child. But suppose the resolution to be a fruit of grace and regeneration, yet we have not full power to stand of ourselves: still we are very changeable creatures in matters that do not absolutely and immediately concern life and death. Lot, that was chaste in Sodom, in the midst of so many temptations, you will find him committing incest in the mountains, where were none but his two daughters. What a change was here! David, that was so tender, that his heart smote him for cutting off the lap of Saul's garment, one would wonder that he should plot lust, be guilty of murder, and lie in that stupid condition for a long time. Peter, which had such courage to venture upon a band of men, and to cut off Malchus's ear, should be so faint-hearted at a damsel's question! So, while the strength of the present impulse and the grace of God is warm upon the heart, we may keep close to our work while the influence continues; but afterward, how cold and dead do men grow! as vapours drawn up by the sun, at night fall down again in a dew. The people were upon a high point of willingness, mighty forward, and ready to offer whole cart-loads of gold and silver, 1 Chron. 29:18. What saith David? 'O Lord God, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and stablish their heart unto thee.' We are not always in a like frame.

2. Our strength lies in God, and not in ourselves. When the apostle had exhorted his Ephesians to all Christian duties, he concludes it thus: Eph. 6:10, 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.' This might is in God, he is our strength. And 2 Tim. 2:1, 'Be

strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ.' God would not trust us with the stock in our own hands, now we have spent our portion, and played the prodigals, but would have us wait upon him from morning to morning: Ps. 25:4, 'Show me thy ways, O Lord, teach me thy paths; lead me in thy truth, and teach me.' We are apt to embezzle it, or forget God, both which are very mischievous. When the prodigal got his stock in his own hands, he went into a far country, out of his father's house. God would not hear from us, there would not be such a constant communion and correspondence between him and us, if our daily necessities did not force us to him. Therefore, that the throne of grace might not lie unfrequented, God keeps the strength in his own hands. We need to consult with him on all occasions.

3. God gives out his strength according to his own pleasure. God many times gives the will, when he suspendeth the strength that is necessary for the performance. Sometimes God gives scire, a sense and conscience of duty; at other times he gives velle, to will, to have a purpose; and when he gives to will, he doth not always give posse, to be able—not such a lively performance. It is possible he may give the will where he doth not give the deed; for it is said, Phil. 2:13, 'He worketh both to will and to do of his good pleasure.' And Paul certainly doth not speak as a convinced, but as a renewed man, when he saith, 'To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not.' He had received the will, and not the deed—finding presupposeth searching. When we have done all we can, yet how to bring our purposes into actions, we cannot tell. Peter had his resolutions (and no doubt they were hearty and real), yet when he comes to make them good, what a poor weakling was Peter! Putabat se posse, quod se velle sentiebat—he thought he could do that which he could will, saith Austin: John 13:37, 'Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thee.' We look upon the willing spirit, and not upon the weak flesh. It is possible we may lean upon

recent dispositions and affections, as if they would carry us out, without dependence upon God. Therefore, for all the parts of spiritual strength he must be sought to.

The use is—

Use. To press you to beware of presumption and self-confidence, when your resolutions are at the highest for God, and your hearts in the best frame. Resolution is needful, as was said before; but all our confidences must arise from God's promises, not our own, if we mean not to be left in the dirt. This self-confidence in spiritual things I shall show—

1. How it discovereth itself.

2. How to cure it.

1. It discovereth itself—

[1.] Partly thus, by venturing upon temptations without a call and warrant. When men will lay their heads in the lap of a temptation, and run into the mouth of danger, they tempt God, but trust to themselves. Peter would be venturing into the devil's quarters; but what is the issue? He denies his master. Dependence upon God is ever accompanied with a holy sollicitude and cautelous fear, Phil. 2:12, 13. When we go out of God's way it is a presuming upon our own strength; for he will keep us in viis, in his ways; not in præcipitiis, when we run headlong into danger.

[2.] When men neglect those means whereby their graces or comforts may be fed and supplied. A man that is kept humble and depending will be always waiting for his dole at wisdom's gates, Prov. 8:34. We cannot regularly expect anything from God but in God's way. They

who depend upon God will be much in prayer, hearing, and taking all opportunities. But when men begin to think they need not pray so much, need not make such conscience of hearing; when we are more arbitrary and negligent in the use of means, then we begin to live upon ourselves and our own stock, and do not depend upon the free grace of God to carry us out in our work.

[3.] When you go forth to any work or conflict, without an actual renewing of your dependence upon God. It is a sign you lean upon the strength of your own resolutions, or present frame of your heart. The Ephraimites took it ill that Gideon would go to war, and not call them into the field when they went out against the enemy, Judges 8:1. Oh, may not God much more take it ill that we will go forth to grapple with the devil and temptations, and go about any business in our own strength? Therefore, still a sense of our weakness must be upon us, that we may 'do all in the name of the Lord Jesus;' that is, by help and assistance from him, Col. 3:17.

[4.] When we boast of our courage before we are called to a trial. They that crack in their quarters do not always do most valiantly in the field. Peter's boast, 'Though all men should leave thee, yet will not I,' came to very little; and you know the story of Mr Saunders in the Book of Martyrs. 'Let not him that puts on his harness boast as he that puts it off.' A temptation will show us how little service that grace will do us which we are proud of, and boast of.

2. To cure carnal confidence, remember your work and your impediments. (1.) Consider your work. A full view of duty will check our rash presumptions. Can you deny yourselves, take up your cross, maintain and carry on a holy course to your life's end? And (2.) Remember your impediments. Partly from a naughty heart. You are to row against the stream of flesh and blood. Satan will be sure to

trouble you, and will assault you again and again. Though he be never so fully foiled, he will not give over the combat: Luke 4:13, he departed from Christ 'for a season.' He had a mind to try the other bout. And the world will be your let—many discouragements and snares from the love and fear of it: 1 John 5:3, 4, 'He that loves God keeps his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous'; and presently he saith, 'And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith;' implying there is no keeping the commandments without victory over the world. Now, can you do all these things in your own strength? The young man was forward in resolving to keep the commandments, but he went away sad, for he had great possessions, Mat. 19:22. Therefore consider these things, that you may fly to the Lord Jesus.

Doct. 3. Though we fly to God's help, yet sometimes God may withdraw and forsake us.

Here I shall speak of the kinds of desertion, and then of the reasons.

First, For the kinds, take these distinctions:—

1. There is a real desertion and a seeming. Christ may be out of sight, and yet you not out of mind. When the dam is abroad for meat, the young brood in the nest are not forgotten nor forsaken. The child cries as if the mother was gone, but she is but hidden, or about other business: Isa. 49:14, 15, 'Sion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me.' In the misgivings of our hearts, we think God hath cast off all care and all thought of us. But God's affectionate answer showeth that all this was but a fond surmise: 'Can a woman forget her sucking-child?' &c. So Ps. 31:22, 'I said in my haste, I am cut off before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee.' We are never more in God's heart many times than when we think he hath quite cast us off.

Surely when the heart is drawn after him he is not wholly gone. We often mistake God's dispensations. When he is preparing for us more ample relief, and emptying us of all carnal dependence, we judge that that is a forsaking; as Ps. 94:18, 'When I said, My foot slippeth, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.' Sometimes in point of comfort we are at a loss, and filled with distractions and troubles, and all is that God may come in for our relief. So in point of grace: 2 Cor. 12:10, 'When I am weak, then I am strong.' There is also a real desertion; for God grants his people are forsaken sometimes: 'Though I have forsaken you for a little moment,' Isa. 54:7, 8, And Christ, that could not be mistaken, complaineth of it; and the saints feel it to their bitter cost.

2. There is internal and external desertion. Internal is with respect to the withdrawals of the Spirit: Ps. 51:11, 'Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.' Now external desertion is in point of affliction, when God leaves us under sharp crosses in his wise providence. These must be distinguished; sometimes they are asunder, sometimes together. And when they are together, God may return as to our inward comfort and support, yet not for our deliverance: Ps. 138:3, 'In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.' David was in great straits, and God affords him soul-relief; that was all the answer he could get then; support and strength to bear the troubles, but not deliverance from the affliction. Sometimes the ebb of outward comfort doth make way for a greater tide and influx of inward comfort: 2 Cor. 1:5, 'As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.' Cordials are for a fainting time. When children are sick and weakly, we treat them with the more indulgence. God may return, and may never less forsake us inwardly than when he doth forsake us outwardly: 2 Cor. 4:16, 'Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' God makes sickly bodies make way for the health of the soul, and an aching head for a better heart. When he



seems to cast us off in point of our external condition, it is to draw us into a more inward communion with himself, that we might receive greater supplies of his grace.

3. There is a desertion as to comfort, and a desertion as to grace. The children of God may sometimes lose the feelings of God's love: Ps. 77:1–3, 'My soul refused to be comforted; I remembered God, and was troubled; my spirit was overwhelmed.' Oh, what a word was that! Remembering of God revives the heart; but to think of God, and to think of his loss, that was his great trouble. Yet all this while God may hold communion in point of grace: Ps. 73:23, 'Nevertheless, I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.' He had been under a conflict, lost his comfort, yet he acknowledgeth support; God held him in his right hand. Trouble and discomfort hath its use; want of comfort makes way many times for increase of grace; and therefore, though a man may be deserted as to comfort, yet he may have a greater influence of grace from God. How often doth it fall out thus with God's children, that their right is more confirmed to spiritual blessings when their sense is lost! Then they are more industrious and diligent to get a sense of God's love again. A summer's sun that is clouded yields more comfort and warmth to the earth than a winter's sun that shines brightest. These cloudy times have their use and their fruit; and Christians have the less of a happy part of communion with God, that they may have more holiness; and less of sweetness and sensible consolation, that they may have more grace.

4. There is *desertio correctiva et eruditiva*—a desertion for correction, and a desertion for instruction. Sometimes the aim of it is merely for correction for former sin; it is a penal overclouding for our unkind and ungracious dealing with him. God may do it for sins; nay, many times for old sins long ago committed; he may charge them

anew upon the conscience: Job 13:24, compared with ver. 26, 'Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?' 'Thou makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.' An old bruise may trouble us long after, upon every change of weather. Many that have grieved God's Spirit in their youth, after they have been converted, God will reckon with them about it in their age. A man will smart for his ungracious courses first or last. Sometimes it is merely for instruction; it instructs us chiefly to show us God's sovereignty, with the changeableness of the best comfort on this side heaven; to show us his sovereignty, that he will be free to go and come at his own pleasure. He will have his people know he is lord, and may do with his own as pleaseth him. The heavenly eradiations and outshinings of his love are not at our beck; God will dispense them according to his pleasure. A mariner hath no cause to murmur and quarrel with God because the wind bloweth out of the east when he desireth a westerly gale. Why? Because it is his wind, and he will dispose these things according to his pleasure. So the comfort and outshinings of his love are his, and he will take them and give them as he thinks good. Again, to show us the changeableness of the best comforts on this side heaven. When Christ hath been in the soul with a full and high influx of comfort, this doth not remain long with us; God may withdraw. Observe it, often after the highest enlargements there may be some forsaking. Cant. 5:1, there we read of a feast between Christ and his beloved: 'Come eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.' Here they are feasted with love; presently we read of desertion, the spouse waxeth lazy and drowsy, and Christ is gone; then she is forced to go up and down to find him. Paul had his raptures; then a messenger of Satan to buffet him. The same disciples that were conscious to Christ's transfiguration—Peter, James, and John, Mat. 17—the same disciples are chosen also to be conscious to his agonies: Mat 26:37, 'He took with him Peter, James, and John.' First they had a glimpse of his glory, then a sight of his

bitter agonies and sufferings. Jeremiah in one line singing of praise, and in the next cursing the day of his birth, Jer. 20:13, 14. After the most ravishing comforts may be a sad suspension. Jacob saw the face of God, and wrestled with him, but his thigh halted. There needs something to humble the creature after these experiences.

5. Desertion is either felt or not felt. Not felt, and then it is more dangerous, and usually ends in some notable fall; as Hezekiah, 2 Chron. 32:31. God left him, and he was not sensible, and then he runs into pride and vainglory, and draweth wrath upon him and his people. God's children, when they do not observe his comings and goings, they fall into mischief, it begins their woe. We do not observe what experiences we have of God, then we faint: we do not observe his goings, then that makes way for some scandal and imprudent and unseemly action, and that makes way for some bitter and sharp affliction. But if it be felt, it is the better provided against. If we do not murmur, but seek to God in Christ to get the loss made up, then it is better. Meek acknowledgments are better than complaining expostulations. It is a sign it works kindly.

6. There is a total and a partial desertion. Those who are bent to obey God may for a while and in some degree be left to themselves. We cannot promise ourselves an utter immunity from desertion, but it is not total. We shall find, for his great name's sake 'The Lord will not forsake his people,' 1 Sam. 12:22; and Heb. 13:5, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' Not utterly, yet in part they may be forsaken. Elijah was forsaken, but not as Ahab; Peter was forsaken in part, but not as Judas, that was utterly forsaken, until he was made a prey to the devil. So carnal professors are forsaken utterly until they are made a prey fit for the devil's tooth. David was forsaken to be humbled and bettered; but Saul was forsaken utterly to be destroyed. Saith Theophylact, God may forsake his people so as to shut out their

prayers, Ps. 80:4, so as to interrupt the peace and joy of their heart, to abate their strength; the spiritual life may be much at a stand, and so as sin may break out, and they fall foully; but not utterly forsaken. But one way or other God is present; present in light sometimes when he is not present in strength, when he manifests the evil of their present condition, so as to mourn under it; and present in awakening desires, though not in giving enjoyment. As long as there is any esteem of God, he is not yet gone; there is some light and love yet left, manifested by our desires of communion with him.

7. There is a temporary desertion and an eternal desertion. One is spoken of, Isa. 54:7, 8, 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee.' God may forsake his servants for a little while: indeed they may have a long winter of it sometimes; as David lay for many months under his sin, until Nathan roused him; but this is but a moment to the eternity wherein God loves them. But the eternal forsaking is of the final impenitent, when God saith, Never see my face more, 'go ye cursed,' &c. Thus for the kinds.

Secondly, The reasons of desertion.

1. To correct us for our wantonness, and our unkind dealing with Christ. If we neglect him upon frivolous pretences, certainly he will be gone: Cant 5:3, 'I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on?' See ver. 6, 'My beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone.' When we are not at God's call, he will not be at our beck. She that would not open to Christ, when she opened, Christ was gone.

2. To acquaint us with our weakness. What feathers are we when the blast of a temptation is let loose upon us! God will show what we are by his withdrawing. God left Hezekiah, 'That he might try him, that he might know all that was in his heart,' 2 Chron. 32:31. When Christ

was asleep, the storm arose, and the ship was in danger. If God be gone but a little, or suspend his influence, we cannot stand our ground.

3. To subdue our carnal confidence: Ps. 30:6, 7, 'In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.' We fall asleep upon a carnal pillow, then God draws it away: 'Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled.' The nurse lets the child get a knock, to make it more cautious. God withdraws, that we may learn more to depend upon him.

4. To heighten our esteem of Christ, that love may be sharpened by absence. When once we feel the loss of it to our bitter cost, we will not part with him again upon easy terms. The spouse when she caught him would not let him go, Cant. 3:2, 3, 4; then are we more tender to observe him in his motions.

5. That by our own bitter experience we may learn how to value the sufferings of Christ, when we taste of the bitter cup of which he drank for us. Christians, you do not know what it was for Christ to cry out, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Mat. 27:46, until we are sensible in our measure and degree of the like. He tasted of the hell of being forsaken, and we must pledge him in that cup first or last, that we may know what our Saviour endured for us; and what it is for a holy man to want the light of God's countenance, and those sensible consolations that he formerly had.

6. To prevent evil to come, especially pride, that we might not be lifted up; and to entender our hearts to others: 2 Cor. 1:4, 'That we might comfort others with the comforts wherewith we were comforted of God.'

Use 1. This informs us that we are not therefore cast out of the love of God because there may be some forsaking. Desertion is incident to the most heavenly spirits. Christ hath legitimated this condition, and made it consistent with grace. It is a disease this which follows the royal seed; David, Heman, Hezekiah, these were forsaken, yet were children of God. It is more incident to the godly than the wicked and carnal. The carnal may be under bondage; sometimes their peace may be troubled and disturbed; but this desertion properly is a disease incident to the godly, and none are so affected with it as they: they have a tender heart; when God is gone how are they troubled! They are very observant, and therefore we cannot say they are not godly because they are forsaken. But those that never felt the love of Christ, never knew what communion with God means, were never troubled with sin, have none of this affliction; but this is incident to the richest and most heavenly spirit whom God hath taken into communion with himself.

Use 2. For direction to the children of God.

1. Observe God's comings and goings; see whether you be forsaken. When God hides himself from your prayers, when means have not such a lively influence, when you have a strong affection to obey, but not such help to bring it into act, and you begin to stumble, observe it; God is withdrawn, and many times seems to withdraw, to observe whether you will take notice of it. Christ made as if he would go further, but they constrained him to stay; so he makes as if he would be gone, to see if you will constrain him to tarry.

2. Inquire after the reason: Ps. 77:6, 'I communed with mine own heart.' What then? 'My spirit made diligent search.' Ay! this is the time to make diligent search what it is divides between God and you. Though God doth it out of sovereignty and instruction sometimes,

yet there is ever cause for creatures to humble themselves, and make diligent search what is the matter.

3. Submit to the dispensation: murmuring doth but entangle you more; God will have us stoop to his sovereignty and wisdom before he hath done. A husband must be absent for necessary occasions; a frown is as necessary for a child as a smile. David refuseth not to be tried, only he prays, 'Lord, forsake me not utterly.' It is a fond child that will not let its parent go out of sight.

4. Learn to trust in a withdrawing God, and depend upon him; to stay ourselves upon his name when we see no light, Isa. 50:10. Never leave until you find him. Look, as Esther would go into the king's presence when there was no golden sceptre held forth, so venture into God's presence when you have no smile and countenance from heaven; trust in a withdrawing God; nay, when wrath breaks out, when God killeth you: Job 13:15, 'Though he kill me, yet will I trust in him.' With such a holy obstinacy of faith should we follow God in this case.

Doct. 4. When God seemeth to forsake us, and really doth so in part, yet we should pray that it be not an utter and total desertion.

Isa. 64:9, 'Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever. Behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.' (1.) Do not despond; we are very apt to do so: Ps. 77:7–9, 'Will the Lord cast off for ever? will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.' The worst kind of despondency is to lie in sin. To lie in the dirt, because we are fallen, is foolish obstinacy. (2.) Pray to God—(1st.) Acknowledging that we have deserved it; (2d.) By supplication. There is nothing which God hath promised to perform but we may ask it in

prayer: Heb. 13:5, 'He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' If thou provest me, let me not miscarry; if thou exercisest me, let me not be cut off. Beg his returns. (3.) Give thanks that God is not wholly gone, as certainly he is not, as long as you are sensible of your loss, and have a tender heart left. Though he hath withdrawn the light of his countenance, yet he hath left the esteem of it, a thirst after God, and a desire of communion with himself. As long as there is any attraction left, you may find him by the smell of his ointments.

## SERMON X

### **Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.—VER. 9.**

IN the former part the Psalmist showeth that the word of God pointeth out the only true way to blessedness. Now, the main thing which the word enforceth is holiness. This is the way which we must take if we intend to come to our journey's end. This David applieth to the young man in the text, 'Wherewith shall a young man cleanse,' &c.

In the words there is—(1.) A question asked; (2.) An answer given.

In the question there is the person spoken of, a young man. And his work, wherewith shall he cleanse his way? *Omnis quæstio supponit unum, et inquirat aliud.* In this question there are several things supposed.

1. That we are from the birth polluted with sin; for we must be cleansed. It is not, 'direct his way,' but 'cleanse his way.'



2. That we should be very early and timeously sensible of this evil; for the question is propounded concerning the young man.

3. That we should earnestly seek for a remedy how to dry up the issue of sin that runneth upon us. All this is to be supposed.

That which is inquired after is, what remedy there is against it? what course is to be taken? So that the sum of the question is this: How shall a man that is impure, and naturally defiled with sin, be made able, as soon as he cometh to the use of reason, to purge out that natural corruption, and live a holy and pure life to God? The answer given is, 'By taking heed thereto according to thy word.' Where two things are to be observed—(1.) The remedy; (2.) The manner how it is applied and made use of.

1. The remedy is the word—by way of address to God, called thy word; because if God had not given direction about it, we should have been at an utter loss.

2. The manner how it is applied and made use of, by taking heed thereto, &c., by studying and endeavouring a holy conformity to God's will.

[1.] I begin with the question; for, as the careless world carrieth the matter, it seemeth very impertinent and ridiculous. What have youth and childhood to do with so serious a work? When old age hath snowed upon their heads, and the smart experience of more years in the world hath ripened them for so severe a discipline, then it is time to think of cleansing their way, or of entering upon a course of repentance and submission to God. For the present, *Dandum est aliquid huic ætati*—youth must be a little indulged; they will grow wiser as they grow more in years. Oh! no; God demandeth his right as soon as we are capable to understand it. And it concerneth every

one, as soon as he cometh to the use of reason, presently to mind his work, both in regard of God and himself.

(1.) In regard of God, that he may not be kept out of his right too long: Eccles. 12:1, 'Remember thy creator in the days of thy youth.' He is our creator; we have nothing but what he gave us, and that for his own use and service. And therefore the vessel should be cleansed as soon as may be, that it may be 'fit for the master's use.' It is a kind of spiritual restitution for the neglects of childhood and the forgetfulness of infancy, when we were not in a capacity to know our creator, much less to serve him. And therefore, as soon as we come to the use of reason, we should restore his right with advantage.

(2.) In regard of himself. The first seasoning of the vessel is very considerable: Prov. 22:6, 'Train up a child in the way in which he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.' When well principled and seasoned in youth, it sticketh by them, before sin and worldly lusts have gotten a deeper rooting. If Solomon's observation be true, a man's infancy and younger time is a notable presage what he will prove afterwards: Prov. 20:11, 'Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.' Much may be known by our young inclinations. But, alas! this is not full out the case. The vessel is seasoned already; but 'wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?' which presupposeth a defilement. No infant is like a vessel that newly cometh out of the potter's shop, indifferent for good or bad infusions. The vessel is tainted already, and hath a smatch of the old man and the corruptions of the flesh: Ps. 51:5, 'Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.' We came polluted into the world; our business is to stop the growth of sin. As a child walloweth in his filthiness, so we do all spiritually wallow in our blood: Ezek. 16:4, 5, 'As for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born, thou wert not washed in water, nor swaddled

at all. No eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out into the open field, to the loathing of thy person in the day that thou wast born. And when I saw thee polluted in thy own blood, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live,' &c. Therefore the question is very savoury and profitable, 'Wherewith shall a young man,' &c.

But why is the young man only specified?

I answer—All men are concerned in this work. Old men are not left to themselves, nor wholly given over as hopeless; but youth need it most, being inclined to liberty and carnal pleasures, and most apt to be led aside from the right way by the motions of the flesh; and being headstrong in their passions, and self-willed, need to have their fervours abated by the cool and chill doctrines of repentance and conversion to God. And, therefore, though others be not excluded, the young man is expressly mentioned: unbroken colts need the stronger bits. The word is of use to all, but especially to youth, to bridle them, and reduce them to reason.

[2.] The answer—'By taking heed thereto according to thy word.' The word, as a remedy against natural uncleanness, is considerable two ways—as a rule, and as an instrument.

(1.) As the only rule of that holiness which God will accept. All other ways are but bypaths, as good meaning, or the suggestions of a blind conscience, custom, example of others, our own desires, laws of men, superstitious observances, and apocryphal holiness. Nothing is holiness in God's account, how specious soever it be, unless it be according to the word. What doth the word do about all these as the rule? It showeth the only way of reconciliation with God, or being cleansed from the guilt of sin, and the only way of solid and true sanctification and subjection to God, which is our cleansing from the

filthiness of sin. All religions aim at this—*Ut anima sit subjecta Deo, et peccata in se*. No true peace without the word, nor no true holiness. The first is proved Jer. 6:16, 'Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' The second is proved John 17:17, 'Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.' So that a young man that is, like Hercules in bivio, to choose his path to true happiness, will never attain to true peace and sound satisfaction of conscience, nor to true grace or a hearty subjection to God, but by consulting with the word. No other rule and direction will serve the turn. (1.) It is the only rule to teach us how to obtain true peace of conscience. The whole world is become obnoxious to God, and held under the awe of divine justice. This bondage is natural, and the great inquiry is how his anger shall be appeased: Micah 6:6, 7, 'Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' Now here is no tolerable satisfaction offered, no plaster for the wounds of conscience, no way to compromise and take up the controversy between us and God; but by the propitiation which the gospel holdeth forth all this is effected. The Gentiles were at a loss, the Jews rested in the sacrifices, which yet 'could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience,' Heb. 9:9; therefore they fled to barbarous and sinfully cruel customs, offering their first-born, &c. There was no course to recover men from their entanglements and perplexities of soul, how to pacify God for sin, but they were still left in a floating uncertainty, till God revealed himself as reconciling the world to himself in Christ. Now, no doctrine doth propound the way of reconciliation with God, and redemption from those fears of his angry justice which are so natural to us, with such

rational advantages, and claimeth such a just title to human belief, as the doctrine of the gospel. Oh! then, if the young man would cleanse his conscience, and quiet and calm his own spirit, he must of necessity take up with the word as his sure direction in the case. Look abroad, where will you find rest for your souls in this business of atonement and reconciliation with God? What strange horrible fruits and effects have men's contrivances on this account produced? What have they not invented, what have they not done, what not suffered upon this account? and yet continued in dread and bondage all their days. Now, what a glorious soul-appeasing light doth the doctrine of satisfaction and atonement by the blood of Christ the Son of God cause to break in upon the hearts of men! The testimony of blood in the conscience is one of the witnesses the believer hath in himself: 1 John 5:8, 'And there are three that bear witness on earth, the spirit, the water, and the blood;' and ver. 10, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.' (2.) It is the only rule of true holiness. Never was it stated and brought to such a pitch as it is in the scriptures, nor enforced by such arguments as are found there; it requireth such a holiness as standeth in conformity to God, and is determined by his will. Now it is but reason that he that is the Supreme Being should be the rule of all the rest. It is a holiness of another rate than the blind heart could find out; not an external devotion, nor a civil course, but such as transformeth the heart and subdueth it to the will of God, Rom. 2:15. If a man would attain to the highest exactness that a rational creature is capable of, not to moral virtue only, but a true genuine respect to God and man, he must regard and love the law of God that is pure. A man that would be holy had need of an exact rule, for to be sure his practice will come short of his rule; and therefore, if the rule itself be short, there will no due provision be made for respects to God or man. But now this is a rule that reacheth not only to the way, but the thoughts; that converteth the soul: Ps. 19:7, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.'

Take the fairest draughts of that moral perfection which yet is of human recommendation, and you will find it defective and maimed in some parts, either as to God or men. It is inferioris hemisphaerii, as not reaching to the full subjection of the soul to God. There is some dead fly in their box of ointment, either for manner or end.

(2.) The word is considerable as an instrument which God maketh use of to cleanse the heart of man. It will not be amiss a little to show the instrumentality of the word to this blessed end and purpose. It is the glass that discovereth sin, and the water that washeth it away. (1.) It is the glass wherein to see our corruption. The first step to the cure is a knowledge of the disease; it is a glass wherein to see our natural face: James 1:23, 'For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass,' &c. In the word we see God's image and our own. It is the copy of God's holiness, and the representation of our natural faces, Rom. 7:9. What fond conceits have we of our own spiritual beauty! but there we may see the leprous spots that are upon us. (2.) It sets us a-work to see it purged; it is the water to wash it out. The word of command presseth the duty; it is indispensably required. What doth every command sound in our ears but 'Wash you, make you clean.'? This is indispensably required: 1 John 3:3, 'And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure;' and Heb. 12:14, 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.' Some things God may dispense with, but this is never dispensed with. Many things are ornamental that are not absolutely necessary, as wealth, riches: 'Wisdom with an inheritance is good;' so learning. Many have gone to heaven that were never learned, but never any without holiness. (3.) The word of promise encourageth it: 2 Cor. 7:1, 'Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God;' and 2 Peter 1:4, 'Whereby are given unto

us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.' God might have required it upon the account of his sovereignty, we being his creatures, especially this being the perfection of our natures, and rather a privilege than a burden; but God would not rule us with a rod of iron, but deal with rational creatures rationally, by promises and threatenings. On the one side he telleth us of a pit without a bottom: on the other, of blessed and glorious promises, things 'which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard of, neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive.' Therefore the word hath a notable instrumentality that way.

(3.) The doctrine of the scripture holds out the remedy and means of cleansing—Christ's blood; which is not only an argument or motive to move us to it. So it is urged 1 Peter 1:8, 'Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable,' &c. It presseth holiness upon this argument. Why? God hath been at great cost to bring it about, therefore we must not content ourselves with some smooth morality, which might have been whether Christ had been, yea or nay. Again, the word propounds it as a purchase, whereby grace is procured for us; so it is said, 1 John 1:7, He hath purchased the Spirit to bless us, and turn us from our sins. And it exciteth faith to apply and improve this remedy, and so conveyeth the power of God into the soul: Acts 15:9, 'Purifying their hearts by faith.'

2. The manner how the word is applied and made use of, 'If he take heed thereunto according to thy word.' This implieth a studying of the word, and the tendency and importance of it, which is necessary if the young man would have benefit by it. David calleth the statutes of God the men of his counsel. Young men that are taken with other books, if they neglect the word of God—that book that should do the

cure upon the heart and mind—they are, with all their knowledge, miserable: Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' If men would grow wise to salvation, and get any skill in the practice of godliness, they must be much in this blessed book of God, which is given us for direction: 1 John 2:14, 'I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.' It is not a slight acquaintance with the word that will make a young man so successful as to defeat the temptations of Satan, and be too hard for his own lust; it is not a little notional irradiation, but to have the word dwell in you, and abide in you richly. The way to destroy ill weeds is to plant good herbs that are contrary. We suck in carnal principles with our milk, and therefore we are said to 'speak lies from the womb.' A kind of a riddle; before we are able to speak, we speak lies—namely, as we are prone to error and all manner of carnal fancies by the natural temper and frame of our hearts, Isa. 58:2; and therefore, from our very tender and infant-age we should be acquainted with the word of God: 2 Tim. 3:15, 'And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures.' It may be children, by reading the word, get nothing but a little memorative knowledge, but yet it is good to plant the field of the memory; in time they will soak into the judgment and conscience, and thence into the heart and affections.

3. It implieth a care and watchfulness over our hearts and ways, that our will and actions be conformed to the word. This must be the young man's daily prayer and care, that there be a conformity between his will and the word, that he may be a walking Bible, Christ's living epistle, copy out the word in his life, that the truths of it may appear plainly in his conversation.

All that I have said issueth itself into three points:—



1. That the great duty of youth, as soon as they come to the full use of reason, is to inquire and study how they may cleanse their hearts and ways from sin.

2. That the word of God is the only rule sufficient and effectual to accomplish this work.

3. If we would have this efficacy, there is required much care and watchfulness, that we come to the direction of the word in every tittle; not a loose and inattentive reflection upon the word, careless inconsiderateness, but a taking heed thereunto.

Now, why in youth, and as soon as we come to the use of reason, we should mind the work of cleansing our way?

1. Consider how reasonable this is. It is fit that God should have our first and our best. It is fit he should have our first, because he minded us before we were born. His love to us is an eternal and an everlasting love; and shall we put off God to old age? shall we thrust him into a corner? Surely God, that loved us so early, it is but reason he should have our first, and also our best; for we have all from him. Under the law the first-fruits were God's, to show the first and best was his portion. All the sacrifices that were offered to him, they were in their strength, and young: Lev. 2:14, 'And if thou offer a meat-offering of thy first-fruits unto the Lord, thou shalt offer for the meat-offering of thy first-fruits green ears of corn dried by the fire, even corn beaten out of full ears.' God would not stay till ripened. God will not be long kept out of his portion. Youth is our best time. Mal. 1:13, when they brought a weak and sickly offering, 'Should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord.' The health, strength, quickness of spirit, and vigour is in youth. Shall our health and strength be for the devil's use, and shall we put off God with the dregs of time? Shall Satan feast upon the flower of our youth and

fresh time, and God only have the scraps and fragments of the devil's table? When wit is dulled, the ears heavy, the body weak, and affections are spent, is this a fit present for God?

2. Consider the necessity of it. (1.) Because of the heat of youth, the passions and lusts are very strong: 2 Tim. 2:22, 'Fly also youthful lusts.' Men are most incident in that age to pride and self-conceit, to strong affections, inordinate and excessive love of liberty: 1 Tim. 3:6, 'Not a novice, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil.' A man may make tame fierce creatures, lions and tigers; and the fury of youth needs to be tempered and bridled by the word. It is much for the glory of grace that this heat and violence is broken when the subject is least of all disposed and prepared. (2.) Because none are tempted so much as they. Children cannot be serviceable to the devil, and old men are spent, and have chosen their ways; but youths, who have a sharpness of understanding, and the stoutest and most stirring spirits, the devil loveth to make use of such: 1 John 2:13, 'I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.' They are most assaulted; but it is for the honour of grace when they overcome, when their fervency and strength is employed, not in satisfying lusts, but in the service of God and fighting against Satan. Therefore it is very needful they should be seasoned with the word betimes.

3. Consider the many inconveniencies that will follow if they do not presently mind this work. (1.) Death is uncertain, and therefore such a weighty business as this will brook no delay. God doth not always give warning. Nadab and Abihu, two rash and inconsiderate young men, were taken away in their sins; and the bears out of the forest devoured the children that mocked the prophet. The danger being so great, as soon as we are sensible of it, we should flee from it. When children come to the fulness of reason, they stand upon their own

bottom; before, they are reckoned to their parents. Oh, woe be to you if you die in your sins! Certainly as soon as a man is upon his own personal account, he should look to himself, lest God cut him off before he hath made his peace with him. (2.) Sin groweth stronger by custom, and more rooted; it gathereth strength by every act. A brand that hath been in the fire is more apt to take fire again. A man in a dropsy, the more he drinks, the more his thirst increaseth. Every act lesseneth fear and strengtheneth inclination: Jer. 13:27, 'Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?' A twig is easily bowed, but when it grows into a tree it is more troublesome and unpliant. A tree newly set may be transplanted, but when long rooted, not so easily. The man that was possessed of a devil from his childhood, how hardly is he cured! Mark 9:29. (3.) Justice is provoked the longer, and that will be a grief to you first or last. If ever we be brought home to God, it will cost us many a bitter tear; not only at first conversion: Jer. 31:18, 'I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised,' &c., but afterwards, David, though he began with God betimes, Ps. 25:7, yet prays, 'Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgression;' and Job 13:26, 'For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.' Old bruises may trouble us long after, upon every change of weather, and new afflictions revive the sense of old sins; they may stick by us. We think tricks of youth are not to be stood upon: you may have a bitter sense of them to your dying day. (4.) You will every day grow more useless to God: the exercise of religion dependeth much on the vigour of affections. Again, it is very profitable; it brings a great deal of honour to God to begin with him betimes. All time is little enough to declare your respects to God. And it is honourable for you. Seniority in grace is a preferment: they were 'in Christ before me,' saith Paul. An old disciple is a title of honour. To grow grey in Christ's service, and to know him long, it maketh the work of grace

more easy. The dedication of the first-fruits sanctified the whole lump: Lam. 3:27, 'It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth,' to be inured to strictness betimes. Dispositions impressed in youth increase with us. Again, it will be very comfortable when the miseries of old age come upon you. As the ant provideth in summer for winter, so should we provide for age. Now what a sweet comfort will it be, when we are taken off from service, that while we had any strength and affections, God had the use of them! Then our age will be a good old age.

Use 1 is for lamentation that so few youths take to the ways of God. No age doth despise the word so much as this, which hath most need of it. It is a rare thing to find a Joseph, or a Samuel, or a Josiah, that seek God betimes. Go the universities, and you will find that those that should be as Nazarites consecrated to God, live as those that have vowed and consecrated themselves to Satan: Amos 2:11, 'And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites,' &c. The sons of the prophets in their youth were bred for a more strict discipline in their holy calling, separated from worldly delights, to be a stock of a succeeding ministry. But, alas! they spend their time in vanity, bringing nothing thence but the sins of the place, and vainly following the sinful customs of the country. How few regard the education of their youth in knowledge or religious practice! Families are societies to be sanctified to God, as well as churches. The governors of them have as truly a charge of souls as the pastors of churches. They offer their children to God in baptism, but educate and bring them up for the world and the flesh. They bewail any natural defect in them, if their children have a stammering tongue, a deaf ear, or a withered leg; but not want of grace. We have a prejudice, and think they are too young to be wrought upon; but God's word can break in with weight and power on young ones: Luke 11:1, 'One of his disciples said unto him, Lord,

teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples;' and Mat. 21:15, 16, 'When the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David; they were sore displeased, and said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus said unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?' They learned it of their parents: Mat. 21:9, 'And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David.' We should often be infusing good principles in youth. Corruption of youth is one of the saddest symptoms of approaching judgment.

Use, 2 is exhortation to young ones. You that are to begin your course, begin with God: you have no experience, yet you have a rule; you have mighty lusts, but a stronger spirit. No age is excluded from the promise of the Spirit: Joel 2:28, 29, 'And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit.' Of John the Baptist it is said, Luke 1:15, 'He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb;' and Mark 10:14, 'Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.' There is power to enlighten you, notwithstanding all your prejudices; to subdue your lusts, notwithstanding the power of corruptions: 1 John 2:13, 14, 'I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father,' &c.; and see Gen. 39:9. It will be a great comfort to you when you die that your great work is over. Oh, what a sad thing is it that, when the body is going to the grave, the soul hath not yet learned to converse with God! Hosea 8:12, 'I have written to them the great things of my

law; but they were counted a strange thing.' God hath written an epistle to us, and we will not read it nor consult with it; are wholly strangers to it. But now, when acquainted with God, it will not be so irksome to go to him.

## SERMON XI

### **With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.—VER. 10.**

THE Psalmist had in the former verse directed the young man to diligence and attention unto the word; but the word doth nothing unless we join prayer; and therefore now he gives an example in his own person. Having spoken of the power of the word to cleanse the way, now saith he, 'With my whole heart,' &c.

Here take notice—

1. Of David's argument, with my whole heart have I sought thee.
2. His request, O let me not wander from thy commandments.

First, For David's argument, 'I have sought thee with my whole heart.' He pleadeth his own sincerity. I showed you largely what it is to seek God, and that with the whole heart, in the second verse. I shall not repeat anything; only, that I may not dismiss this clause without some note, observe, first, that it is the duty and practice of God's children to seek him.

You have David's instance in the text and elsewhere. It is their general character: Ps. 24:6, 'This is the generation of them that seek

him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah.' God's children are a generation of seekers. They find hereafter, but now they seek. Their great business is to be seeking after God, more ample and full communion with him.

Seeking of God implies three things:—

1. There is a more general seeking of God, for relief of our sin and misery by nature.
2. More particular, upon special occasions.
3. There is a constant seeking of God in the use of his ordinances.

1. There is a more general seeking of God, for relief of our sinful and wretched condition by nature. Adam, when a sinner, ran away from God; and therefore all our business is now to seek him, that we may find him again in Christ Jesus. The general address that is made to God for pardon and reconciliation, it is often called a seeking of God in scripture; so it is taken Isa. 55:6, 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;' that is, get into favour with God before it be too late. So Amos 5:6, 'Seek the Lord, and ye shall live.' This notes our general address for pardon and reconciliation.

2. There is a more particular seeking of God; that notes our addresses to God either in our exigencies and straits, or in all our business and employment.

[1.] In our exigencies and straits. And so we are said to seek God when in doubts we seek his direction, James 1:5; when in weakness we seek strength; in sickness, health; in troubles, comfort. Asa is blamed that he 'sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians.' Paul's messenger of Satan drives him to the throne of grace: 2 Cor. 12:8,

'For this I sought the Lord thrice.' He would knock again and again, to see what answers he could get from God.

[2.] In all our businesses and affairs God must be sought unto, and we must ask his leave, his counsel, and his blessing. Pagans, before the awe of religion was extinguished, would begin with their gods in every weighty enterprise. A Jove principium was an honest heathen principle. Laban consults with his teraphim; Balak sends for Balaam; they had their oracles that they would resort to. So far as any nation was touched with a sense of a divine power, they would never venture upon anything without consulting with their gods. And it is enjoined as a piece of religious good manners to own God upon all occasions: Prov. 3:5, 'In all thy ways acknowledge him.' It is an acknowledgment of God, an owning him as a God, that we would be asking his leave, counsel, and blessing. His leave must be asked, though the thing be never so lawful and easy. We are taught every day to ask our daily bread, though we have it by us, that we may not, like thieves and robbers, use his goods without his leave. So for his counsel; he is sure to miscarry that makes his bosom his oracle, his wit his counsellor. It is a high piece of spiritual idolatry to lean upon our own understanding, and think to carry even the ordinary affairs of any day without asking counsel from God. And then his blessing. God is not an idle spectator, he disposeth of all events, and giveth the blessing: Jer. 10:23, 'The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps;' that is, as to any happy issue. God doth the more stand upon his right that he may the oftener hear from us, and that we may have many occasions to bring us to the throne of grace. Now this is the constant practice of God's children. David always ran to the oracle or the ephod when he had any business to do: 1 Sam. 23, Shall I do thus and thus, or shall I not? Jacob in his journey would neither go to Laban, nor come from him, without a warrant. Jehoshaphat in the business of Ramoth-Gilead



would not stir a foot until he had counsel from God; he sends not only to the captain of the host, but to the prophet of the Lord: 'Inquire, I pray thee, of the Lord to day,' 1 Kings 22:2; Judges 1:1, 2:28.

I have spoken this to show why the children of God are called the generation of them that seek him.

3. The third thing that may be called seeking of God is our observance of him in the use of his ordinances. It is one thing to serve God, another thing to seek God; one thing to make God the object, another thing the end of our worship. To seek God only in our necessity, and not to seek God in his ordinances, argueth a base spirit. Christians, our losing God in Adam, that makes us seek him in a way of reconciliation. Our want of God in straits, and in the course of our affairs, maketh us seek him by way of supply. But now our duty to God, and love to him, should make us seek him in his ordinances by way of communion; and in this sense seeking God is often spoken of in scripture: Ps. 22:26, 'They shall praise the Lord that seek him;' that is, that wait upon him, and maintain communion with him in the means of grace.

Well, then, let us be more in seeking of God. If we would find him in heaven, we must seek him on earth: Heb. 11:6, 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' They that seek his favour, that often resort to him, carry on a constant communion with him; those that are waiting for his power and presence in his ordinances, these are the men God will own. We are not fit to receive so great a blessing as God's favour if we will not look after it with diligence.

Secondly, Observe, those that seek God aright, must seek him with their whole heart.

But how is that? Besides what hath already been spoken of it in the second use, it noteth three things—

1. Sincerity of aims.
2. Integrity of parts.
3. Uniformity of endeavours.

1. Sincerity of aims. Many pretend to seek God, but indeed they do but seek themselves. As those that followed Christ for the loaves, that take up religion upon base and carnal respects: John 6:26, 'Verily I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.' There was much outward diligence, but a false heart lurking under it; their belly drove them to him. Of all by-ends this is the worst and basest: *Vix diligitur Jesus propter Jesum.*—Jesus Christ is scarce loved for Jesus' sake. Yet, further, those that prayed to God for corn, wine, and oil, and did not seek his favour and grace in the first place, see what the Lord saith of them: Hosea 7:14, 'They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds.' They did seek God, but yet it is counted howling. They only minded the supply of outward wants; and made prayer merely to be an act of carnal self-love. And then it is but howling, such a noise as a dog or a beast would make when he wants his food. Christians, no doubt they were instant, there was a world of earnestness, they were affected when the stroke was upon them, and seriously desired to get rid of it, but 'they have not cried to me with their whole heart.' It was but such a sense of pain and want as the beasts have. If there be anything sought from God more than God, or not for God, we do not seek him with the whole heart, but only for other uses.

2. It notes integrity of parts. We read in scripture of loving God, not only with the heart, but with the 'whole heart;' and of believing, not only with the heart, Rom. 10:10, but of believing with the 'whole heart,' Acts 8:37; because seeking of God is but a metaphorical term, by which faith is expressed; therefore let us see what it is to believe with the whole heart. The doctrine of the gospel is not only true, to work upon the understanding, but it is good, so as to move and draw the will: 1 Tim. 1:15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation,' &c. Not only 'a faithful saying'—that is, a true doctrine—'that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,' but it is 'worthy of all acceptation.' It is an excellent doctrine to ravish the will. Now, observe what a great deal of difference there is between men in believing. Some that hear the gospel, and have only a literal knowledge of it, so as to be able to talk of it, so as to understand the words and syllables, to know what it means; they may have some clearness of understanding this way, but there is not a sound assent. There are others affected so with the gospel, as by the common influence of the Spirit they may assent to the truths delivered concerning God and Christ, and salvation by him, yet do not give it entertainment in their hearts. These may be said to seek God, but not with the whole heart. A speculative, naked, and cold assent they may have, but that is not enough. It is not enough to see food that is wholesome, but you must eat it. Nor is it enough to understand the gospel, and believe that it is true, but we must embrace it; it must be accepted, else we do not believe with the whole heart. The word is propounded to man as true. Now, the truth made known may cause a speculative assent. This may draw profession after it; and this we call historical faith, because we are no more affected with the gospel than with an ordinary history which we read and believe. The word is propounded again as good, to move and excite the will. Now, there is a twofold good—the good of happiness, and the good of holiness. The good of happiness, that which is profitable and sweet. Then there is

the good of holiness. Now, there are many that look upon the gospel as good and profitable, because it offereth pardon and eternal life; such comfort to the conscience, and such good to our whole souls. We may be affected with it as a good doctrine. Naturally, man hath not only a sense of religion, but he hath a hunger after immortality and everlasting blessedness. Therefore, since the gospel doth so clearly promote happiness, it may be greedily caught hold of by those whose hearts are affected, while they look upon it under these notions; and they may be so far affected that they may for a while not only profess it out of danger, but when some danger doth arise they may defend their opinions with some care. Yet this is not with all the heart. Why? As soon as any great danger doth arise, out of which there is no escape, as gibbets, fires, racks, ignominy, and utter loss—as soon as persecution arose, saith Christ, all this ardour and heat of spirit which they did formerly seem to have, comes to nothing. What is the reason it vanisheth? Because they receive the gospel rather upon those notions of interest and profit, than of duty and holiness; and the impression of the profitableness of the gospel, as a doctrine of happiness, was not so deeply rooted in them, not so durable, that the hope of the future good would be prevalent over the fear of present evil and danger. There may be some desires of heaven in a carnal breast, but they are easily blotted out by worldly temptations; but the true desires of holiness are lasting, and will prevail over our lusts.

3. Believing with all the heart implies uniformity of endeavours. Oftentimes the soul may be strongly moved and affected for the present, and carried out to the gospel under the notion of holiness; but it is but the lighter part of the soul that is so moved, not the whole heart, therefore it is not durable. The people meant as they spake when they were willing to come under the obedience of the word. God gives them that testimony: 'The people have well said; but

oh! that there were such a heart in them,' Deut. 5:28, 29. They may receive it, and may seem affected with it, and have a sense of reformation; but, saith the evangelist, Luke 8:14, 'It brings no fruit to perfection.' It was not so deeply rooted as to prevail strongly over their carnal distempers. And, therefore, here comes in another sort of men, that are affected with the word as a holy doctrine. They may have a liking to the holiness of it, and have some consolation thereupon; they have their beginnings, and some good offers towards sanctification; but it brings nothing to perfection. They may have such a hope of heaven as that they may be said to 'taste the powers of the world to come,' Heb. 6:5, 6; yet because it is not deeply rooted in the heart, and only begets some raw motions, and moves the lighter part of the soul, and doth not show itself in a uniform course of obedience, therefore it is not with all the heart. It may be it was but for a time, or cast in upon some eminent trouble. Therefore that is only believing, and seeking God with all the heart, when the doctrine of life is so acknowledged to be true, good, and holy, as to be closed with upon that account; not only because of its suitableness to our eternal good and interest, but as it is a rule of our duty. And then it enters upon the heart when every faculty of it is subdued to God. It is not some colouring of the outside, but a deep dye when it soaks into the whole soul, and subdues the affections to God, which is manifested by a uniform course of obedience. Now David urgeth this to God as an argument, 'I have sought thee with my whole heart.' Hence observe—

Doct. We may mention the good which is wrought in us, and urge it to God in prayer.

It is a useful case. How may we mention our own gracious qualifications, and the good that is wrought in us?

Negatively—1. Not by way of boasting. There is no such thing here; no presumptuous boasting of his own perfections; for it was accompanied with a deep sense of his weakness, wandering, and straggling condition; he acknowledgeth his infirmities. There is no such thing allowed as boasting. The apostle's argument is convincing, 'Why boastest thou? What have we that we have not received?' If we can boast of anything, it is that we are most in debt, that we have received more: 1 Cor. 1:31, we must 'glory in the Lord.'

2. Not pleading of merit, as if he had deserved anything of God. So the Pharisee speaks of his good works, Luke 18:11. It is not to such a purpose as if we could challenge a reward as a due debt upon any good that we have done.

But positively—How then may we make mention of our qualifications?

1. We may mention what is wrought in us for God's glory. Surely, however we humble ourselves, we must not belie his bounty. To be always complaining of spiritual evils, it doth not argue a good temper of soul: Ps. 116:7, 'Return to thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.' We may own the Lord's bounty, and take notice what good we have done to the glory of his grace: 'Not I, but the grace of God which was with me,' 1 Cor. 15:10.

2. We may mention it to our own comfort. Thus Paul, 2 Cor. 1:12. Jesus Christ is our rejoicing, but in one sense this is also our rejoicing, 'the testimony of our conscience.' Wherefore is grace given us, but for the furtherance of our comfort? To bear false witness against ourselves is naught. Though the duties of the first table neither begin nor end in us, yet the whole law of charity begins at home.

3. For our own vindication. Thus Hezekiah: Isa. 38:3, 'Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before thee with a perfect heart.' This was his plea, but I suppose it was not before God as a judge, but before God as a witness. He called God to witness that he had walked before him with a perfect heart. He was slandered by Rabshakeh. They thought, when he broke down the altars of Baal and cut down their groves, that he had cut down the altars of the God of Israel; therefore, saith Rabshakeh, speaking to the humour and discontent of the people—and we must look upon it as a politic insinuation—'Is not this he whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away and demolished?' 2 Kings 18:22. Now, saith Hezekiah, 'I have walked before thee with an upright heart.' Many a good magistrate is often put upon such pleas for God's honour, in things distasteful to the popularity.

4. What God hath wrought in us may be urged as an argument in prayer to obtain further grace many ways. Partly because God loves to crown his own mercies, and make one to be a step to another. We are endeared to God by his own mercies; he is very tender and choice of them. In whom he hath begun a good work he will perfect it: Zech. 3:2, 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' What! shall all my former mercies be in vain? It is God's own argument, and he takes it well when his people urgeth it. In many cases, Deus donando debet—by giving one mercy, he makes himself a debtor to give another. Plutarch gives us a story of the Rhodians, when they came to sue to the Romans for help, that one urged what good turns they had done to the Romans; but the people urged what good turns the Romans did to them, and they obtained relief. Such a plea is acceptable and honourable to God, when we urge what God hath done for us. And partly because sincerity, by the consent of all, hath the full room of an evidence and gospel-plea in the court of justification. When the business is how a sinner shall be accepted with God, for a law-plea

we can only plead the merits of Christ and God's mercy; there all we have and can do is but dung and dross, Phil. 3:8, 9, as to an acquittance from sin. But as to our acquittance from hypocrisy, as to the plea of a gospel-evidence, we may produce our sincerity and the fruits of our obedience, to show our title is good as the matter is ordered by the Lord's grace, that we have the gospel-title. To all the other our title is by the righteousness of Christ, but the evidence of our title is sincere walking.

Secondly, Let us come to David's request, 'Let me not wander from thy commandments.' It may be translated, 'Make me not to err;' that is, 'by the suspending of thy grace;' for that will necessarily follow. The Septuagint reads, 'Do not repel from thy commandments.' God seems to repel and cast off those that he doth not assist with his grace. Here David saith, 'I have sought thee.' Observe the mischief that a heart which truly seeketh God desireth to fly from—sin, or wandering from the path of obedience. There is a communion with God, but in the way of his commandments; therefore they do not desire establishment of their interest and happiness only, but of God's glory, that they might not wander. Hence observe—

Doct. 1. The more experience men have of the ways of God, the more sensible will they be of their readiness to wander.

David, a man of so much experience, that sought God with his whole heart, 'Lord, let me not wander.' What is the reason?

1. Because they have a larger sense of duty.
2. A more tender sense of dangers and difficulties that do attend them.



First, They have a larger sense of duty to God. At first, while we are carnal, we take up duty by the lump, and by the visible bulk of it; we look only to ἔργον νόμου, 'the work of the law,' Rom. 2:15, and to avoid gross sins, or perform outward acts of worship. Oh! if I do sin, I am no adulterer, no extortioner, Luke 18:11. We think then it is well. But when we begin to have grace wrought in our heart, then we begin to serve God in the spirit, Phil. 3:3: 'And my God, whom I serve with my spirit,' Rom 1:9, then we begin to look after the regulation of the inner man, and subduing of the soul to God; and we cannot be contented with the visible bulk of obedience, and with some general conformity. Ay! but at first there is only a general purpose to serve God in the spirit; but afterward, when they begin to look into the breadth of the commandment, still they are sensible of their coming short, and how apt they are to wander in this and that point; still their sense of duty is increased, because their light, their love to God, and their power is increased, and because they draw near to their everlasting hopes.

1. Because their light is increased. By communion with God they see more of his holiness. The more a man is exercised in obedience, the clearer is his light and understanding, both to God and the will of God: Mat. 5:8, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' All sight of God, it is, as Nazianzen speaks, according to the proportion of our purity; and therefore the more communion we have with God, the more sight into the nature of God, and the will of God, and the more they are held under the awe of God. In moral disciplines, the further we wade in them, the more we see of our defects. Those that went to Athens, first they counted themselves σοφοὶ, wise men; afterward only φιλόσοφοι, lovers of wisdom; then they were only men that could talk a little; afterward they found themselves nothing. So a Christian in communion with God, the longer he converseth with God, the more he doth see of his

perfection and holiness: 'Surely I am more brutish than any man,' was the expression of wise Agur, Prov. 30:2. This holy man of God, saith Chrysostom, speaks it not only humbly, but truly, as he thinks. Sure they did not compliment with God. These holy men, in the serious actings of their souls, they speak as they think. Why? Because they have a high sense of God's holiness, therefore a deeper sense of their own vileness. They think there are hardly any so bad as themselves. Now they are convinced that the holy God will not be put off with any slight matter; and they are become sensible of that precept, Mat. 5:48, 'Be perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.'

2. Their love to God is increased by acquaintance with him, and therefore their hearts are more tender and sensible of the least deflection. The more a man loves God, the more he will do for God: 1 John 5:3, 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.' That is a clear rule; the more we love God, the more chary we will be of his commandments; and therefore they cannot sin upon such easy terms as before, nor go to heaven upon such easy terms as they thought before.

3. Their power is increased. He that is grown to a man's estate minds other work than what he did when a child; and as they have more strength, they look after more work. At first it was only to prevent excesses and breaking out of sin, but afterwards to subdue every thought to the obedience of Christ.

4. They are nearer to heaven, and therefore they look after greater suitableness to their everlasting estate. They think of that sinless and pure estate they shall enjoy there, therefore have a greater sense of duty upon them. Natural motion, saith the philosopher, is slower in the beginning, and swifter in the end and close; so spiritual motion

in the end and close ariseth to a greater vigour of holiness; that which served before will not serve their turn now: Phil. 3:14, they are 'pressing forward toward the mark,' &c.; they are hastening apace, and strain themselves when the prize is so near.

Secondly, As they have a larger sense of duty, so they have a greater experience of the dangers and difficulties that do attend them. Aristotle observes of young men, that they are more given to hope than the old are. They are of great and strong hopes. He renders three reasons for it—because they are eager of spirit, have little experience, and look but to a few things; and therefore they are forward to get abroad in the world, and to entangle themselves in the early cares of a family, until their rashness be confuted by their own miscarriage. So it is true of young Christians; they are all on a flame, ready to run into the mouth of danger upon the confidence of their present affections; and till they have smarted often, this confidence is not abated.

But men that have been exercised and experienced are more sensible of the naughtiness and inconstancy of their own hearts: Ps. 51:6, 'In the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom;' and therefore are more diffident of their own strength, and desire the Lord to keep them from wandering. We see, then, a cautelous fear is necessary to the last; it is useful to us not only to begin, but to work out our salvation: Phil. 2:12, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;' not only when we are novices, and so weak, and more liable to temptation, but to the close of our days: Prov. 28:14, 'Blessed is the man that feareth always.' That fear which causeth diffidence, and doubting, and despair, is a torment, not a blessedness; yet the fear that is opposite to carnal security and presuming on our own strength, is a fruit of grace and spiritual experience. This is that which stirreth up care and diligence in our

heavenly calling, and dependence upon God, and constant addresses to him; that keepeth us humble and waiting for the supplies of his grace.

Doct. 2. It is God alone that can keep us from wandering.

Reas. There is in man's heart a mighty proneness thereto: Jer. 14:10, you have hearts that 'love to wander.' Man is a restless creature, that loveth shifts and changes. For weakness they are compared to children, Hosea 11:3, and for wandering compared to sheep, Isa. 53:6. There is no creature so apt to go astray as sheep, and so unable to return. This is the disposition of men by nature. And mark, much of the old nature remains still with the saints. Have they not this wandering property to the last? David acknowledgeth it, though there were some good in him: Ps. 119:176, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep.' Consider the saints; though they have sincerity, yet not perfection; and sometimes they wander through inadvertency; they are overtaken, Gal. 6:1, as Noah was—they do not run of their own accord. And sometimes we err through the darkness that is in us. Though a child of God be 'light in the Lord,' yet he hath a great deal of darkness still. It may be he is wise in generals, but ignorant in particulars, as the heathen; in general they had good notions of an infinite and eternal power, but they were 'vain in their imaginations,' Rom. 1:21, in their practical inferences and discourses, when they came to rest upon this God. So a child of God may have a general sense of his duty, but as to particulars he is apt to miscarry; the mind may be blinded by lust and prejudice.

Sometimes they err through frowardness of their own lust: there is 'a law in their members which wars against the law of their minds,' Rom. 7. There are boisterous lusts, and a man hath much ado to keep his path: Ps. 73, 'My foot had well-nigh slipped.' Therefore we had

need God should keep us continually. And the Lord hath undertaken to guide us: Isa. 58:11, 'The Lord shall guide thee continually;' and Ps. 48:14, 'He will be our guide even unto death;' and Ps. 73:24, 'Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to thy glory.' We need this constant guidance and direction from God, that he may still lead us, and keep us from wandering and turning aside.

Use. You see, then, what need we have of a guide and shepherd, and of constant dependence upon God. Of all titles, this is the title given to the saints; they are a 'flock, and the sheep of God's pasture;' and Christ is called 'the shepherd of souls,' 1 Peter 2:25. There is no creature of such a dependence as sheep. Dogs and swine can roam abroad all the day, and find their way home again at night, but sheep must have a guide to keep them in the fold, and to reduce them when gone astray, Luke 15. The good shepherd brought him home upon his shoulders. Lord, saith Austin, I can go astray of myself, but I cannot come back of myself. We need often to put up this request, 'Oh, let me not wander from thy commandments.'

## **SERMON XII**

## **Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.—VER. 11.**

IN this verse you have David's practice, and the aim and end of it.

1. His practice, I have hid thy word in my heart.
2. The aim and end of it, that I might not sin against thee.

In the first, his practice, observe these circumstances—

1. The object or matter, the word.
2. The act of duty, I have hid.
3. The subject, the heart.

I shall open these circumstances.

1. The object, the word. The revelation of God's mind to his people is called his law, his testimonies, his ways, his precepts, his statutes, his commandments, his judgments, and now his word; whereby is meant God's expounding his mind as if he himself did speak to us. The expression is general, and compriseth promises, threatenings, doctrines, counsels, precepts. All these must be hid in the heart.

2. The act of duty, I have hid. A thing may be hidden two ways, either to conceal it, or else to cherish and keep it.

[1.] To conceal it; hid so as the unprofitable servant did hide his talent in a napkin, Mat. 25. So David, typifying Christ, saith, 'I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy

faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and truth from the great congregation.'

[2.] To be kept as things of price, as jewels and treasures are hidden in chests and secret places, that they may not be embezzled or purloined. And herein there may be an allusion to the law, which was kept in a chest or ark, Exod. 25:21. Thus the word is hidden, not in order to concealment, but safety. As to the conceit of hiding our knowledge, that we may not lose it by vainglory, which Chrysostom and Theodoret mention on the place, it is a conceit so foreign, that it need not to be mentioned. What we value most preciously we save most carefully.

3. The subject or place where the word is hidden, in the heart. Not the brain, or mind and memory only, but the heart, the seat of affections. To hide the word in our hearts is to understand and remember it, and to be affected to it and with it. Christ saith, John 14:21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.' First we must have them, and then keep them. First we know them, then assent to them, and then approve them, because of the authority of the lawgiver, and the excellency of the thing commanded; and then respect them as a treasure that we are chary of; and having them still in our eye, do thereby regulate our practice and conversation. In short, by holding it in our hearts is meant not only a knowledge of the word, but an assent to it; not only an assent to it, but a serious and sound digestion of it by meditation; not only a digestion, but a constant respect to it, that we may not transgress it as it is a rule, nor lose it as it is a treasure, but may have it ready and forthcoming upon all occasions.

The points are these:—

Doct. 1. One duty and necessary practice of God's children is to hide the word in their hearts.

Doct. 2. That in hiding the word in our hearts, there must be a right end; our knowledge of it and delight in it must be directed to practice.

1. That one duty and necessary practice of God's children is to hide the word in their hearts. See it confirmed by a scripture or two: Josh. 1:8, 'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night;' Job 22:22, 'Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thy heart.' By the law is meant the whole word of God. 'Lay up his words,' as we would do choice things, that they may not be lost or embezzled; and lay them up as treasure to be used upon all occasions. 'In the heart;' let them not swim in the brain or memory only, but let the heart be affected with it: Col. 3:16, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly;' be so diligent in the study of the scripture, that it may become familiar with us, by frequent hearing, reading, meditating, conferring about it. As a stranger, let it not stand at the door, but receive it into an inner room; be as familiar as those that dwell with you. God complaineth of his people: Hosea 8:12, 'I have written to them the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.' To be strangers to the word of God, and little conversant in it, is a great evil. What is it to hide the word in our hearts? (1.) To understand it, to get a competent knowledge of it; we take in things into the soul by the understanding: Prov. 2:10, 'When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul.' There is first an entrance by knowledge. (2.) When it is assented unto by faith. The word is settled in the heart by faith, otherwise it soon vanisheth: Heb. 4:2, 'The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.' (3.) When it is kindly entertained:



John 8:37, Christ complains, 'Ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you,' οὐ χωρεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν. Men are so possessed with lust and prejudice, that there is no room for Christ's word. Though it break in upon the heart with evidence and power, yet it is not entertained there, but cast out again as an unwelcome guest. (4.) When it is deeply rooted. Many men have flashes for a time; their affections may be much aloft, and they may have great fits and elevations of joy and delight, but no sound grace: John 5:35, 'Ye rejoiced in his light for a season.' But now the word must be settled into a standing affection, if we would have comfort and profit by it. We read of 'the ingrafted word,' James 1:21. There is a word bearing fruit, and a word ingrafted. Till there be the root of the matter in us, in vain do we expect fruit.

The reasons why this is one duty and practice of the saints, to hide the word in their hearts, are two:—

Reas. 1. First, that we may have it ready for our use. We lay up principles, that we may lay them out upon all occasions. Man hath an ingestive and an egestive faculty; when it is hid in the heart, it will be ready to break out in the tongue and practice, and be forthcoming to direct us in every duty and exigency. When persons run to the market for every pennyworth, it doth not become good housekeepers. To be to seek of comforts when we should use them, or to run to a book, is not so comfortable as to hide it in the heart. As Christ saith, 'A good scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old,' Mat. 13:52. He hath not only this year's growth, but the last year's gathering (for so is the allusion made); he hath not only from hand to mouth, but a good stock by him. So should a Christian have not only knowledge from hand to mouth, but a good stock and treasure in his heart, which is a very great advantage in these seven things.

1. It will prevent vain thoughts. What is the reason evil is so ready and present with us? Because our stock of knowledge is so small. A man that hath a pocket fuller of brass farthings than pieces of silver, will more readily draw out farthings than shillings; his stock is greater. So vain thoughts will be more ready with us, unless the word dwell richly in our hearts: Mat. 12:35, 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.' The workings of our spirits are as our treasure and stock. The mind works upon what it finds in itself, as a mill grinds whatsoever is put into it, chaff or corn. Therefore, if we would prevent wicked thoughts, and musings of vanity all the day long, we must hide the word in our heart.

2. When you are alone and without outward helps, your hearts will furnish you with matter of counsel, or comfort, or reproof: Ps. 16:7, 'My reins instruct me in the night season.' When we are alone, and there is a veil of darkness drawn upon the world, and we have not the benefit of a bible, a minister, or Christian friends, our reins will instruct us; we may draw out of our heart that which will be for our comfort and refreshing. A Christian is to be a walking bible, to have a good stock and treasure in himself.

3. It will supply us in prayer. Barrenness and leanness of soul is a very great defect, which God's children often complain of. One great reason is, because the word of God doth not dwell plenteously in them, so that in every prayer we are to seek. If the heart were often exercised in the word, the promises would hold up our hearts in prayer, enlarge our affections, and we should be better able to pour out our spirits before him: Ps. 45:1, 'My heart is inditing a good matter.' What then? 'My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.' When the heart is full, the tongue will be loosed and speak freely. What is the reason we are so dumb and tongue-tied in prayer? Because our

heart is so barren. When the spring is dry, there will be little water in the stream: Eph. 6:17, 'Take the sword of the Spirit, that is the word of God;' then presently, 'praying with all manner of supplication.' When we have a good store of the word of God it will burst out in prayer.

4. It will be a great help to us in all businesses and affairs. Prov. 6:21, 22, speaking of the precepts of God, 'Bind them upon thy heart; when thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.' Upon all occasions the word will be ready to cast in seasonable thoughts. When we awake, our most early thoughts in the morning will begin with God, to season the heart all the day; and as we are about our business, the word will hold our hearts in the fear of God; and when we sleep, it will guard thee from vain dreams and light imaginations. In a wicked man sin engrosseth all the thoughts; it employs him all the day, plays in his fancy all the night; it solicits him first in the morning, because he is a stranger to the word of God. But a man that is a bible to himself, the word will be ever upon him, urging him to duty, restraining him from sin, directing him in his ways, seasoning his work and employment. Therefore we should hide the word in our hearts.

5. It is a great relief against temptations to have the word ready. The word is called 'The sword of the Spirit,' Eph. 6:17. In spiritual conflicts there is none to that. Those that ride abroad in time of danger will not be without a sword. We are in danger, and had need handle the sword of the Spirit. The more ready the scripture is with us, the greater advantage in our conflicts and temptations. When the devil came to assault Christ, he had scripture ready for him, whereby he overcame the tempter. The door is barred upon Satan, and he cannot find such easy entrance, when the word is hid in our hearts,

and made use of pertinently: 1 John 2:14, 'I write to you, young men, because ye are strong.' Where lies their strength? 'And the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.' Oh, it is a great advantage when we have the word not only by us, but in us, ingrafted in the heart! When it is present with us, we are more able to resist the assaults of Satan. Either a man forgets the word or hath lost his affection to it, before he can be drawn to sin. The word of God, when it hath gotten into the heart, it will furnish us with seasonable thoughts.

6. It is a great relief in troubles and afflictions. Our faintings come from ignorance, or our forgetfulness: Heb. 12:5, 'Ye have forgotten the consolation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.' If we had a herb growing in our gardens that would ease our smart, what are we the better if we know it not? There is no malady but what hath its remedy in the word. To have a comfort ready is a great relief.

7. It makes our conference and conversation with others more gracious: Mat. 12:34, 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' When we have a great deal of hidden treasure in the soul it will get out at the tongue; for there is a quick intercourse between the heart and the tongue. The tap runs according to the liquor wherewith the vessel is filled. Come to men of an unsavoury spirit, pierce them, broach them, give them occasion again and again for discourse, and you get nothing but frothy communication from them and vain talk. But now a man that hath stored his heart with the word is ever and anon interposing for God. Like a bottle filled with wine, he must have vent. As the spouse's lips are said to 'drop as honeycombs,' they are ever putting forth savoury expressions in their converse with others: Col. 3:16, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly, teaching and

admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.' It will burst out presently if the word of God dwell in your hearts.

Before I go to the second reason, let me answer an objection: But is not this to take from the Spirit, and to give it to the word? and that to the word, not as written in God's book, but as it is in our hearts? Will not this be to ascribe all to created grace? I answer—

1. Questionless it is the office of the Spirit to bring things to our remembrance, and the great help of the Spirit of God is by suggesting such passages as may be of most seasonable relief to the soul in temptations, in prayer, and in business, John 14:16. But what is given to the scriptures and grace is not to the wrong of the Spirit, for the scripture is of his inditing, and grace is of his working; yea, we still reserve the chief honour to the Holy Ghost, for he not only worketh grace, but worketh by grace. He not only indites the scripture, but works by it; it is he that quickeneth prayer; and therefore it is ill trusting to our own understanding and memory, for it is the Spirit that is the great remembrancer, and impresseth upon the mind savoury and seasonable thoughts.

2. I grant further, the children of God are subject to much forgetfulness of the truth that is impressed upon their hearts. Partly through the present cloud and mist which the temptation raiseth. The Psalmist had truths enough to support him, Ps. 73:17; yet he saith, 'Until I went into the sanctuary of God, I was foolish and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee, 'There is so much dulness upon the children of God that they cannot remember seasonable thoughts; as Hagar had a fountain by her, yet she did not see it till God opened her eyes, Gen. 21. So under the temptation all are benighted, and the light that is in the understanding is obscured. And partly through the little sense they have for the present of the

need of the comforts which the word propoundeth; few so wise as to lay up for a dear year. And partly through sloth and negligence, being taken up with other things. It is possible sometimes that we may be guided by the Spirit, and act right merely by the guidance of the Holy Ghost, without any interposing and concurrence of our own understandings; as John 12:13, compared with ver. 16, 'They took branches of palm-trees, and went forth to meet him; and cried, Hosanna, blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.' 'These things understood not his disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.' Mark, they were guided by the Spirit to do that they knew not for the present; they had only a back-look, not a foresight; they were ignorant of what they were doing until afterward; thoughts came not in their mind but only in the review: John 2:22, 'When he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them.' They did not take up the meaning of them, yet they were guided aright. They did not carp against Christ, as the Jews did. They were guided by the Spirit in a case they were wholly ignorant.

3. The Holy Ghost makes use of a sanctified memory, bringing scriptures to our remembrance as we have need. It is made their act, because the Holy Ghost made use of their memories: 'They remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up,' John 2:17. They that neglect to search and hide the word in their hearts, they have not such seasonable refreshment; for God works more strongly with the strongest graces; there where there is the greater receptivity, there is the greater influence; those that are ignorant cannot expect such help as those that have the word dwell richly in their hearts.

The second reason is, therefore should we hide the word in our hearts, because God doth so in the work of conversion: Heb. 8:10, 'I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts.' The mind is compared to tables of stone, and the heart to the ark; and so this is required of us to 'write them upon the table of our heart,' Prov. 7:3; and here, 'I have hidden thy word in my heart.' How doth this follow? because God doth so in conversion, therefore it is our duty?

I answer—(1.) God requires what he works, to show the creature's duty, as well as the power of his own grace. God is to convert and turn; yet do you turn, circumcise your heart, and I will circumcise; mortify your members, &c.; and yet, 'If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.' He gives and requires; to engage the subserviency of our endeavours, and to make us sensible of our duty and obligation. (2.) This followeth because this work must be gone over again and again that it may be more explicit. We must revive the work, and put a fresh copy of the law into our heart, to keep the old work a-foot.

Use 1. To persuade you to study the scripture, that you may get understanding, and hide the word in your hearts for gracious purposes. This is the book of books; let it not lie idle and unemployed. The world can as well be without the sun as the bible. Ps. 19, first he speaks of the sun, then of the law of God. This is to the Christian and gracious world as the sun is to the outward world. The use and profit of it should make us look after more acquaintance with it. Consider the great use of the word for informing the understanding and reforming the will. For informing the understanding: 2 Tim. 3:17, the word of God is 'able to make the man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnished.' Who should have more knowledge than the man of God, that is to stand in God's stead, and teach the people? Then for reforming the will: ver. 9 of this psalm,

'Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.' A young man that is so heedless and headstrong, and in the very ruff and heat of his lusts, yet there is enough in the word to cleanse and tame him, and subdue him to God. Oh! therefore, let us get it into our hearts; let it not only move the lighter part of the soul, but get rooting, that it may have its full power and force, that we may not only have a little knowledge to talk of it; but we are to hide it deeply, that it may take root, and spring up again in our lives and conversations. To this end meditate often of it, and receive it in the love of it.

1. Meditate often of it: Luke 2:19, 'Mary kept all these sayings.' How did she keep them? She 'pondered them in her heart.' Musing makes the fire to burn, and deep and constant thoughts are operative; not a glance or a slight view. The hen which straggleth from her nest when she sits a-brooding produceth nothing; it is a constant incubation which hatcheth the young. So when we have only a few straggling thoughts, and do not sit a-brooding upon a truth; when we have flashes only, like a little glance of a sunbeam upon a wall, it doth nothing; but serious and inculcative thoughts, through the Lord's blessing, will do the work. Urge the heart again and again; as the apostle, when he had laid down the doctrine of justification and the privileges thereof: Rom. 8:31, 'Now what shall we say to these things?' Is this a truth?—then what will become of me if I disregard it? Thus to return upon our heart when any light begins to shine in our minds from the scripture: is this the word of God, and doth it find no more entertainment in my heart?

2. Receive it in the love of it. The apostle makes that to be the ground of apostasy: 2 Thes. 2:10, 'Because they received not the truth in the love of it,' &c. Oh! let it soak into the affections. If it lie only in the tongue or in the mind, only to make it a matter of talk and



speculation, it will be soon gone. The seed which lies upon the surface, the fowls of the air will pick it up. Therefore hide it deeply; let it get from the ear into the mind, from the mind into the heart; let it soak further and further. First men have a naked apprehension of truth, then it gets into the conscience, and then it lies in the heart, then it is laid up; but when we suffer it only to be made matter of speculation, it is soon lost. Know this, a man may receive a thing in the evidence and light of it, when he doth not receive it in the love of it. When it rests in naked speculation, then he receives a thing in the evidence and light of it; but when it hath a prevailing sovereignty in the heart, then we receive it in the love of it. When it is dearer than our dearest lust, then it will stick by us; when we are willing to sell all for the pearl of price, Mat. 13:46. We are often put to it what we will part with—our lusts or the truth. When it breaks in upon the heart with evidence and power, you cannot keep both. Therefore let it soak into the affections, and hide the word in your hearts, that you may not sin against God.

Use 2. To direct you what to do in reading, hearing, meditating.

1. In reading. Hide the word in your hearts. The word may be reduced to doctrines, promises, threatenings. (1.) For doctrines, lay up knowledge, Prov. 10:14. It is a notable preservative against sin, and an antidote against the infection of the world, when we have a good stock of principles: Ps. 37:31, 'The law of God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.' As long as truth is kept lively and active, and in view of conscience, we shall not slide, or not so often slide. We have many temptations to divert us from the truth and obedience; but here we are in safety, when the law of God is in our heart. How often was the word of God in Joseph's heart: 'How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' Against God, that is of such a sovereign majesty!—against God, of such infinite goodness and

mighty power, so able to save and to destroy! Every time you read the scriptures you should lay up something. The best way to destroy ill weeds is by planting the ground with right seed. Everywhere we shall meet with notable passages. Therefore, stock yourselves with good principles. (2.) Then for promises, that part of the word. What have you hidden in your heart for comfort against temptations, desertions, afflictions? What have you laid up against a dear year? Job 22:22, 'Lay up his word in thine heart.' In a time of trial you will find one promise will give you more comfort and support than all the arguments that can be produced by reason: Ps. 119:50, 'This is my comfort in my affliction; thy word hath quickened me.' He had a word to support him. Therefore let us treasure up all the promises; all will be little enough when we need comforts. That we may not have them to seek in a time of distress, it is good they should be familiar. As you read the word, collect for your comfort and profit; happy is the man that hath his garner full of them. (3.) And so for threatenings, especially against the sins we are most inclinable to: 'Who among you will give ear, and hear for the time to come?' Isa. 42:23. You should think of what will come afterward. It is well with you for the present, but matters to come are put off, little cared for, Amos 6:3.

2. In hearing. Do not hear slightly, but hide the word in your heart, that it be not embezzled by thy own negligence, forgetfulness, running into carnal distractions; that it be not purloined by Satan, that he may not snatch away the good seed out of thy soul. When the word is preached, there is more company present than is visible; there are angels and devils in the assembly. Whenever the sons of God meet together, Satan is present with them. The devil is present to divert the mind by wandering thoughts, by raising prejudices, that we may cast out the word; or by excuses, delays, evasions, putting it off to others when we begin to have some sensibleness of our sin and

danger. The devil is loath to let us go too far, lest Christ get a subject into his kingdom. Oh! therefore, labour to get something into thy heart by every sermon; some fresh notion or consideration is given out to set you a-work in the spiritual life. A conscientious waiting upon God will find something every time. It is sad to consider how many have heard much, and laid up little or nothing at all; it may be they have laid it up in their note-books, but not laid up the word in their hearts.

3. For meditation. Meditate upon the word; do not study the word in a cursory manner, or content yourselves with a slight taste, or a little volatile affection; but ponder it seriously, that it may enter into your very heart. Hasty and perfunctory thoughts work nothing. Meat must be well chewed and digested, if you would have it turn into good blood and spirits. You must follow it close till it settle into some affection.

So much for David's practice, I have hid thy word in my heart.

The second thing is the aim and end of it, that I may not sin against thee.

Doct. 2. In hiding the word in our hearts there must be a right end; our knowledge of it and delight in it must be directed to practice.

1. We must not study the word merely out of curiosity, that we may know what is said there, as men will pry into civil art and discipline. So the Athenians flocked about Paul, Acts 17:18–21; so for novelty's sake men may have an affection and a delight in the word: John 5:35, 'Ye rejoiced in his light for a season.' There are certain adulterous affections we have to the word when it is new and fresh, but when it grows stale we loathe it. This affection to the word is soon spent.

2. We must not hide the word in our heart merely that we may be able to teach others, that we may make a gainful trade of it. Alas! a man may teach others and be himself a castaway. Look, as in coining of money, an iron stamp may impress the character and print upon a piece of gold and silver, so God may use the gifts and knowledge of some men to beget faith in others, and perish themselves: Mat. 7:21, 'We have prophesied in thy name;' yet 'Depart from me; I know you not.'

3. This must not be our end neither, not merely for delight. Largeness of knowledge brings a content with it, as it is an addition to our perfection. Truth is the object of our understanding, and may please an unsanctified mind. Not merely out of subserviency to some base and inferior ends, that we may get esteem in the world, or the repute of knowing persons, but as it is an elevation of the understanding. Every delight in truth is not a delight in God. There is a natural oblectation we have in the contemplation of any sublime truth; this is merely a delight in the work of our own faculties, when the affections are terminated in bare knowledge; as it is a high and mysterious truth, as it is a delectation to the understanding.

4. We are not merely to study the word for the comfortableness of it, and the suitableness to the conscience. As man is a reasonable creature, he will delight in knowledge; and as he hath a conscience presageous of death and judgment to come, he may delight in the comfort of it. Many search out promises that do not affect precepts. The stony ground seemed to have a joy; they may delight in the comfortable part of religion; but this joy comes to nothing—this gladsome forward spring is no sure prognostication of a plentiful harvest. Then do we receive the word aright when we look to the holy part, and mortify our natural desires and affections. Many deal with the word as great men do with fleshly companions—are willing to

entertain them at their tables to hear their discourse, because of the pleasantness of their mirth; but to enter into bonds for them, and discharge them from debt, or better their fortunes, that they will not do. So many will give Christ and the word, and the comfortable part of it, entertainment; but they are loath to take the duty of the gospel upon themselves. Therefore, it is not enough to study the word merely that we may cherish our own persons with the comfortable part of it; but we must also study the holy part of it, and that which doth require our duty. Let us labour to hide the word in our hearts, as David did: 'I have hid thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.'

## **SERMON XIII**

### **Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes.—VER. 12.**

IN these words you have:—

1. A compellation, blessed art thou, O Lord.
2. A supplication, teach me thy statutes.

First, The compellation carrieth the force of an argument: Because thou art blessed, O Lord, therefore teach me. And therefore I shall open the sense of this title that is here given to God, so as I may still make good the argument.

For the sense, God may be said to be blessed objectively or subjectively.

First, Objectively, as he is the object of our blessedness. It is our blessedness to enjoy God: Ps. 144:15, 'Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord.' That is our blessedness, to have God for our portion. As soon as we are admitted into covenant with God, we have a right to him: 'I am thy God;' and we have the full consummation of it when we enter into heaven; there we have the highest enjoyment of God that we are capable of. We have many fruitless and unquiet cares to enjoy the creatures, which are neither blessed in themselves, nor can make us blessed; but now God is our summum bonum, our chief good; the enjoyment of him is the chiefest good. Still we are capable of a higher happiness until we enjoy God. In other things we can neither have satisfaction nor security: the creature cannot satisfy, nor yet secure us in the enjoyment of itself. In this sense the argument will hold good: 'Blessed art thou, O Lord;' that is, Thou art the object of my blessedness; my blessedness lieth in the enjoyment of thee; therefore teach me thy statutes. If God be our chiefest good and our utmost end, it concerns us nearly to learn out the way how we may enjoy him: John 17:3, 'This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' It concerns believers to study that wherein their eternal happiness consisteth, and what is the way to get it: 'Thou art blessed, and therefore teach me thy statutes.'

Secondly, Subjectively; and so again God is blessed either in art active or in a passive sense.

1. In an active sense. And here we must distinguish again; for so God is blessed either with respect to himself or with respect to us.

[1.] Blessed in himself, as he hath the fulness of perfection and contentment. Blessedness is often ascribed to God: 1 Tim. 1:11, 'The glorious gospel of the blessed God.' I will open that place by and by: 1

Tim. 6:15, 'Who is the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.' Now, how is God blessed in himself? God's blessedness is that attribute by which the Lord, from himself, and in his own being, is free from all misery and enjoyeth all good, and is sufficient to himself, and contented with himself, and doth neither need nor desire the creature for any good that can accrue to him by us. Or, more shortly, God's blessedness is the fruition of himself, and his delighting in himself. Mark, it lieth not in the enjoyment of the creature, but in the enjoyment of himself. God useth us, but doth not enjoy us. As we enjoy a thing for itself, but we use it for another; so *uti* and *frui* differ: we use the means, but enjoy the end. God useth the creature in subserviency to his own glory. So it is said: Prov. 16:4, 'God made all things for himself.' His happiness lieth in knowing himself, in loving himself, in delighting in himself.

But how is this used as an argument, 'Blessed art thou, O Lord; therefore teach me thy statutes'? Either thus: God, that is blessed, hath enough for himself; surely there is enough in him for us too: Gen. 17:1, 'I am God all-sufficient; walk before me, and be thou perfect.' I say, if God finds satisfaction enough in himself, our souls surely will find satisfaction in him. That which will fill a pottle, or greater measure, will fill a pint or a lesser measure; that which will satisfy a prince, and be enough for him in that estate, will satisfy a beggar, and supply his wants. God hath an infinite fulness of knowledge, comfort, and holiness; therefore surely enough to satisfy us, as empty as we are. Therefore we should desire to receive of this fulness in God's way. Or, again, thus: If God be blessed, we had need to inquire after his statutes, for these teach us the way how we may be blessed in God's blessedness, how we may be conformed to the nature of God, and live the life of God, and then surely we shall be happy enough. (1.) How we may be conformed to the nature of God: 2 Peter 1:4, 'That we may be partakers of the divine nature,'

according to our measure, that ours may be such as his is. The promises, or the word, have an influence that way. If we see a man hath a rich trade, and secret ways of gain, every one would be acquainted with the mysteries and art of his getting, and desirous to know it. God is eternally blessed, therefore we should study to be like him. (2.) That we may live the life of God. Surely if we could learn to live such a life as God doth, we should be happy. However our prejudices darken it, yet the life of God cannot be a gloomy life. Now, ignorance of God's statutes is a great hindrance to the life of God: Eph. 4:18, 'Being alienated or estranged from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.' Well, then, the consideration of this, that God is blessed, will certainly make us prize his statutes, prize his word, for by that we are conformed to the nature of God, and to the life of God; we are engaged in the same design wherein God himself is engaged: God loves himself, and acts for himself, and pursueth his own glory. Now when the word of God breaks in upon the heart, we pursue the same design with God. Men are prejudiced against a course of holiness; it seems to look upon them with a sour and austere face. Surely God loves a pleasant life; whoever is miserable, he hath a full contentment. Doth he that made all things want true joy and contentment? Who should have happiness if God hath not? Now, when we learn God's statutes, we come to be conformed to the nature of God; we love what he loves, and hate what he hates, and then we begin to live the life of God. The happiness of God lieth in loving himself, enjoying himself, and acting for his own glory; and this is the fruit of grace, to teach us to live as God lives, to do as God doth, to love him and enjoy him as our chiefest good, and to glorify him as our utmost end. This is the first sense wherein God may be said to be actively blessed, as he hath infinite complacency in himself.



[2.] God is actively blessed with respect to us as he is the fountain of all blessedness. He is not only blessedness itself, but willing to communicate and give it out to the creature, especially his saints. He fills all created things with his blessedness: Ps. 145:16, 'Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.' There is not a creature in the world but hath tasted of God's bounty, but especially the saints: Eph. 1:3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ.' These are vessels into which God is still pouring more, until they be completely filled up. Now, this communicativeness that is in God, without any irking of mind, is a certain argument or encouragement to move us to seek of God grace to keep his statutes. This is often urged in this case, his communicativeness to all his creatures: ver. 64, 'The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy; teach me thy statutes.' Thou art bountiful to all creatures; and, O Lord, show thy bounty to me. The same again: ver. 68, 'Thou art good, and dost good; teach me thy statutes.' Every good, the more good it is, the more it is diffusive of itself. And it is a part of God's blessedness that he is still of the giving hand: Acts 20:35, 'Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.' It was a maxim which Christ commended to his disciples: 'Remember the words of the Lord Jesus;' that which he often inculcated, 'That it is more blessed to give than to receive.' The words formally indeed are not found in any evangelist; only there we may see the whole drift of Christ's doctrine was to press men to give; it is a more blessed thing. This is the happiness of God, that he gives to all, and receives of none; that he is so ready to communicate of his own fulness upon such free terms: John 1:16, 'Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace;' that is, grace for grace's sake. Thus we have seen how God is actively blessed.

2. God is passively blessed as he is blessed by us, or as worthy of all praise from us, for his goodness, righteousness, and mercy, and the communications of his grace. There are two words by which our thanksgiving is expressed—praise and blessing. You have both in Ps. 145:10, 'All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee.' Praise relateth to God's excellency, and blessing to his benefits. His works declare his excellency: but his saints, which are sensible of his benefits, they bless him; they count him worthy of all honour and praise, and are ever ascribing to him, Rev. 5:13, 'Blessing, honour, glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.' Why blessing? As for other things, so it was for opening the book which was sealed with seven seals, and revealing his mind to his people; as you may see, ver. 9. So David here, 'Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes.' As if he had said, Lord, thou art, and thou shalt be blessed: I bless thee that thou hast taught me; and I desire thou wouldst teach me still, that I may ever bless thee. Thus it may be taken in a passive sense, as he is the object of our blessedness.

Well, then, all that I have said upon this compellation may be reduced to these six propositions:—

1. That God is over all, and above all, blessed enough in himself, and needeth nothing from us to add to his happiness and perfection.

That he is blessed enough in himself: Rom. 9:5, 'God over all, blessed for ever.' That he needs nothing from us to add to his happiness and perfection: Ps. 16:2, 'My righteousness, my goodness, extendeth not to thee.' He is above our benefits and injuries. If there could result any one happiness to God from the creature, surely then he would have made the world sooner; what hindered him? for why should he keep himself out of his own happiness? And therefore he made the

world, not that he might be happy, but that he might be liberal. Before ever there was hill or mountain, man or angel, God was happy enough in himself. The divine persons took infinite delight and complacency in each other; as their rejoicing is expressed: Prov. 8:30, 31, 'I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.' God had infinite complacency in Christ, and Christ in God, both in the Spirit, all in each, and each in all, before ever there was hill or mountain. The world is upheld, as stones are in an arch, by a mutual dependence, by a combination of interests. We need one another, but God doth not stand in need of us. 'The head cannot say to the foot, I have no need of thee;' the greatest stand in need of the meanest, of their labours, their service; the meanest parts have their use in the body. But now, God standeth in no need of us, for he giveth all, and he receiveth nothing back again; as the fountain hath no need of the stream, but the stream hath need of the fountain. The sun fills the lap of the earth with blessings, and the earth returns nothing but vapours, that obscure its beams rather than add anything to its brightness. God filleth every living thing, especially his saints, with blessing, and receiveth nothing from us again.

2. Though God stand in no need of us, yet he is willing to communicate his blessedness, and to make us happy in the enjoyment of himself.

There is a threefold consideration which doth advance the bounty of God—that to us, that himself to us, and that so readily and freely.

[1.] That to us, who can neither hurt him nor help him: Ps. 8:3, 4, 'Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him?' What a poor sorry creature is man I wilt thou set thine eyes upon such a one? What would God lose if we were all damned? or what would he gain if all were saved? He would lose no

more by us than a bounteous man doth by the death of a company of beggars and maimed persons, which live upon his expense and charge. Wherein can we be useful to God?

[2.] Herein lieth the bounty of God, to give us such a blessing as the enjoyment of himself. When he had no greater thing to swear by, saith the apostle, he sware by himself. When God hath no greater thing to give us, he gives us himself: 'I am thy God.' He scatters and sheds abroad some common influences upon all creatures; but to us he gives not only that which is his, but gives us himself, that when our happiness is at the highest, we may immediately enjoy him.

For the opening of this blessedness in giving us the fruition of himself, consider we enjoy God two ways—mediately and immediately; one proper to this world, the other to the next.

(1.) Mediatly. We enjoy God when he communicateth himself to us by secondary means, or the interposition of the creature between him and us. Thus in common mercies, when he feeds us by his meat and drink, and enlighteneth us with his sun. Here in the world we have blessings at second or third hand: 'I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth,' &c., Hosea 2:21, 22. Whatever one creature affordeth to another, it hath it first from God. The creature is but an empty hollow pipe through which the blessing runs, and it passeth from pipe to pipe. God poureth out his influences to the heavens, and the heavens pour out their influences upon the earth; and the strength of the earth runneth up into corn, wine, and oil, and by corn, wine, and oil Israel hath his refreshments. So still from pipe to pipe is the blessing conveyed to the creature. So for special mercies; we have them by degrees; life, comfort, grace by the word and seals. But the Lord will not only supply us at second and third hand, but—

(2.) Immediately. When God communicates himself to us without any other thing between us and him; when we are immediately present with God, and have immediate influences from God, this is the happiness of heaven. In the heavenly state 'God shall be all in all,' 1 Cor. 15:28. He shall be both the dispenser and the dispensation. There we see him face to face, 'and in his face and presence there is fulness of joy,' Ps. 16:11. That is our happiness in the next world, where immediate influences and virtue doth pass out from him. In heaven there is no temple, Rev. 21:22, 'But the Lamb is the temple of it.' There is a service of God, and constant influences in that God supplieth all immediately from himself.

[3.] This is upon free terms: John 1:16, 'Of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace.'

3. The word of God, especially the gospel part, doth only teach us the way how we may be blessed in the enjoyment of God.

That is a notable place to this purpose: 1 Tim. 1:11, 'The glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.' Mark there, first, he calls it 'the glorious gospel.' When he speaks of the law in that place he saith, 'We know that the law is good,'—compare it with ver. 8; but when he comes to speak of the gospel, he calls it 'the glorious gospel.' The law is good, but the gospel glorious, because more of the glory of God is displayed and discovered to the creature. And 'the glorious gospel of the blessed God.' Titles are always suited to the case in hand; therefore it is called 'The glorious gospel of the blessed God,' because there God is discovered as ready to bless us; there is the way how we may come to be blessed in God, how he may with respect to us be a fountain of blessedness; there we have the highest discoveries of this mystery, the most moving arguments to persuade us to look after it; and with this gospel there is a grace, a

virtue dispensed to enable us to walk in this way. So that if we would enjoy the blessed God, we must consult with his statutes, and especially the gospel.

4. If we would profit by the word of God, we must go to God, and desire the light and strength of his grace.

If we would enjoy the blessed God, according to the direction of his word, we must not only consult with the word, but with God. Nothing else can draw us off from the world, and persuade us to look after heavenly things; nothing else will teach us the vanity of the creature, the reality of spiritual privileges. Until we see these things in a divine light, the heart hangs off from God; and therefore saith David, Ps. 16:7, 'I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel.' He had chosen God for his portion, and then 'I will bless the Lord,' &c. We shall still run after lying vanities until God doth open your eyes to see the mysteries of the word, and to be affected with the way. Those that are drawn to God must first be taught of God: John 6:44, 'No man cometh to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him;' for Christ adds presently, 'They shall be all taught of God.' Our hearts can never be drawn unto God until he take us into his own hands.

5. The more we are brought to attend upon the word, and the more influence the word hath upon us, the nearer the blessing.

Christians, we are not far from the kingdom of God. There is some blessedness when we begin to look after the directions of the word, and to wait upon the teachings of God: Prov. 8:34, 'Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.' Then you are in a hopeful way to true blessedness when you begin to be careful to attend upon God's teaching, much more when you have the fruits of it, when you know him so as to love him, so as to have your hearts drawn off from sin and folly: Acts 3:26,

'Him hath God sent to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.' The great business of Jesus Christ is to make us blessed in the enjoyment of God. But how is it? only by bare knowledge? No, it is by turning every one from his iniquity. So the more this teaching of God prevails upon the heart, the more blessed we are: Ps. 119:1, 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.' Otherwise, to have a golden head and feet of clay, that is monstrous, as in Nebuchadnezzar's image; to have a naked knowledge of God, and not brought under the power of it. You read of the heathens, when they sacrificed to their gods, they were wont to hang a garland upon the heads of the beasts, and to crown them with roses, so they were led on to sacrifice. Many may have garlands upon their heads, ornaments of knowledge, yet are going on to destruction; therefore that light and teaching which conveyeth blessedness is such as prevaieth upon the heart, and doth effectually turn us to God.

6. It is not only an affront put upon God, but also a great wrong, to neglect the word of God, and the way he prescribes, and to seek blessedness in temporal things.

Here you have the true way to blessedness set down in God's statutes; but in outward things there wants fulness, sincerity, eternity.

[1.] There wants fulness. That which makes us blessed, it must fill up the heart of man. As a vessel is never full until it have as much as it can hold, so we can never be said to have a full happiness and contentment until we have as much as we can hold. That which fills must be greater than the thing filled. Now man's heart is such a chaos of desires, that it can never be filled up but in God: Ps. 16:11, 'In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for

evermore.' Therefore, of the joy and happiness we have in God, it is said, 'Enter into thy master's joy,' Mat. 25. When we speak of a cup of water, that enters into the man, that is taken down into the man; but if we speak of a river of water, or tub of water, that is greater than the man is capable of, or can receive,—the man enters into it; so this joy and happiness, which is truly and genuinely so, it must exceed our capacity, greater than we can receive, that we may enter into it; it is the infinite God can only satisfy the heart of man. In temporal things there is no kind of fulness; you have not one worldly comfort, but you desire more of it. Ahab was a king, yet still he wants something, Naboth's vineyard. A man is not satisfied with abundance, neither is his soul filled with increase of worldly things; yet we may desire more, Eccles. 5; and if we have one thing to the full, yet we shall need another. If a man be strong, he may need learning; it may be though he hath some kind of learning and knowledge, yet he hath not wisdom. Naaman was rich, wise, valiant, and honourable, but he was a leper. There is a but upon all worldly happiness; therefore there is no fulness in these things.

[2.] There is no sincerity in them. All that is in the world is but a semblance and an appearance, that which tickles the senses; it doth not go to the heart. You would have thought Belshazzar was merry at the heart when he was quaffing and carousing in the cups of the temple; but how soon is the edge of his bravery taken off, Dan. 5:5, 6. Haman in the midst of his honours was troubled at the heart for want of Mordecai's knee. Those things which seem to affect us so much cannot allay one unquiet passion, certainly cannot still and pacify the least storm of the conscience; and therefore, whatever face men put upon temporal enjoyments, if they cannot see God's special love in them, they want sincere joy. There is many a smart lash they feel when the world hears not the stroke: Prov. 14:13, 'Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is



heaviness.' All the laughter and merriment which men seem to receive from the creature, it is but a little appearance, not such as will go to the conscience, that will indeed and thoroughly rejoice and comfort a man, and give him solid joy.

[3.] There wants eternity. An immortal soul must have an eternal good, 'pleasures for evermore,' Ps. 16:11. In this world we have but a poor changeable happiness: Luke 12:20, it was said to the rich fool, 'This night thy soul shall be required of thee.'

Thus much for the first branch, blessed art thou, O Lord.

Secondly, I come from the compellation to the supplication, teach me thy statutes. And here observe—(1.) The person teaching; he speaks to God, 'Do thou, O God, teach.' (2.) We may consider the person taught, 'Teach me;' I, that have hid the word in my heart. David, that was a prophet, is willing to be a disciple. Those that teach others have need that God should teach them. The prophet saith, 'Teach me, O Lord.' David, a grown Christian, he desires more understanding of God's will. Certainly we should still 'follow on to know the Lord,' Hosea 6:3. Heathens, that only knew natural and moral things, yet they saw a need of growth; and the more they knew, the more they discovered their ignorance; and always as they grew older, they grew wiser. How much more sensible would they have been of their defects in the knowledge of spiritual things, if they had in a little measure been acquainted with the mysteries of godliness, that pass all understanding, and are so much from human sense, and above the capacities of our reason! Prov. 30:3, Agur said, 'I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy.' There is very much yet to be learned of God, and of his ways. Many think they know all that can be taught them. David, a great prophet, a man after God's own heart, yet is earnest that God would teach him his statutes. (3.) The

lesson or matter to be taught, 'thy statutes;' so he calls the word, because the doctrines of it have the force of a law published; they do unalterably bind, and that the soul and conscience; and therefore the precepts, counsels, and doctrines of the word are all called statutes.

The point is—

Doct. If we would know God's statutes so as to keep them, we must be taught of God.

Here I shall inquire—

1. What it is, or how doth God teach us?
2. The necessity of this teaching.
3. The benefit and utility of it.

First, How doth God teach us?

Outwardly, by his ordinance, by the ministry of man.

Inwardly, by the inspiration and work of the Holy Ghost.

1. The outward teaching is God's teaching, because it is an ordinance which is appointed by him. Now both these must ever go together, external and internal teaching: 'Despise not prophecy, quench not the Spirit.' If you would have any enlightening and quickening of the Spirit, you must not despise prophecy. We teach you here, and God blesseth. Jesus Christ, when he comes to teach his disciples, first he openeth the scripture, Luke 24:37; and then, ver. 45, 'he opened their understandings.' Of Lydia it is said, 'God opened her heart in attending to the things spoken by Paul,' Acts 16:14. She was attending, and then God openeth her heart. When the eunuch was

reading, then God sends an interpreter. The outward means are necessary; it is God's teaching in part; but the inward grace especially. Both these must go together; for it is said, John 6:45, 'Every man that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.' There must be a hearing of the word, and so there is a teaching from God. But—

2. The inward teaching, which is the work of the Spirit, that needs most to be opened. What is that? It consists in two things—(1.) When God infuseth light into the understanding, so as we come to apprehend the things of God in a spiritual manner: Ps. 36:9, 'In thy light shall we see light.' There is no discerning spiritual things spiritually, but in God's light. There may be a literal instruction which one man may give to another, but 'in thy light only shall we see light;' such a lively affective knowledge as disposeth the heart for the enjoyment of God. There is a seeing, and a seeing in seeing: Isa. 6:10, 'Lest in seeing they shall see.' A man may see a truth rationally that doth not see it spiritually. Now, when we have the Spirit's light, then in seeing we see. Or, as the apostle calls it, Col. 1:6, 'A knowing of the grace of God in truth,' since you did not only take up the report, but feel it, and had some experience of it in your hearts. Again, (2.) God's teaching consisteth not only in enlightening the understanding, but in moving and inclining the heart and the will; for God's teaching is always accompanied with drawing: John 6:44, 'No man cometh to me, except the Father draw him;' which Christ proves, ver. 45, because 'they shall be all taught of God.' The Spirit's light is not only directive, but persuasive; it is effectual to alter and to change the affections, and to carry them out to Christ and to his ways; he works powerfully where he teacheth. When the Holy Ghost was first poured out upon the apostles, there was a notable effect of it; it came in the appearance of cloven tongues, like as of fire, Acts 2:3, to show the manner of the Spirit's operation by the ministry; not only as light,

but as fire: it is a burning and a shining light; that is, such a light as is seasoned with zeal and love, that affects the heart, that burns up our corruptions. And therefore, you know, when Christ would put forth a divine effect in his conference with his two disciples, it is said, 'Their hearts burned within them while he talked with them,' Luke 24:32. There is a warmth and heat conveyed to the soul. Thus for the nature of this teaching.

Secondly, The necessity of this teaching will appear in several things.

1. If we consider the weakness of a natural understanding: 1 Cor. 2:14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned.' They must be spiritually understood. There must be a cognation and proportion between the object and the faculty. Divine things cannot be seen but by a divine light, and spiritual things by a spiritual light, else they shall have no savour and relish. Can sense, which is the light of beasts, trace the workings or the flights of reason? Can you see a soul or an angel by the light of a candle? There is no proportion between them. So, can a natural man receive the things of the Spirit? He receives them not. Why? Because spiritual things must be spiritually discerned.

2. There is not only blindness, but obstinacy and prejudice. When we come to judge by sense and reason, the whole business of Christianity seems to be a foolish thing to a carnal heart. To give up ourselves to God, and all our interests, and to wait upon the reversion of a happiness in another world, which is doubtful whether there will be any such thing or no, is a folly to him. To deny present lusts and interests, to be much in prayer, and be often in communion with God, is esteemed a like folly. When the apostle came to preach the gospel to the wits at Athens, they scoffed at him; they entertain his doctrine as fire is entertained in wet wood, with hissing and

scorn. To do all, and suffer all, and that upon the account of a happiness to come, to a carnal heart this is but a fancy and a mere imagination.

3. As blind and obstinate, so we are apt to abuse truth. Carnal hearts turn all to a carnal purpose. As spiders assimilate and turn all they suck into their own substance, so doth a carnal heart turn all, even the counsels and comforts of the word, to a carnal purpose. Or as the sea, whatever comes into it, the sweet rivers and droppings of the clouds, turns all into salt water: Hosea 14:9, 'Who is wise, and he shall understand these things; prudent, and he shall know them; but the transgressors shall stumble therein.' As right excellent and as notable as the doctrines of the word are, yet a carnal heart finds matter in them to stumble at; he picks that which is an occasion of ruin and eternal perdition from the scripture; therefore the apostle saith, Eph. 4:21, 'If ye have learned of him as the truth is in Jesus.' We are never right, and truth never works us to regeneration, but it is only fuel for our lusts, until we have learned it as it is in Jesus. Carnal men undo themselves by their own apprehensions of the truths of God. Luther calls some promises bloody promises, because of the mistakes of carnal men by their perverse application. Therefore, that we may maintain an awe of God in our soul, we need to be taught of God.

4. We are apt to abuse our knowledge. Saving knowledge makes us more humble, but carnal knowledge more proud. Where it is in gift rather than in grace, there men are puffed up. The more we know God or ourselves by a divine light, the more humble we shall be: Jer. 31:18, 19, 'When I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.' The more light we have from God, the more we look into a vile heart. When Adam's eyes are opened, he runs into the bushes; he

was ashamed. So when God opens the eyes, and teacheth a Christian, this makes him more humble.

5. There needs God's teaching, because we are so apt to forsake when we have known the things of God: Ps. 119:21, 'The proud do err from thy commandments.' What is the reason David was so steadfast in the truth? He did not take it up from the teachings of man, but from the teachings of God. When a man leads us into any truth, another man may lead us out again. But now, when God hath taught us, and impressed truth upon the heart, then it is durable. What is the reason believers are not as fickle as others, and not led away by the impure Gnostics, and like those libertines now among us? 1 John 2:20, 'Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.' They had an unction which came down from Jesus Christ upon their hearts; and then a man is not led away by every fancy, but begins to grow stable in spirit.

6. We cannot tell how to master our corruptions, nor restore reason to its dominion again. It is not enough to bring light into the soul, but we must have power and efficacy, or true conversion will not follow. Man's reason was to govern his actions. Now, all literal instruction is weak, like a March sun, which draweth up the vapours, but cannot scatter them; it can discover sins, but cannot quell them: Rom. 7:9, 'When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' He could not tell how to bridle his lusts; he found them more outrageous: 'The good that I would do, I do not; and the evil which I would not, that I do.'

Thirdly, The benefit and utility of God's teaching. When God teacheth, truth cometh upon us with more conviction and demonstration, 1 Cor. 2:6, and so hath a greater awe and sovereignty. Those that have made any trial can judge between being taught of

God and men. Those that are taught of men, the charms of rhetoric may sometimes stir up some loose affection, but it doth soon vanish and wear away again; but the work of God makes deep impression upon the soul, and truths are then more affective. Man's knowledge is sapless, dry, and unsavoury: 2 Peter 1:8, 'For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.' There may be an empty belief, and a naked and inactive apprehension of Christ, which stirs up no affection; but the light which comes from God enters upon the heart, Prov. 2:10; it affects the whole soul. It doth not only stay in the fancy, float in the brain, but affect the heart. And then it is renewing. Man's light may make us more learned but God's light more holy. We are 'changed by beholding the glory of God into the same image,' 2 Cor. 3:18.

## SERMON XIV

### **With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.—VER. 13.**

FOR the coherence of these words, you may refer them either to the 11th or 12th verse. If to the 11th verse, there he speaks of hiding the word in his heart, and now it breaks out in his tongue. First it must be in the heart, and next in the tongue. First in the heart. It is but hypocrisy to be speaking and talking of good things, when we have not been refreshed and warmed by them ourselves. Christianity is not a religion to talk of, but to live by. There are many rotten-hearted hypocrites that are all talkers; like the moon, dark in themselves, whatever light they give out to others; or like negroes, that dig in rich mines, and bring up gold for others, when themselves are poor. The power of grace in the heart is a good foundation for grace on the lips.

This is the method and order wherein David expresseth it: 'I have hidden thy word in my heart;' and then, 'With my lips have I declared,' &c. And as it must be first in the heart, so next in the tongue. John 7:38, Christ speaks of 'him that believeth in him, that out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.' By the belly is meant the heart. When there is true grace in the heart, the sweet influences thereof will flow forth in their common discourse for the refreshing of others; as a spring sendeth forth the streams to water the ground about it. If the heart be full, the tongue will drop what is savoury. I say, certainly if it be within, it will break out. The word is to be hid, but not like a talent in a napkin, but like gold in a treasury, to be laid out upon all meet occasions. Thus referring it to the 11th verse, there may be a fair connection.

Or if you refer it to the 12th verse, 'Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes:' teach me that I may teach others. Our requests for knowledge are like to speed when we are willing to exercise this knowledge for the glory of God and the good of others. Talents thrive by their use: 'To him that hath shall be given,' Mat. 25:29; that is, to him that useth his talents. Trading brings increase; and so it may be used as an argument to back that petition, Lord, teach me; for I have been ever declaring with my lips all the judgments of thy mouth.

Again, none can speak of God with such savour and affection as he that is taught by God: Teach me, and I have or will declare (it may be read either may) all the judgments of thy mouth. A heathen could say, *Non loquendum de Deo sine lumine*—we must not speak of God without light. The things of God are best represented with the light of his own grace. David shows that he would perform the duty of a good disciple; that he would teach others if God should teach him.

In the words two things are to be explained—



1. What he will declare, all the judgments of thy mouth.

2. In what sense he will declare them.

First, What he will declare. God's will, revealed in the scripture, is called 'The judgments of his mouth,' his judgments. I have showed that, ver. 7, at large. Briefly now I will add two reasons:—First, Because it is the rule according to which we must judge of all spiritual truth: Isa. 8:20, 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' Secondly, It is the rule according to which we must look to be judged both here and hereafter. Here, 'I will chastise them (or judge them) as their congregation hath heard,' Hosea 7:12. According to the sentence of the word, so will the course of his providence be, and according to which we shall be judged hereafter: John 12:48, 'The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.' God's providences are a comment upon the scriptures. The scripture is not only a record of what is past, but a calendar and prognostication of what is to come. You may read your doom, your judgment there; for the statutes of the Lord are all called judgments, because of an answerable proceeding in the course of God's providence: if men escape here, they will not escape the judgment of the last day, when the sentence of that God shall infallibly be made good. Now, the verdict of the word is called the judgments of his mouth, as if God himself had pronounced by oracle, and judged from heaven in the case; and these judgments of his mouth the Psalmist saith shall be the matter of his discourse and conference with others.

Secondly, In what sense it is said that he will declare all the judgments of his mouth. In this speech David may be considered as a king, as a prophet, or as a private believer.

1. As a king; so some conceive that whenever he judged or gave sentence upon the throne, he would declare the judgments of God's mouth; that is, decree in the case according to the sentence of the law. In favour of this sense it may be alleged—

[1.] That certainly the king was bound to study the law of God, as you shall see, Deut. 17:18, 19, 'When he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests the Levites; and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life.' Every king was bound to have a copy of the law, the Rabbis say, written with his own hand, carried about with him wheresoever he went, in city or camp.

[2.] That the kings of Judah were bound up by the judicials of Moses, 'out of that which is before the priests and Levites;' that is, according to thy judicial laws, so will I pass sentence upon malefactors.

[3.] That, proceeding according to this rule, their declarations in court were the judgments of God's mouth: 2 Chron. 19:6, 'He said to the judges, Take heed what ye do; for ye judge not for man but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment.' If this sense did prevail, we might observe hence, that a godly man useth the word to season the duties of all his relations. And again, that a good magistrate is so to judge upon the throne that his sentences there may be as the judgments of God's own mouth. But that which caused this misconceit was the word judgments, which is not of such a limited import and signification as those that pitched upon this interpretation did conceive, and therefore mistook the meaning of this place.

2. David may be considered here as a prophet, and so a pattern of all teachers. He asserts his sincerity in two respects—(1.) As to the matter of his doctrine; it should be the judgments of God's mouth,

such as he had received from God. (2.) As to the extent; that he would declare all the judgments of his mouth.

[1.] As to the matter of his doctrine, it should be the judgments of his mouth. That which should be declared and taught in the church should not be our own opinions and fancies, but the pure word of God; not the vanity of our thoughts, but the verity of his revelations; otherwise we neither discharge our duty to God, nor to the children of God. Not to God, when we come in his name without his message: Jer. 4:10, 'Ah Lord! thou hast greatly deceived this people,' saith the prophet Jeremiah to God. Thou hast done it; because the false prophets had done it in his name. The dishonour reflects upon him when his ordinance is abused to countenance the fancies of our own brain. Nor to the children of God, whose appetite carrieth them to pure unmixed milk: 1 Peter 2:2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby,' λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα—unmixed milk. The more natural the milk is, and without any mixture, the more kindly to a gracious appetite. To mix it with sugar, and the luscious strains of a human wit, doth but disguise it, and hide it from a spiritual taste. But to mix it with lime, as Jerome saith of heretics, makes it baneful and noxious. Thus he speaks of his faithfulness as a prophet, a public teacher in the church.

[2.] As to the extent; all the judgments of thy mouth, without adding or diminishing. No part of God's counsel must be forborne, either out of fear or favour. Our work is not to look what will please or displease, but what is commanded: Acts 20:27, 'I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.' If it be the counsel of God, let it succeed how it will, it must be spoken. So David here, all the judgments of thy mouth.

3. David may be considered as a private Christian; and so, I would declare all the judgments of thy mouth in a way of conference and gracious discourse. This is the sense I shall manage. The consideration I shall insist upon is this:—

Doct. It concerns all that fear God to declare upon meet occasions the judgments of his mouth.

How? In the way of public teaching? Shall every one that hath knowledge and parts teach? I answer—No. There are some separate for that work: Acts 13:2, 'Separate unto me Paul and Barnabas for the work whereunto I have called them.' Paul and Barnabas were gifted and called by the Spirit, yet were to be solemnly authorised by prophets and teachers at Antioch, by officers of the church.

Was it not enough that they were called by the Holy Ghost? What can man add more?

There must be order in the church. Though they were called, yet they were to be ordained, and to have a solemn commission. It is true, all Christians are prophets, yet they are not to invade the office ministerial; as they are also all kings, yet they are not to usurp the magistracy, or to disturb the ruler in his government. If Christians would but meditate more, and see how much they have to do to preach to their own hearts; if they would but regard the unquestionable duty that they owe to their families more, this itch of public preaching would be much abated, and many other confusions and disorders among us would be prevented; and they would sooner find the Lord's blessing upon interchangeable discourse, gracious conferences, than this affectation of sermoning and set discourses.

Well, then, we are to declare the judgments of his mouth, not by way of public teaching, but by way of private conference, edifying others,

and glorifying God by the knowledge and experience that we have—

First, In our own families.

Secondly, In our converses.

1. In our own families, in training up children and servants in the way of the Lord, and inculcating the doctrine of God upon them. This is a commanded duty, as you may see, Deut. 6:6, 7, 'And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart.' What then? 'And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.' Morning and evening, rising up and lying down, at home and abroad, they should be instructing their families. When the word of God is in the heart, thus it will break out. And chap. 11:19, you have the same again. This is a duty God reckoneth upon, that you will not omit such a necessary piece of service: Gen. 18:19, 'I know Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.' God promiseth himself, that from Abraham and his family he should have respect. God hath made many great promises to Abraham, as he doth now to all believers; but if you would have him bring upon you that which he hath spoken, you must not disappoint him. The seasoning of youth betimes in your families is a very great advantage. The family is the seminary of the church and state; and usually those that are ill-bred in the family, they prove ill when they come abroad. A fault in the first concoction is not mended in the second; and therefore here you should be declaring the mind and counsel of God to them. Many that afterwards prove eminent instruments of God's glory will bless you for it to all eternity. It is the best love you can express to your children, when you take care to season them with the best things. A

husband is charged to love his wife. How shall he express this love? Eph. 5:25, 26, 'Even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it,' &c. I suppose the degree is not only commended for a pattern, but the kind; it must be such a love as Christ bore to his church: 'He gave himself for her, that he might sanctify her.' It must be such a love as tends to sanctification. It is a poor kind of love parents express to their children in providing great estates and portions for them, or bringing them up in trades that they may thrive in the world. But when you train them up for heaven, there is the best love: Prov. 4:3, 4, 'For I was my father's son' (he was the darling), 'tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother.' And wherein was that love expressed? He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words; keep my commandments and live.' So for servants; it is not enough to provide bodily maintenance for them—so we would do for the beasts if we would use their strength and service; but we are to instruct them according to our talents. And that is the best love we can show, to provide for their souls.

2. In our converses, speaking of God and of his word in all companies, instructing the ignorant, warning and quickening the negligent, encouraging the good, casting out some savoury discourse wherever we come. So Ps. 37:30, 'The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment.' A good man studieth in his speeches to glorify God, to edify those he speaks to: 'I will declare thy judgments,' saith David. Wise and gracious discourse drops from him. So Cant. 4:11, 'Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under thy tongue.' The passages of that song are to be understood in a spiritual sense. Now the lips and the tongue being instruments of speech, and milk and honey things by which the word is expressed, I suppose it is meant of a conference; and because the word of God is compared to milk and honeycomb, it

shows that their conference should be gracious and edifying. This is that which drops from a sanctified mouth.

For the reasons of this:—

1. I shall argue from the interest which God hath in the lips and tongue, and therefore they must be used for God. He made them, bought them, and, if we belong to him, we gave them up with other things to him. We did not reserve our tongues. When we resigned and surrendered ourselves to the Lord's use, we did not make exception. The same argument which holds good for the whole body, why it should be possessed in sanctification and honour, holds good for every part of it: 1 Cor. 6:20, 'Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your bodies, and in your spirits, which are God's.' Thy whole is God's, thy spirit, thy body, and every part; thy wit, strength, hand, tongue, all are God's; and therefore he expects to be glorified by thy tongue. They were rebels that said, Ps. 12:4, 'Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?' There is nothing we have that is ours, but God's. Our hearts are not our own, to think what we will; nor our tongues our own, to speak what we will. God expects service from the tongue, otherwise we must be answerable for it when our sovereign Lord calls us to an account. Now, it is strange God should have so clear a right to our speech and language, and yet so little a share therein: 'Give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's.' Thy tongue and thy lips, whose are they? If thou couldst make thy tongue of thyself, then thou mightst use it for thyself; but since you had it from God, you must use it for God. But, alas! how little are men mindful of this! Follow them all the day, you get not one word of God from them; they use their tongues as if they were their own, not God's.

2. It is the glory of the tongue to serve God in this kind. It is the most excellent member in the body when it is well used for the glory of God and edification of others; therefore called our glory often in the psalms: 'Awake, my glory;' that is, my tongue; and what is glory in the Old Testament is rendered tongue in the New, Acts 2. Our tongue is our glory. Why? Because we have this advantage by it, we may speak for God: 'Therewith bless we God,' James 3:9. The benefit of speech is our privilege above angels and beasts. Angels they have reason, but no tongues; and beasts they have tongues, but no reason to guide them and act them. But now we have tongues and reason both, that we may declare our maker's praise. Surely this member and instrument was not given us to savour meats and drinks—that is not the highest use of it—but to express the sense and affections of the mind; not to utter vain, frothy, frivolous things—what an abuse is that!—but to comfort and instruct one another in the things of God. It is our glory.

3. Every creature hath a voice like itself, and therefore so should the new creature have. The ox bellows, the ass brayeth, goats and sheep may be known by their bleat, and so is a man by the tenor of his discourse. As the constitution of the mind is, so are the words. A wicked man hath a vain heart, and therefore his discourse is idle and frivolous: Prov. 10:20, 'The tongue of the just is as choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is little worth.' The antithesis shows it should have been said, 'The tongue of the wicked is little worth;' but he would point at the cause of it, 'the heart of the wicked.' There is a quick intercourse between the tongue and the heart. Now, because the heart of the wicked is nothing worth, all his thoughts and musings are vain; he goes grinding chaff in his mind all the day; his mind, like a mill, is always at work, not upon corn, that it might be bread for his soul, but upon chaff; therefore, because his heart is nothing worth, his tongue is nothing worth. The tongue of the just is



as choice silver, it brings in a great deal of treasure. But take a wicked man, all the workings of his heart, his thoughts and discourses, when summed up together, the product and total sum at night is nothing but vanity: 'The Lord seeth all their thoughts are but vain.' A vain heart will have vain speeches, and so a cankered sinner will have cankered discourse, as a putrid breath discovereth rotten lungs. Every man's speech is as his humour is. Come to a covetous person, he will be discoursing of farms, oxen, bargains, wares, and such like. Come to an epicurean gallant, to a voluptuary, and he will be telling you of horses, games, dogs, meats, drinks, merry company. Go to the ambitious, they will be talking of honours, offices, and the like. As they are of the flesh, so their talk savours of fleshly things. Every man hath a voice like himself, he speaks according to the constitution of his mind. Go to the discontented man, he will be talking of his adversaries, telling of affronts, wrongs, and public offences received. But a godly man hath a voice too like himself; he will be declaring the judgments of God's mouth; he will be speaking out of the word of God, of things within his sphere, and suitable to his kind: Mat. 12:35, 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things.' Still the tap runs according to the liquor with which the vessel is filled, and a man's speech bewrays him of what kind he is; and therefore, since every creature hath a voice like himself, so should the new creature have.

4. I shall argue from the nature of good, which is communicative, and loves to propagate itself—*omne bonum sui diffusivum*: Luke 22:32, 'Thou being converted, strengthen thy brethren.' He had had experience of a changeable heart; now go strengthen others. Fire turneth all things about it into fire; leaven pierceth through the whole lump. So grace seeks to propagate and diffuse itself. Therefore, when the work of God is written upon a man's mind and laid up in his heart, he will be declaring and speaking of it to others.

Naturalists observe that mules and creatures which are of a mongrel race do not procreate after their kind; so the false Christians are not for propagating and enlarging Christ's interest; they are not so warm, spiritual, and heavenly in their discourses. Andrew, when acquainted with Christ, calls Peter, and both call Nathanael: John 1:41–45, 'We have found the Messiah.' John calls his disciples. As a hen, when she hath found a worm or a barleycorn, clucks for her chickens that they may come and partake of it with her, so a man acquainted with Christ, who hath tasted that the Lord is gracious, he cannot hold; he will be calling upon his friends and relations to come and share with him of the same grace. As they have more of God, they will improve it for the comfort of others, and are willing to take hold of all opportunities to this end.

5. It discovereth plenty of knowledge and a good esteem of the word. (1.) Plenty of knowledge, when it is so apt to break out. When these living waters run out of the belly, it is a sign of a good spring there: Col. 3:16, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another.' It is a sign we have gotten the riches of understanding; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. So Prov. 16:23, 'The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.' When our speech hath weight and worth in it, and we are ready upon all occasions, it argueth a good stock of the word. You know a man that puts his hand in his pocket, and brings up gold at every draught, it is a sign he hath more plenty of it than silver; so when we are ready to bring out gracious discourses, it argueth a treasure and stock within. (2.) It argueth a good esteem of the word. Things that are dear and precious to us, we use to discourse of them. What we love, admire, and affect, the tongue will be occupied about such things: John 3:31, 'He that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth;' and 1 John 4:5, 'They are of the world, therefore speak they of the world.' I know it is

spoken in the first place of ordinary teachers. All men, whose original is of the earth, they savour of it in their speech; when they speak of divine things, there is some earthiness in it. The other scripture is meant of false teachers, they savour of the world, all their teaching doth savour of their affections. But both places give this general truth: What a man's affections are upon, it is most ready in his mouth. Therefore it argueth we are affected with the word of God when we are declaring it upon all occasions.

6. It is for our benefit to be talking of good things to others. The breasts that are not sucked do soon grow dry, but the more they are milked out and drawn, the greater is the increase; so in spiritual things, we gain by communicating; by discourse, truths are laid more in view. We find in any art of common learning, the more we confer about things with others, the more understanding we get ourselves: Prov. 11:25, 'The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.' It is spoken of alms; it is true of spiritual alms, as plain experience shows. By watering and refreshing others, the more are we comforted and refreshed ourselves. The loaves were increased in the dividing. Solomon compares conference to the whetting iron upon iron; the more one iron is whetted upon another, both are sharpened; so by conference our gifts are increased. Earthly goods, the more they are given out, we have the less in view and visible appearance, though God can increase them; but now, in heavenly and spiritual things, in the very giving out to others, they are increased upon our hands.

Use 1. To shame us for our unprofitableness in our relations and converses; for these are two things wherein a Christian should take occasion to declare the judgments of God's mouth.

1. In our relations, that we do no good there in declaring the judgments of God's mouth to one another. Surely every relation is a talent, and you will be accountable for it, if you do not improve it for your master's use. The husband is to converse with his wife as a man of knowledge; 1 Peter 3:7; and the wife to gain upon the husband, 1 Peter 3:2; and both upon the children and servants. The members of every family should be helping one another in the way to heaven. With what busy diligence doth an idolatrous family carry on their way and their course! See Jer. 7:18, 'The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire,' &c., saith the Lord. Every one will have his hand in the work, and are quickening and inflaming one another. Fathers, children, husbands, wives, all find some employment or other about their idolatrous service. Oh, that every one would be as forward and zealous and helpful in the work of God! Oh, that we were as careful to train and set our families a-work in a course of godliness! Christians should reason thus: What honour hath God by making me a father, a master of a family? Every such an one hath a charge of souls, and he is to be responsible. It will be no grief of heart to you when by your means they become acquainted with God: 'Ye are my crown and my rejoicing,' says the apostle, of the Thessalonians converted by his ministry. It will be a crown of honour and rejoicing in the day of the Lord, when you have been instrumental, not only for their prosperity in the world, but of their increasing in grace.

2. In our converses, how little do we edify one another! If Christ's question to the two disciples going to Emmaus were put to us: Luke 24:17, 'What manner of conversation had you by the way?' what cause should we have to blush and be ashamed! Generally our discourse is either—(1.) Profane and sinful; there is too much of the rotten communication which the apostle forbids: Eph. 4:29, 'Let no corrupt communication come out of your mouth, but that which is

good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearer.' Rotten discourse argueth a rotten heart. Or, (2.) Idle and vain, as foolish tales. The apostle bids Timothy, 1 Tim. 4:7, to 'refuse profane and old wives fables,' or 'vain compliments,' though we are to give an account for idle words, Mat. 12:36. Or else, like the Athenians, we 'spend our time in hearing and telling news,' Acts 17:21. Or we please and solace ourselves with frothy flashes of wanton wit, and 'jesting that is not convenient,' which the apostle forbids, Eph. 5:4. The praise of a Christian lieth not in the wittiness, but in the graciousness of his conversation. That which is Aristotle's virtue is made a sin with Paul—foolish jesting. You should rather be refreshing one another with what experiences you have had of the Lord's grace; that is the comfort and solace of Christians when they meet together. But when men wholly give up themselves to move laughter, all this is idle and vain discourse. It is not enough to say it doth no hurt, but what good doth it do? doth it tend 'to the use of edifying'? A Christian that hath God and Christ, and his wonderful and precious benefits to talk of, and so many occasions to give thanks, he cannot want matter to discourse of when he comes into company; therefore we should avoid vain discourse. Or, (3.) We talk of other men's matters or faults, as the apostle speaks of those, 1 Tim. 5:13, that wandered from house to house; that were not idle only, but tattlers also, and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not: Lev. 19:16, 'Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people.' The Hebrew word signifies a merchant, or one that goeth about with spices to sell; thence the word is used for one that wandereth from place to place, uttering slanders as wares. These pedlars will always be opening their packs. Men fill up time by tattling and meddling with others: Thus have I heard of such or such an one. Or, (4.) our discourse is wholly of worldly business, not a word of God: 'They are of the earth, and speak of the earth,' John 3:31. The habituating ourselves to worldly discourse together, without interposing something of God, is

a great disadvantage. Or, (5.) vain jangling; if we speak of anything that hath an aspect upon religion, we turn it into a mere dispute about opinion; we do not use conferences as helps to gracious affections. How many are there sick of questions, as the apostle saith, and 'dote upon strife of words'? 1 Tim. 6:4. Thus if we did put ourselves to question at night, What have I spoken? what good have I done? what good have I received from such company?—it would make the word more sensible and active upon our souls.

Use 2. To press us to holy conference, both occasional and set.

1. Occasional. We are not left at random in our ordinary discourse, to speak as we will; but at all times and with all persons we should have an eye to the good of those with whom we speak: Col. 4:6, 'Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.' In visits, walks, journeys, let your speech be always with grace. We should ever be drawing to good discourse, as remembering we must give account: James 2:12, 'So speak as those that shall be judged by the law of liberty.' Certainly a gracious heart will thus do. He that doth not want a heart will not want in occasion of interposing somewhat for God. This was Christ's manner: Luke 14:15, when he was eating bread in the Pharisee's house, he discourseth, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.' There will be a feast in heaven, when we shall 'sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God.' So when Christ was at Jacob's well, John 4:14, he discourseth of the 'well of living waters which springeth up to eternal life'; still he draweth towards some gracious improvement of the occasion. So John 7:37, when he was at the feast of tabernacles, and it was the custom there to fetch water from Siloa, and pour it out upon the altar of burnt-offerings—they were to make a flood of it—Christ improves it: 'If any man will come to me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of

living water;' he spiritualiseth the occasion. If our hearts were as they ought to be, we would have a gracious word more ready; we would either be beginning or carrying on good conference wherever we came. But Christians are to seek, either through barrenness or leanness of soul; they have not that good treasure or stock of knowlege in them, or through the custom of vain speech. And the great cause of all is the prevalency of an unsanctified and worldly heart; this hindereth us from being more fruitful in our converse.

2. It should press us to holy conferences set. There may be, and should be, some set time for mutual edification. It is not the duty only of the ministers, but also of private Christians, keeping within the bounds of their station and the measures of their knowledge, to teach and to instruct one another. The scriptures are full of this: Col. 3:6; Col. 1:5–11; Heb. 3:13; Jude 20. Christians should often meet together for prayer and spiritual edification. So Heb. 10:24, 25; Rom. 15:14. I heap up these places because of the error of the Papists, who will not have the laity speak of scripture, or things pertaining to scripture. Whereas you see these injunctions are plain and clear, and it is a great part of that holy communion that should pass between saints, this mutual exhorting, quickening, and strengthening one another's hands in the work of the Lord. These places are not to be understood of public communion, of church societies, but of private conferences, by way of interchangeable discourse and mutual edification. It is not necessary these set conferences should be always, and all the members of the church meet and confer together; but a company of savoury Christians, whose spirits suit best in commerce, and most likely to help one another. Though I am to love all the brotherhood, and carry a respect to all in relation to me, yet I am to single out for my advantage some of the most eminent, or the most suitable; for great regard is to be had to that. Christ made a distinction in his little flock, in his family, shall I call it; some he

singleth out for more immediate converses, as Peter, James, and John, in his transfiguration, in Mat. 17:1, and in his agonies; these were the flower, the choice, that he singled out for his special converse. I speak not of public meetings, in public societies, but set conferences with gracious Christians with whom our spirits suit best, and are likely to be of greatest help in maintaining of the spiritual life. These set times the people of God have ever made conscience of. It is a great comfort and refreshing to be conscious to the exercise of each other's grace: Rom. 1:12, 'That I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me.' And it is a mighty strengthening in evil times: Mal. 3:16, 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it.' And you will find the benefit of the manifold graces of God, that what one wants will be supplied by the help of another. God doth not so give his gifts to one but that he needs others' help. Paul calls Aquila and Priscilla 'fellows or helpers in Christ Jesus;' and Apollos, a mighty man in the scriptures, had a great deal of help by Aquila and Priscilla, Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 12:21, 'The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you.' The meanest have their use, quickening and strengthening one another. This mutual edification differeth from ministerial or church society; because the one is an act of authority, the other of charity; the one in the face of the congregation, the other by a few Christians in private; and it may be improved to awaken each other to consider of God, of the ways of God, the word of God, the works of creation and providence, redemption, the judgments he executes in the world, mercies towards his people, the experiments and proofs of his grace in your Christian warfare: Ps. 66:16, 'Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.' Ferus speaks of some old monks, *Conveniebant in unum, audiebatur verbum Dei, &c.*—they were wont to meet together, and after they had read the word of God, every one did acquaint one another with



his weaknesses, with his temptations, and mutually asked counsel, and comforted one another out of the word of God; and after this they concluded all with prayer, and so every man went to his home. These examples, did we observe them, they would be most useful to us; we might drive on a trade to heaven, and be of very great profit in the spiritual life; if the gifts of private Christians were managed without pride, vainglory, and without despising of the weak, it would be of exceeding honour to God, use and comfort to the saints.

## **SERMON XV**

**I have rejoiced in the way of thy  
commandments, as much as in all riches.  
—VER. 14.**

THESE words may respect the 12th verse, as another argument wherewith to back his request, 'Teach me thy statutes; for I have rejoiced in the way of thy commandments as much as in all riches.' Many are for worldly wealth, but I have other desires: Lord, teach me how to understand and keep thy statutes, and this will be a greater benefit than any worldly possession whatsoever. Or you may refer them to the 13th verse, as a reason of his practice; every man will be speaking of that wherewith he is delighted: 'Lord, thy testimonies are my rejoicing;' therefore, I have and will be speaking of them upon all occasions. Or this may be the fruit of what was mentioned before: those that are exercised about the word, the study, and practice of it, and conference about it, have a sweet sense of the goodness of it in their own souls, so as they delight and rejoice in it above all things; and if we have not felt this effect, it is because we are strangers to the word.

In the words there is—

1. A delight asserted.
2. The object of it, in the way of thy testimonies.
3. The degree of it, as much as in all riches.

By way of explication: The 'testimonies' of God are his word, for it testifieth of his will. Now the prophet saith not only, 'I have rejoiced in thy testimonies,' but 'in the way of thy testimonies.' Way is one of the words by which the law is expressed. God's laws are ways that lead us to God; and so it may be taken here, the way which thy testimonies point out and call me unto; or else, his own practice, as a man's course is called his way; his delight was not in speculation or talk, but in obedience and practice: 'In the way of thy testimonies.' The degree, 'as much as in all riches.' As much, not to show the equality of these things, as if we should have the same affection for the world as for the word of God; but as much, because we have no higher comparison. This is that worldlings dote upon and delight in. Now, as much as they rejoice in worldly possessions, so much do I rejoice in the way of thy testimonies. For I suppose David doth not compare his own delight in the word with his own delight in wealth; but his own choice and delight with the delight and choice of others. If he had spoken of himself both in the one respect and in the other, the expression was very high. David, that was called to a crown, and in a capacity of enjoying much in the world, gold, silver, lands, goods, largeness of territory, and a compound of all that which all men jointly, and every man severally, doth possess, yet was more pleased in the holiness of God's ways, than in all the world.' 'For what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' Mat. 16:26.

Doct. A gracious heart finds more true joy in the way of God's word than in all worldly things whatsoever.

To explain this, consider—

1. What this delight is.
2. How a gracious heart finds more delight in the word of God than in all worldly things.
3. The reasons why they do so

1. What this delight is. I shall give you several distinctions.

[1.] There is a sweetness in the study of God's word, or when we give up ourselves to attain the knowledge of it. The very speculation and study produces a delightful taste, for three reasons:—

(1.) Truth is the good of the understanding; therefore, when the faculty is suited with a fit object, this correspondence causeth a rejoicing and delectation: Prov. 24:14, 'My son, eat thou honey because it is good; and the honeycomb, because it is sweet to thy taste: so shall the knowledge of wisdom be to thy soul when thou hast found it.' Every truth, if it be but a natural or philosophical verity, when we come to consider and see it with our own eyes, and have found it out by search, and do not repeat it by rote only, breedeth a delight. Pleasure is applicatio convenientis convenienti; so it is true in theological truths; we are the more affected with them the more they are represented with evidence to the soul.

(2.) Scriptural truths are more sublime than other truths, and do ennoble reason with the knowledge of them: Deut. 4:6, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and an understanding people.' Such doctrines as we meet with in the word of God concerning angels and the souls

of men, the creation and government of all things, the redemption of men, must needs affect the heart, and breed a joy in the view and contemplation of them.

(3.) Because these truths are suitable to our necessities. To every man that hath a conscience, it cannot but be very pleasing to hear of a way how he may come to the pardon of sins, and sound peace of conscience, solid perfection, and eternal glory. Man is naturally under fear of death, Rom. 1:32, and would be glad of pardon; weak, and unable to find out or attain to moral perfection, he would be glad of an exact rule, and gropeth and feeleth about for an everlasting happiness, Acts 17:27. So far as anything is found to this purpose in the writings of men, they have a marvellous force and influence upon us. Any beam of this truth scattered in Plato or Socrates, of man's reconciliation with a just God, there is nothing in their writings; the then world was under perplexity; but yet of moral perfection, and an eternal state of blessedness, there were some glimmerings. Now, when these are represented to the understanding with such evidence and satisfaction as they are in the scriptures, where you have the only sufficient direction to true happiness, no wonder if they are greedily caught at. Now this delight, though good, I speak not of, because it may be in temporaries, who have a taste of the good word, to invite them to seek for more, Heb. 6:4, and is a fruit of common illumination. The stony ground received the word with joy, Luke 8:13; and though it may affect the heart, yet if not above all riches, it doth not prevail over carnal affections.

[2.] There is a sweetness found in the way of God's testimonies which ariseth from the conscience of practical obedience, not from contemplation only; and it is best to be found when we come to practise and perform what we know. It is said of wisdom, Prov. 3:17, 'All her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.'

There is not only a sweetness in our privileges, but in our duties. No man knoweth the contentment of walking closely with God but he that hath tried. So Micah 2:7, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' not only speak good, but do good. There is a certain performance of what the word saith, when it is said: it may be accounted done; but to whom? To them that know it, and are able to talk of it? No; but to them that walk. And will every slight endeavour and the presumption of conformity to the rule serve the turn? No; to them that walk uprightly, that sincerely frame themselves to obey God's will with the greatest exactness and care they can use. Oh, what good, what reviving of heart and cheerfulness do they find in this work! Briefly, this delight in the way of God's testimonies (that you may not be mistaken) differeth from that contentment and serenity of mind which is the fruit of integrity or moral sincerity. There is some degree of comfort that accompanieth any good action, as heat doth fire; the conscience, so far as he doth good, hath some kind of peace in it. The heathens by God's general bounty and goodness had a conscience excusing when they did good, as well as accusing when they did evil: Rom. 2:15, 'Their thoughts in the meantime accusing, or else excusing one another,' μεταξύ ἀλλήλων —'by turns,' and this excusing cannot be without some sweetness and contentment of mind. Sacer intra nos spiritus sedet bonorum malorumque nostrorum observator et custos; hic prout a nobis tractatus est, ita nos ipse tractat, saith Seneca. This may be without faith; whereas we speak of such a joy as is founded in faith, though found in the ways of obedience in Christ's service: Mat. 11:29, 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' In short, there is delight in the duty and the dispensation; for it is both promised and required. Delight in God's ways is promised as a gift of God, and as the result of our obedience: Isa. 58:13, 14, 'If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call

the sabbath a delight, &c., then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord,' &c.; and Cant. 2:3, 'I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.' There is sweetness God bestoweth, or sensible consolation, which must be distinguished from that delight which is a fruit of our gracious esteem. I can exclude neither, though that delight which is the fruit of our esteem of the word is principally here intended; the one is more durable than the other. A gracious affection to the word and ways of God should ever remain with us; but we are not always feasted with spiritual suavities. Now and then we have them, and when they have done their work they return to God. As in the vision made to Peter, the sheet that was showed him was received up again into heaven, Acts 10:16, when Peter was informed of God's will; so this comfort returneth to the giver when it hath done its work, refreshed our hearts, and engaged us to wait upon God.

2. How a gracious heart rejoiceth more in the way of God's testimonies than in all riches.

[1.] There is a broad difference in the things themselves, and therefore there should be in our affections to them; for our affections should be carried out according to the worth of things; otherwise, if an object of less worth have more of our hearts than an object of more value, they are like members out of joint, they are not in their proper place. There is a great distance between the things themselves, as much as there is between the enjoyment of God and the creature, and therefore there must be a considerable difference in our affections to them. If the difference be so nice that thou canst hardly distinguish which thy heart is more affected with, the enjoyment of God in the way of his testimonies, or the enjoyment of wealth and worldly accommodations, or if the disproportion be on the world's side, that hath more of thy esteem and complacency, then

God is not thy chiefest good; thou lovest the creature more than God, which is inconsistent with grace: for this is the prime act of grace, to choose God for our chiefest good.

[2.] We must distinguish between the sensitive stirring of the affections and the solid complacency of the soul. It is possible a child of God may be more sensibly moved by temporal things, as they do more strike upon the senses; but the supreme and prevailing delight of the soul is in spiritual things, in the way of God's testimonies. To exemplify this by the contrary affection, as in sorrow; a temporal loss may to sense more stir the affections, as to bodily expression of them, than a spiritual; as the drawing of a tooth or any present pain may make us cry out more than the languishings of a consumption; whereas the other may go nearer to the heart, and causeth a more lasting trouble. So in joy; a man may be pleased with earthly conveniences, and yet his solid esteem is more in spiritual things; as a trifle may provoke laughter more than a solid benefit that accrueth to us. Therefore the case is not to be decided by the intensiveness of the sensitive expression so much as by the appreciation of the soul. In this sense the point is to be understood; he would lose all the world rather than dispense with his obedience to God. This is selling all for the pearl of price spoken of, Mat. 13:46. All other things are trampled upon and renounced for this one's sake, that we may enjoy God in Christ. And truly this affection to the word is not easily to be found; for we often see that men for a little gain will break all the commandments of God, as things not to be stood upon when any temporal commodity is in chase, and in the pursuit of worldly riches care not how they neglect Christ and heavenly things.

3. The reasons why they rejoice more in the way of God's testimonies than in all riches.

[1.] Because of the suitableness of these things to the new nature. Everything hath a kind of joy when it enjoys that which is good for it. The ground doth pleasantly receive a shower of rain after drought; the natural man eateth and drinketh, and his heart is filled with gladness; so the spiritual man is affected with that which is agreeable to the divine nature. Everything is preferred according to the suitableness and proportion which it carrieth to our necessities and desires. The cock in the fable preferred a barleycorn before a jewel; the barleycorn is more suitable to its natural appetite. So believers have 'not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God,' 1 Cor. 2:12; therefore the way of God's testimonies is more suitable and proportionable to that nature which they have. Their wealth and worldly things they indeed suit with the sensitive nature, but that is kept under, therefore the prevalent inclination is to the word more than to the world.

[2.] There is nothing in the enjoyment of worldly things, but they have it more amply in the exactest and sincerest way of enjoyment by the word, and walking in the way of its precepts. Satan's baits whereby he leads men to sin are pleasure and profit; when bonum honestum, the good of honesty and duty, is declined, there remains nothing but bonum utile et jucundum, the good of pleasure and profit. If we be moved with these things, it is good to look there where we may have them at the highest rate and in the most sincere manner. Now, it is the word of God believed and obeyed which yieldeth us the greatest profit and the greatest pleasure. You have both in one verse: Ps. 19:10, 'More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than the honey and the honeycomb.' Because of the profit it is compared to gold, and because of the sweetness and pleasure we have by it, it is compared to honey.



The word of God will truly enrich a man and make us happy. The difference between God's people and others doth not lie in this, that the one seeketh after riches, the other not; they both seek to enrich themselves; only the one seeketh after false, and the other true riches, as they are called, Luke 16:11, and so differ from one another as we and the Indians do, who reckon their wealth by their wampenpeage, or shells of fishes, as we do ours by gold and silver; the one hath little worth but what their fancies put upon it; the other hath a value in nature. Or, to speak in a more home comparison, counters, glass beads, and painted toys please children more than jewels and things of greater price, yea, than land of inheritance, or whatever, when we come to man's estate, we value and is of use to us for the supply of present necessities. So worldly men, preferring their kind of wealth before holiness and the influences of grace, do but cry up baubles before jewels. To evidence this, and that we may beat the world with their own notions, and so the better defeat the temptation, let us consider what is the true riches.

1. What is indeed true riches.
2. Why these are the true riches.

1. What is indeed riches.

[1.] Gracious experiences or testimonies of the favour of God. He is a rich man indeed that hath many of these. So it is said, Rom. 10:12, God is 'rich to all that call upon him;' it is meant actively, not passively; it only noteth that God doth give out plentiful experiences of his grace.

[2.] Knowledge: 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly, in all wisdom,' Col. 3:16. And the apostle mentions 'the riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery

of God, and of the Father, and of Christ,' Col. 2:2. This is a treasure indeed, that cannot be valued; and he is a very poor soul that wants it.

[3.] Faith: James 2:5, 'Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith?' He is a rich man that is emptied of himself that he may be filled with God.

[4.] Good works: 1 Tim. 6:10, 'Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, &c., but rich in good works.' O miserable man! that hath nothing to reckon upon but his money and his bags, so much by the year, and makes it all his business to live plentifully in the world, laying up nothing for heaven, and is not rich in gracious experiences, knowledge, faith, and good works, which are a Christian's riches!

## 2. Why are these the true riches?

[1.] That is true riches which maketh the man more valuable, which gives an intrinsic worth to him, which wealth doth not that is without us. We would not judge of a horse by the richness of his saddle and the gaudiness of his trappings; and is man, a reasonable creature, to be esteemed by his moneys and lands, or by his graces and moral perfections?

[2.] That is riches which puts an esteem upon us in the eyes of God and the holy angels, who are best able to judge, One barbarous Indian may esteem another the more he hath of his shells and trifles; but you would count him never the richer that should bring home a whole ships lading of these things: Luke 12:20, such a fool is he 'that heapeth up treasure to himself, and is not rich towards God;' that hath not of that sort of riches which God esteemeth. We are bound

for a country where riches are of no value; grace only goeth current in the other world.

[3.] That is riches which steads us in our greatest extremities. When we come to die, the riches of this world prove false comforts, for they forsake a man when he hath most need of comfort. In the hour of death, when the poor shiftless naked soul is stripped of all, and we can carry away nothing in our hands, grace lieth near the heart to comfort us. It is said by a voice from heaven of those that die in the Lord, 'Their works follow them;' their wealth doth not. Our graces continue with us to all eternity.

[4.] That is the true riches which will supply all our necessities, and bear our expenses to heaven. Wealth doth not this, but grace: Mat. 6:33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, and all these things shall be added;' 1 Tim. 4:8, 'Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.' Heaven and earth are laid at the feet of godliness.

[5.] That is true riches which will give us a title to the best inheritance. The word of God is able to enrich a man more than all the riches of the world, because it is able to bring a man to an everlasting kingdom. All this is spoken because there is an evil desire that possessed the whole world; they are vehemently carried after riches, and as they are increased, so are they delighted. But, saith David, my delight is to increase in knowledge and grace; if I get more life, more victory over lusts, more readiness for God's service, this comforts me to the heart. Now how do you measure your thriving? by worldly or spiritual increase?

Here is the true delight. Spiritual delight in spiritual objects far exceedeth all the joy that we can take in worldly things. The

pleasures of the mind are far more pure and defecate than those of the body; so that if a man would have pleasures, let him look after the chiefest of the kind. He spoke like a beast rather than like a man that said, 'Eat, drink, and be merry; thou hast goods laid up for many years,' Luke 12:19. That is the most that worldly things can afford us, a little bodily cheer: Ps. 17:14, 'Thou hast filled their bellies with hid treasures;' there is the poor happiness of a rich worldling. He may have a bellyful, and fare at a better rate than others do: Hab. 1:16, 'Their portion is made fat, and their meat plenteous.' When men have troubled themselves and the world to make themselves great, it is but for a little belly-cheer, which may be wanted as well as enjoyed; a modest temperance and mean fare yieldeth more pleasure. But what is this to the delights of the mind? A sensualist is a fool, that runneth to such dreggy and carnal delights. Noble and sublime thoughts breed a greater pleasure. What pleasure do some take in finding out a philosophical verity!—the man rejoiceth, the senses are only tickled in the other. Of all pleasures of the mind, those of the spiritual life are the highest, for then our natural faculties are quickened and heightened by the Spirit. The reasonable nature hath a greater joy than the sensitive, and the spiritual divine nature hath more than the mere rational. There is not only a higher object, the love of God, but a higher cause, the Spirit of God, who elevateth the faculty to a higher manner of sense and perception. Therefore both the good and evil of the spiritual life is greater than the good and evil of the rational. The evil of the spiritual is greatest: 'A wounded spirit who can bear?' And the good of the spiritual life is greatest, 'joy unspeakable and glorious.' The higher the life, the greater the feeling; 'groans not uttered.' 'Peace passing all understanding,' though it maketh no loud noise, yet it diffuseth a solid contentment throughout the soul. All this is spoken because the way of God's testimonies is looked upon as a dark and gloomy course by carnal men; yet it is the life of the blessed God himself: Eph. 4:18,

'Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.' And surely he wants no true joy and pleasure that lives such a life.

Use 1. Here is an invitation to men to acquaint themselves more with the way of God's testimonies, that they may find this rejoicing above all riches. It is hard to pleasant natures to abjure accustomed delights; and carnal men picture religion with a sour austere face: We shall never see cheerful day more if we are strict in religion. Oh! consider, your delight is not abrogated, but perfected; you shall find a rejoicing more intimate than in all pleasures. Cyprian saith he could hardly get over this prejudice, in his epistle to Donatus. Austin, thirty years old, parted with his carnal delights, and found another sweetness—*quam suave mihi subito factum est!* It is your disease maketh you carnal; when freed from the fervours of lust, these things will have no relish with you. If it seem laborious at first, it will be more joyful than all riches. The root is bitter, but the fruit sweet. At first it is bitter to nature, which loveth carnal liberty, to render itself captive to the word; but after a little pains, and when the heart is once subdued to God, it will be sweet and comfortable. Ask of the spies that have been in this good land if it be not a land flowing with milk and honey. David tells you, 'In the way of thy testimonies.' This way would be more trodden if men would believe this; if you will not believe, make trial; if Christ's yoke seem burdensome, it is to a galled neck.

Use 2. Trial.

1. Have we a delight in obedience to God's precepts? Ps. 112:1, they that fear God, delight greatly in his commandments. It is not enough to serve God, but we must serve him delightfully; for he is a good

master, and his work hath wages in the mouth of it. It is a sign you are acquainted with the word of God, when the obedience which it requireth is not a burden but a delight to you. Alas! with many it is otherwise. How tedious do their hours run in God's service! no time seemeth long but that which is spent in divine worship. Do you count the clock at a feast? and are you so provident of time when about your sports? Are you afraid that the lean kine will devour the fat, when you are about your worldly business? What causeth your rejoicing? the increase of wealth, or grace?

2. Is this the supreme delight of the soul? It is seen not so much by the sensible expression, as by the serious constitution of the soul, and the solid effects of it.

[1.] Doth it draw you off from worldly vanities to the study of the word? What are your conceptions of it? What do you count your riches? To grow in grace, or to thrive in the world? To grow rich towards God, or to heap up treasures to yourselves? Is it your greatest care to maintain a carnal happiness?

[2.] Doth it support you in troubles and worldly losses? and bear you out in temporal adversities? You cannot be merry unless you have riches and wealth and worldly accommodations; then, soul, eat, drink, and be merry!

[3.] Doth it sweeten duties? The way of God's commandments is your way home. A beast will go home cheerfully. You are going home to rest. Let the joy of the Lord be your strength. Certainly you will think no labour too great to get thither, whither the word directs you. As one life exceedeth another, so there is more sensibleness in it. A beast is more sensible of wrong and hurt and of pleasure than a plant; and as the life of a man exceedeth the life of a beast, so is he more capable of joy and grief; and as the life of grace exceedeth the

life of a mere man, so its joys are greater, its griefs greater. There are no hardships to which we are exposed for religion, but the reward attending it will make us to overcome.

## SERMON XVI

### **I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.—VER. 15.**

ALL along David had showed what he had done; now, what he will do. Ver. 10, 'I have sought;' ver. 11, 'I have hid;' ver. 13, 'I have declared;' ver. 14, 'I have rejoiced.' Now, in the two following verses, he doth engage himself to set his mark towards God for time to come: 'I will meditate in thy precepts,' &c. We should not rest upon anything already done and past, but continue the same diligence unto the end. Here is David's hearty resolution and purpose to go on for time to come. Many will say, Thus I have done when I was young, or had more leisure and rest; in that I have meditated and conferred. You must continue still in a holy course. To begin to build and leave unfinished is an argument of folly. There is always the same reason for going on that there was for beginning, both for necessity, profit, and sweetness. We have no license to slack and give over till all be finished: Phil. 2:12, 'Work out your own salvation;' otherwise all you do is in vain, yet not in vain: Gal. 3:4, in vain as to final reward, yet not in vain as to increase of punishment. You lose your cost, your watchings, striving, prayings; but you will gain a more heavy punishment, so that it had been better you had never begun: 2 Peter 2:20, 21, 'For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to

have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.' You bring an ill report upon God; your sense of the worth of heavenly things must needs be greater for your making trial; and therefore your punishment for neglect the greater. Into the vineyard they came at several hours, but all tarried till the close of the day. Some called sooner, some later, but all held out till the end: Heb. 6:10, 11, you; have ministered and must minister; you have prayed and must pray; you have heard the word with gladness, and must hear still. Many in youth are zealous, but when their first heats are spent, grow worldly, careless, and ready to sound a retreat from God. The fire of the altar was never to go out; so should the life, and warmth, and vigour of our affections to the word of God be ever preserved. God is the same still, and so is the word; and therefore we should ever be the same in our respects to it. The devil in policy lets men alone for a while, to manifest some respect to the ways of God, that they may after do religion a mischief. They are full of zeal, strict, holy, diligent in attendance upon ordinances. He never troubleth them, but is at truce with them all this while, till they get some name for the profession of godliness, and then he knoweth their fall will be the more scandalous and ignominious, not only to themselves, but to their profession. They are forward and hot men a while, till they have run themselves out of breath, and then by a notable defection shame themselves, and harden others.

Compare it with the 13th verse, 'I have declared;' now 'I will meditate.' To be warm and affectionate in our expressions of respect to the word before others, and to slight it in our own hearts, argueth, gross hypocrisy; therefore David would not only confer, but meditate. Many talk with others, but not with their own soul: 'Commune with your hearts, and be still.' True zeal is uniform; when there is no witness but God, it acts alike.



Refer it to the 14th verse, David had spoken of his delight in the law; now, that he would meditate therein; in both not to boast, but to excite others by his example: that is to be understood all along when he speaketh of his diligence in and about the law of God. But mark, first the word was his delight, and then his meditation, Delight causeth meditation, and meditation increaseth delight: Ps. 1:2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' A man that delighteth in the law of God will exercise his mind therein. Our thoughts follow our affections. It is tedious and irksome to the flesh to meditate, but delight will carry us out. The smallest actions, when we have no delight in them, seem tedious and burdensome. It was no great matter for Haman to lead Mordecai's horse, yet a burdensome offensive service, because it was against his will. The difficulty that we find in holy duties lieth not in the duties themselves, but in the awkwardness of our affections. Many think they have no parts, and therefore they cannot meditate. He that findeth a heart to this work will find a head. Delight will set the mind a-work, for we are apt to muse and pause upon that which is pleasing to us. Why are not holy thoughts as natural and as kindly to us as carnal? The defect is in the heart: 'I have rejoiced in thy testimonies,' saith David, and therefore 'I will meditate in thy statutes.'

In the words there is a double expression of David's love to the law of God:—

1. I will meditate in thy precepts.
2. I will have respect to thy ways.

Concerning which observe—

1. In both the notion by which the word of God is expressed and diversified, precepts, ways. The word precepts implieth God's authority, by which the counsels of the word are ratified. Ways implieth a certain direction for our walk to heaven. There are God's ways to us declared in his promises. So it is said, Ps. 25:10, 'All the paths of God are mercy and truth.' Our ways to God, ver. 4 of that psalm: 'Show me thy ways, teach me thy paths.' These are his precepts.

2. Observe, the one is the fruit of the other: 'I will meditate;' and then, 'I will have respect.' Meditation is in order to practice; and if it be right, it will beget a respect to the ways of God. We do not meditate that we may rest in contemplation, but in order to obedience: Josh. 1:8, 'Thou shalt meditate in the book of the law day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein.' So Phil. 4:8, 9, 'Think of these things,' 'do these things'—λογίζεσθε. When you cast up your accounts, and consider what God hath required of you, it is that you may set upon the work. Meditation is not a flourishing of the wit, that we may please the fancy by playing with divine truths (sense is diseased that must be fed with quails), but a serious inculcation of them upon the heart, that we may urge it to practice. Nor yet an acquainting ourselves with the word that we may speak of it in company: conference is for others, meditation for ourselves when we are alone. Words are but the female issue of our thoughts, works the male. Nor merely to store ourselves with curious notions and subtile inquiries; study searcheth out a truth, but meditation improveth it for practical use: it is better to be sincere than subtile.

3. Observe, this practical obedience is expressed by having respect unto the ways of God. To respect God's ways is to take heed that we do not turn out of them, to regard them and ourselves: 'Observe to

do them,' Josh. 1:8; and it is called elsewhere, pondering our path: Prov. 4:26, 'Ponder the path of thy feet,' that we may not mistake our way, nor wander out of it. Respect to God's word was opened ver. 6 and 9. The main point is this—

That one great duty of the saints is meditating on the word of God, and such matters as are contained therein.

Let us inquire what meditation is, because the practice and knowledge of the duty is almost become a stranger to us. Before I can define, I must distinguish it. Meditation is—

1. Occasional.

2. Set and solemn.

1. Occasional meditation is an act by which the soul spiritualiseth every object about which it is conversant. A gracious heart is like an alembic; it can distil useful thoughts out of all things that it meeteth with. Look, as it seeth all things in God, so it seeth God in all things. Thus Christ at Jacob's well discourseth of the well of life, John 4; at the miracle of the loaves, discourseth of manna, John 6 and 7; at the feast of tabernacles, of living waters; at the Pharisee's supper, discourseth of eating bread in the kingdom of God, Luke 14:15. There is a holy chemistry and art that a Christian hath to turn water into wine, brass into gold, to make earthly occasions and objects minister spiritual and heavenly thoughts. God trained up the old church by types and ceremonies, that the things they ordinarily conversed with might put them in mind of God and Christ, their duties, and dangers, and sins. And our Lord in the New Testament taught by parables and similitudes taken from ordinary functions and offices amongst men, that in every trade and calling we might be employed in our worldly business with a heavenly mind; that whether in the shop, or at the

loom, or in the field, we might still think of Christ, and grace, and heaven. There is a parable of the merchantman, a parable of the sower, a parable of the man calling his servants to account, &c., that upon all these occasions we might wind up our minds, and extract some spiritual use from our common affairs. Thus the creatures lift up our minds to the creator. David had his night meditation: Ps. 8:3, 'When I consider the heavens, the work of thy hands, the moon, and the stars which thou hast ordained,' &c.;—the sun is not mentioned. When he was gone abroad in the night, his heart was set on work presently: and Ps. 19:5, there is a morning meditation, for he seemeth to describe the sun coming out of his chambers in the east, and displaying his beams like a cloth of gold upon the world. A holy heart cannot want an object to lead him to the meditation of God's power, and goodness, and glory, and wise providence, who hath made and doth order all things according to the counsel of his will. There is a great deal of practical divinity in the very bosom of nature, if we had the skill to find it out. Job biddeth us, 'Ask the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee; or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.' They speak by our thoughts.

2. There is set and solemn meditation. Now this is of several sorts, or rather, they are several parts of the same exercise.

[1.] There is a reflective meditation, which is nothing but a solemn parley between a man and his own heart: Ps. 4:4, 'Commune with; your own heart and be still;' when we have withdrawn ourselves from company, that the mind may return upon itself, to consider what we are, what we have been, what straits and temptations we have passed through, how we overcame them, how we passed from death to life. This is a necessary part of meditation, but very difficult. What can be more against self-love and carnal ease than for a man to be his own

accuser and judge? All our shifts are to avoid our own company, and to run away from ourselves. The basilisk dieth by seeing himself in a mirror, and a guilty man cannot endure to see his own natural face in the glass of the word. The worldly man choketh his soul with business, lest, for want of work, the mind, like a mill, should fall upon itself. The voluptuous person melteth away his days in pleasure, and charmeth his soul into a deep sleep with the potion of outward delights, lest it should awake and talk with him. Well, then, it is necessary that you should take some time to discourse with yourselves, to ask of your souls what you have been, what you are, what you have done, what shall become of you to all eternity: Jer. 8:6, 'No man asketh of himself, what have I done?' You would think it strange of two men that conversed every day for forty or fifty years, and yet all this while they did not know one another. Now, this is the case between us and our own souls; we live a long time in the world, and yet are strangers to ourselves.

[2.] There is a meditation which is more direct, when we exercise our minds in the word of God and the matters contained therein. This is twofold:—

(1.) Dogmatical, or the searching out of a truth in order to knowledge: 'Proving what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God,' Rom. 12:2. This is study, and differeth from meditation in the object, and supposeth the matter we search after to be unknown, either in whole or in part; whereas practical meditation is the inculcation or whetting of a known truth upon the soul: and it differs in the end; the end of study is information, and the end of meditation is practice, or a work upon the affections. Study is like a winter sun, that shineth, but warmeth not; but meditation is like blowing up the fire, where we do not mind the blaze but the heat. The end of study is to hoard up truth; but of meditation, to lay it forth in conference or

holy conversation. In study, we are rather like vintners, that take in wine to store themselves for sale; in meditation, like those that buy wine for their own use and comfort. A vintner's cellar may be better stored than a nobleman's; the student may have more of notion and knowledge, but the practical Christian hath more of taste and refreshment.

(2.) Practical and applicative. This we now speak of; and it is that duty and exercise of religion whereby the mind is applied to the serious and solemn consideration and improvement of the truths which we understand and believe, for practical uses and purposes. Not like a man that soweth and never reapeth; or a woman that often conceives, but never brings forth living children.

(1st.) It is a duty; for it is commanded, Josh. 1:8, 'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein.' As the promise is general, 'I will not leave thee nor forsake thee,' Heb. 13:5, so is the command. To meditate in the law is a part of the description of a godly man: Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.' It is commended to us by the practice and example of the saints in scripture. Isaac, Gen. 24:63, 'went out to meditate in the field in the eventide,' to pray, as in the margin; the word in the original is indifferent to both senses; it properly signifieth muttering, or an imperfect or suppressed sound. The Septuagint sometimes renders it by ἀείδειν, to sing; but others by ἀδολεσχῆσαι, which signifies to exercise himself. The word is used here ἐν ταῖς ἐντολαῖς σοῦ ἀδολεσχῆσω. Symmachus, λαλῆσαι, to speak; Aquila, ὁμιλῆσαι, to discourse with God and his own soul. The original word, נִשְׁחַל, signifieth to mutter, or such a speaking as is between thoughts and words. He made his duty his refreshment and solace at night. So

David often in this psalm. Reason enforceth it. God, that is a spirit, deserveth the most pure and spiritual worship by the mind, as well as that which is performed by the body. Thoughts are the eldest and noblest offspring of the soul, and it is fit they should be consecrated to converse with God.

(2d.) It is a necessary duty; not a thing of arbitrary concernment, a moral help that may be observed and omitted at our pleasure; but of absolute use, without which all graces wither. Faith is lean unless it be fed with meditation on the promises: Ps. 119:92, 'I had fainted in my affliction, unless thy word had been my delight.' Hope is not lively unless we contemplate the thing hoped for, and, with Abraham, walk through the land of promise, Gen. 15, and think often and seriously on 'the glory of the riches of the inheritance of the saints,' Eph. 1:18, and get upon the mount of meditation, upon the top of Pisgah, to get a view of the land. So for love; the more we study 'the height, and breadth, and depth of God's love in Christ,' Eph. 3:18, 19, the more is the heart melted and drawn out to God, and more quickened to obedience: Ps. 26:3, 'Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes.' And as it helpeth our graces in their exercise, so all other duties; as hearing of the word. To hear and not to meditate is unfruitful. The heart is hard and the memory slippery, the thoughts loose and vain; and therefore, unless we cover the good seed, the fowls of the air will catch it away. It is like a thing put into a bag with holes—lost while it is received: James 1:23, 24, 'Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own souls; for if a man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of person he was.' Bare hearing begets but transient thoughts, and leaveth but a weak impression in the soul; like a flash of lightning, as soon gone as come, or the glance of a sunbeam upon a wave. A man never discerneth the scope, the

beauty, the order of the truths delivered, till he cometh to meditate on them, and to go over them again and again in his thoughts: Ps. 62:11, 'God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this,' &c., i.e., when we repeat it upon our thoughts, inculcate it, and meditate upon it, this maketh a deeper impression, and that which is spoken rebounds again and again; it is twice heard. David saith, Ps. 119:99, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation.' The preacher can but lay down general theorems and deduce practical inferences; but that which fasteneth them upon the heart is our own thoughts; and so we come to be wiser, to see more clearly and practically as to our own case than he that preacheth; we see a further use than he was aware of. So for prayer; what we take in by the word we digest by meditation, and let out by prayer. These three duties help one another. What is the reason men have such a barren, dry, and sapless spirit in their prayers? It is for want of exercising themselves in holy thoughts: Ps. 45:1, 'My heart inditeth a good matter;' and then 'My tongue is as the pen of a ready writer.' It alludeth to the mincah, the meat-offering; the oil and flour were to be kneaded together, and fried in a pan, and so offered to the Lord. When we come with raw dough-baked offerings, before we have concocted and prepared our thoughts by mature deliberation, we are barren or tumultuary in our prayers to God. Prayer is called by the name of meditation, because it is the product and issue of it; as Ps. 5:1, 'Give ear to my words, O Lord; consider my meditation.' So Ps. 19:14, 'Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight;' implying that prayer is but the vent and expression of what we have deliberated and meditated upon. So David findeth his desires more earnest after grace, the more he mused and meditated: Ps. 143:5, 6, 'I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the works of thy hands; I stretch forth my hands unto thee; my soul thirsteth after thee as a thirsty land.' Well, then, it is the life and strength of other



ordinances, without which how slight and perfunctory are we! I might instance in conference; the stream of good discourse is fed by serious thoughts. The Lord's Supper, a duty which is mainly despatched by our thoughts; there we come to put reason to the highest use, to be the instrument of faith and love; of faith in believing applications; of love, in resolutions of duty and thankfulness. In that one ordinance there is a union of mysteries, which we take abroad in holy and serious thoughts. To have an unfruitful understanding, then, is a great damp and deadness to the heart. Now, we shall never enlarge ourselves in pertinent and savoury thoughts, unless we use to meditate; for spiritual dispositions do not come upon us of a sudden, and by rapt motions, but by progressive and orderly degrees and preparations.

(3d.) It is a profitable duty as to temporals. Isaac went out to meditate, and of a sudden he espieth the camels coming upon which Rebecca was brought to him, Gen. 24:63, 64. Was this a mere accident, think you, or a providence worthy of remark and observation? Isaac goes to meet with God, and there he gets the first view of his bosom-friend and spouse. This was a mercy cast into the bargain. 'Godliness hath the promises of this life, and that which is to come.' There is nothing lost by duty and acts of piety. Seneca said the Jews were a foolish people, because they lost the full seventh part of their lives—*Septimam ætatis partem perdunt vacando*; intending their sabbath-time. This is the sense of nature, to think all lost that is bestowed upon God. Flesh and blood crieth out, What need this waste? they cannot spare time from their callings, they have families to maintain. Oh! let me tell you, by serving God you drive on two cares at once. Worldly interests are cast into the way of religion, and though not designed and intended by us, these things are added to us. For comforts and manifestations of God, we have them many times in our recess and the privacy of our retirements, in a more

plentiful manner than elsewhere. 'The spouse inviteth the bridegroom, Cant. 7:11, 'Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field.' Upon which Bernard, O sancta anima, fuge publicum, fuge. An nescis te verecundum habere sponsum, qui nequaquam tibi velit indulgere præsentiam suam coram aliis? We have most experiences of God when we are alone with him, and sequestered from all distractions of company and business, solacing ourselves with God. Exod. 3:1, Moses drove the sheep to the back side of the wilderness, and came to the mount of God: he goeth aside from the other shepherds, that he might converse with the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, and there he seeth the vision of the fiery bush. Usually God cometh to us in our deep meditation; when the soul is most elevated, and fittest to entertain the comforts of his presence, then we have sensible experience of God.

The standing spiritual benefits of meditation are many. It imprints and fastens a truth upon the mind and memory. Deliberate thoughts stick with us, as a lesson we have conned is not easily forgotten. Civet long kept in a box, the scent remaineth when the civet is taken out. Sermons meditated on are remembered by us long after they are delivered: it sets the heart a-work. The greatest matters will not work upon him that doth not think of them. Tell them of sin, and God, and Christ, and heaven and hell, and they stir them not, because they do not take these truths into their deep thoughts; or if they be stirred a little, it is but a fit, while the truth is held in the view of conscience. We had need inculcate things if we would have them to affect us. The steel must beat again and again upon the flint, if we would have the sparks fly out; so must the understanding bear hard upon the will, to get out any affection and respect to the ways of God. It showeth the beauty of truths. When we look upon them in transitu, we do not see half that is in them; but upon a deliberate view it more appeareth; as there is a secret grace in some, that is not discerned but by much

converse and narrow inspection. It helpeth to prevent vain thoughts. The mind of man is restless, and cannot lie idle; therefore it is good to employ it with good thoughts, and set it a-work on holy things; for then there will be no time and heart for vanity, the mind being prepossessed and seasoned already; but when the heart is left to run loose, vanity increaseth upon us. O Christians! meditation is all; it is the mother and nurse of knowledge and godliness, the great instrument in all the offices of grace. We resemble the purity and simplicity of God most in the holiness of our thoughts. Without meditation we do but talk one after another like parrots, and take up things by mere hearsay, and repeat them by rote, without affection and life, or discerning the worth and excellency of what we speak. It is meditation that maketh truths always ready and present with us: Prov. 6:21, 22, 'Bind them continually upon thy heart; when thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou wakest, it shall talk with thee.' But I forbear.

1. Whereby the mind is applied to serious and solemn consideration. I add this, to distinguish it from occasional meditation, and those good thoughts that accidentally rush into our minds, and to note the care and attention of soul that we should use in such an exercise. It is musing makes the fire burn: glances or transient thoughts, or running over a truth in haste, is not meditation, but a serious attention of mind. It is not to take a snatch and away, but to make a meal of truth, and to work it into our hearts. Alas! a slight thought, that is like a flash of lightning, gone as soon as come, doth nothing. Constant thoughts are operative; and a truth, the longer it is held in the view of conscience, the more powerful it is: Deut. 32:46, 'Set your hearts to all the words which I testify among you this day.' A sudden thought may be none of ours; it may be unwelcome, and find no entertainment with us, but set your hearts to it: Luke 9:44, 'Let these things sink down into your hearts;' let them go to the quick: Prov.

18:1, 'Through desire a man having separated himself, intermeddleth in all wisdom.' Then is a man fit for these pure and holy thoughts, for intermeddling in all wise and divine matters, when he hath divorced himself from other cares, and is able to keep his understanding under a prudent confinement.

2. Of the truths which we understand and believe. In meditation we suppose the object understood; for it is the work of study to search it out, of meditation to enforce and apply it; and we suppose it believed and granted to be a truth. The work now is to improve our assent, that it may have an answerable force and efficacy upon the soul.

3. It follows in the description, for practical uses and purposes. Meditation is not to store the head with notions, but to better the heart. We meditate of God that we may love him and fear him; of sin, that we may abhor it; of hell, that we may avoid it; of heaven, that we may pursue it. Still the end is practical, to quicken us to greater diligence and care in the heavenly life.

Use 1. To reprove those that are seldom in this work. Worldly cares and sloth and ease divert us; if we had a heart, we would have time and leisure. The clean beasts did chew the cud. We should go over, and over, and over again the truths of God in our thoughts. But alas!

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1. Either men muse on trifles; all the day their minds are full of chaff and vanity. Oh! hast thou thoughts for other things, and hast thou no thoughts for God's precepts? Hast thou not a God and a Christ to think of? And is not salvation by him, and everlasting glory, worthy of your choicest thoughts? You have thoughts enough and to spare for other things—for base things, for very toys—and why not for God and the word of God? Why not for Christ and that everlasting redemption he hath accomplished for us? If a man would throw his

meat and drink down the kennel, rather than give to him that asketh him, the world would cry shame upon him. Will you cast away your thoughts upon idle vanities rather than God shall have them? Oh, shame! Your thoughts must be working. What! shall they run waste, and yet God have no turn?

2. Or else men muse on that which is evil. There are many sins engross the thoughts.

[1.] Uncleanness sets up a stage in the heart, whereon a polluted fancy personates and acts over the pleasures of that sin. Our thoughts are often panders to our lust: 2 Peter 2:14, 'Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin.' The unclean rolling of fancy on the beauty of women is forbid: Mat. 5:28, 'He that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.'

[2.] Revenge; the thoughts of it, how sweet are they to a carnal heart! Men dwell upon their discontents and injuries till, like liquors that sour in the vessel when long kept, they sharpen revenge. We are apt to concoct anger into malice: 'Frowardness is in his heart; he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord,' Prov. 6:14.

[3.] Envy stirreth up repining thoughts; it is a sin that feedeth on the mind: 1 Sam. 18:9, 'And Saul envied David from that day forward.' David's ten thousands ever ran in Saul's mind. Envy muses on the good of others to hate them.

[4.] Pride, in lofty conceits and whispers of vanity: Luke 1:51, 'He hath scattered the proud in the imaginations of their hearts.' Proud men are full of musings. 'Is not this great Babylon that I have built, for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?' Dan. 4:30. Proud men please themselves

with the suppositions of applause, and the echoes of praise in their minds.

[5.] Covetousness consists chiefly in a vain musing: Ezek. 33:31, 'Their heart goeth after their covetousness;' 2 Peter 2:14, 'Hearts exercised with covetous practices.'

Use 2 is of exhortation, to press us to meditate on God's precepts. Many think it is an exercise that doth not suit with their temper; it is a good exercise, but for those that can use it. It is true there is a great deal of difference among Christians. Some are more serious and consistent, and have a greater command over their thoughts; others are of a more slight and weak spirit, and less apt for duties of retirement and recollection; but our unfitness is usually moral rather than natural, not so much by temper as by ill use. Now, sinful indispositions do not disannul our engagements to God, as a servant's drunkenness doth not excuse him from work. Inky water cannot wash the hands clean. That it is a culpable unfitness appeareth partly because disuse and neglect is the cause of it; those that use it have a greater command over the thoughts. Men count it a great yoke; custom would make it easy. Every duty is a help to itself; and the more we meditate the more we may. They that use it much find more of sweetness than difficulty in it. If a man did use to govern his thoughts, they would come more to hand. Partly, want of love. We pause and stay upon such objects as we delight in. Love naileth the soul to the object or thing beloved: Ps. 119:97, 'Oh, how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day.' Carnal men find no burden in their thoughts; their heart is in them. Well, then, though you have not such choice and savoury thoughts as others have, yet set upon the work; you can think of anything you love.

Oh! but, as some press it, it requireth art and skill, and logical disposition of places of argumentation.

Ans. We cannot tie you to a method. Serious thoughts, no question, are required, and dealing with the heart about it in the best way of reasoning that we can use. Take these directions:—

1. Look how others muse how to commit a sin; and shall not we muse how to redress it? Wicked men sit a-brood: Isa. 59:5, 'They hatch the cockatrice egg, and weave the spider's web; they devise mischief upon the bed;' Micah 2:1, 'Woe to them that devise mischief on their beds.' So do you muse how to carry on the work of the day with success: Prov. 16:30, 'The wicked man shutteth his eyes to devise froward things;' it signifies his pensive solitary muttering with himself.

2. As you would persuade others to good. Surely you do not count admonition so hard a work. What words you would use to them, use the same thoughts to yourself: heart answereth to heart.

3. You understand a truth; you have arguments evident and strong why you should believe it; repeat them over to the soul with application: Job 5:27, 'See it, and know it for thy good.' This application is partly by way of trial, partly by way of charge. By way of trial: How is it with thee, O my soul?—Rom. 8:31, 'What shall we say to these things?' By way of charge and command: Ps. 73:28, 'It is good for me to draw nigh to God; I have put my trust in the Lord, that I might declare all thy works.'

## **SERMON XVII**

## **I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.—VER. 16.**

DAVID had spoken much of his respect to the word, both as to his former practice and future resolutions. A godly man, the more good he doth, the more he desireth, delighteth, and resolveth to do. Spiritual affections grow upon us by practice and much exercise. The graces of the Spirit and the duties of religion do every one fortify and strengthen one another; lose one, and lose all; keep one, and keep all. Meditation breedeth delight, and delight helpeth memory and practice. He had said, 'I will meditate on thy precepts;' and now, 'I will delight myself in thy statutes;' and that produceth a further benefit, 'I will not forget thy word.'

The spiritual life is refreshed with change as well as the natural; but it is with change of exercise, not of affection. There is hearing, praying, conferring, meditating, and all with delight; for when one fontinel is drawn dry, we may, as the lamb doth, suck another that will yield new supply and sweetness. David had spoken of his various exercises about the word, in the use of all which he would maintain a spiritual delight.

In this verse observe again a double respect to the word of God:—

1. I will delight myself in thy statutes.
2. I will not forget thy word.

These are fitly suited. Delight preventeth forgetfulness; the mind will run upon that which the heart is delighted in; and the heart is where the treasure is, Mat. 6:21. Worldly men, that are intent upon carnal interests, forget the word; it is not their delight. If anything displease



us, we are glad if we can forget it; it is some release from an inconvenience to take off our thoughts from it; but it doubleth the contentment of a thing that we are delighted in to remember it and call it to mind. In the outward school, if a scholar by his own averseness from learning, or by the severity and imprudence of his master, by his morosity or unreasonable exactions, hath no delight in his book, all that he learneth is lost and forgotten; it goeth in at one ear, and out at the other: but this is the true art of memory, to cause them to delight in what they learn. Such instructions as we take in with a sweetness, they stick with us, and run in our minds night and day. So saith David here, 'I will delight in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.'

Doct. 1. One great respect which the saints owe to the word of God is to delight therein.

David resolveth so to do: 'I will delight,' or solace or recreate myself in thy statutes; this should be his refreshment after business. David had many things to delight in;—the splendour and magnificence of his kingdom; as Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 4:30, 'Is not this great Babylon that I have built, for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?' His great victories, which Aristotle saith are delightful to all. Τὸ νικᾶν ἡδὺ, οὐ μόνον τοῖς φιλονέικοις ἀλλὰ πᾶσι· φαντασία γὰρ ὑπεροχῆς γίνεταί. It is an appearance of excellency (Arist. Rhet. i. cap. 11). Or in his instruments of music; as those, Amos 6:5, 'that chaunt to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music like David.' No; this was not the mirth that he chose for his portion. Wicked men throng their hearts with such delights as these, lest an evil conscience flee upon them; 'but I will delight myself in thy statutes.' He might take comfort in a subordinate way in these things; but the solace of his life, and the true sauce of all his labours,

was in the word of God. As David, so Jeremiah, chap. 15:16, 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them; they were unto me as the joy and rejoicing of my heart.' That was the food and the repast of his soul, and he felt more warmth and cherishing in it than any can in their bodily food. So Paul: Rom. 7:22, 'I delight in the law of God in the inward man.' Not to know it only, but to feel the power of it prevailing over his lusts; that was his delight as to the better part of his soul. So it is made a general character of the blessed man: Ps. 1:2, that 'he delighteth in the law of God, and in that law doth he exercise himself day and night.' God's people will delight in his law; it is one of the greatest enjoyments they have on this side heaven, in the time of their absence from God. It is the instrument of all the good that they receive—comfort, strength, quickening.

But now, how do they delight in God's statutes?

1. In reading the word. The eunuch, returning from public worship, was reading a portion of scripture, Acts 8:28. It is good to see with our eyes, and to drink of the fountain ourselves; if it seem dark without the explication of men, God, that sent Philip to the eunuch, will send you an interpreter.

2. In hearing of the word. The command is, James 1:19, 'Wherefore be swift to hear.' The saints have had experiment of the power of it, and therefore delight in it. 'I was glad when they said, Come, let us go up unto the house of the Lord,' Ps. 122:1. You should be glad of these occasions of hearing, not as, with the minstrel, to please the ear, but to warm the heart. Seeing is in heaven, hearing in the churches upon earth; then vision, now hearing.

3. In conferring of it often. What a man delighteth in he will be talking of; so should you at home and abroad: Deut. 6:7, 'Thou shalt be talking of them when thou sittest in thy house, and as thou

walkest by the way,' seasoning thy journey. He that would have God to be in his journey, as travelling and walking abroad, should be speaking of divine things.

4. In meditating and exercising his mind upon it: Ps. 1:2, 'He delighteth in the law of God, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.' Delight causeth a pause or consistency of mind: as the glutton rolleth the sweet morsel under his tongue, and is loath to let it go, so a godly man's thoughts will run along with his delight. Clean beasts chew the cud; God's children will be ruminating, going over the word again and again.

5. In practice. This delight is not a bare speculation—so hypocrites have their tastes and their flashes—but in believing, practising, obeying: Ps. 119:14, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies.' Delight breedeth obedience, and is increased and doubled by it. It is not the delight which an ordinary beholder taketh in a rare piece of painting, merely to admire the art; but the delight which an artist taketh in imitating it, and copying it out. Here in the text it is 'in thy statutes.' A gracious heart is alike affected with the rule as the promise; not only with discoveries of grace, but discoveries of duty.

Now thus it must be ordinarily.

1. The duties of every day must be carried on with delight. This must be our divertisement, and the refreshment of our other labours, that when tired out with the incumbrances of the world, we may look upon reading, meditating, hearing, as our recreation, and the salt and solace of our lives, that other things may go down the better. The labours of the mind do relieve those of the body, and those of the body those of the mind. Ainsworth saith, the word in the text signifieth, 'I will solace and recreate myself;' and Ps. 1:2, 'His delight

is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he exercise himself day and night,' as was before cited.

2. Especially upon the Lord's day: Isa. 58:13, 'Thou shalt call the sabbath a delight;' call it so, that is, account it so. When our whole time is to be parted into meditation, and prayer, and hearing, and conference, then it is our advantage to lie in the bosom of God all the day long. A bell is kept up with less difficulty when it is once raised; and when the heart is once got up, it is the better kept up in a holy delight in God.

The reasons of it are two—

1. The word of God deserveth it.
2. This delight will be of great use to them.

First, The word of God deserveth it.

1. In regard to the author, they delight in it for the author's sake, because it is the signification of his mind; as a letter from a beloved friend is very welcome to us. Aristotle, mentioning the causes of delight, saith (Rhet. i. cap. 11), 'Οι ἐρῶντες, καὶ διαλεγόμενοι, καὶ γράφοντες, καὶ ποιοῦντες ἀεὶ τὶ περὶ τοῦ ἐρωμένου χαίρουσιν—lovers are mightily pleased when they hear anything of the party beloved, or receive anything from them, a letter or a token. The word is God's epistle and love-letter to ourselves; it is the more welcome for his sake. The contrary God complaineth of: Hosea 8:12, 'I have written to them the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.' God is the author, whosoever be the penman; it is a writing from him to us. Now, to be strangers to it, or little conversant about it, argueth some contempt of God; as to slight the letter of a

friend showeth little esteem of the writer. But now the saints put it into their bosoms, view it with delight, it is God's epistle.

2. In regard of its own excellency, in three respects; it is—

[1.] Their direction.

[2.] Their support.

[3.] Their charter.

[1.] It is their direction; it is 'a light that shines in a dark place,' 2 Peter 1:19. The world is a dark place, beset with dangers, and ever and anon we are apt to stumble into the pit of destruction, without taking heed to this light. The word discovereth to them evils, that they may see them, repent of them, forsake them; and showeth us our ready way to heaven, that we may walk therein. It discovereth the greatest dangers, and pointeth out the surest way to safety and peace. They are called true laws and good statutes, Neh. 9:13, to show the full proportion that they bear to the soul. Verum and bonum,—truth and goodness, are proper for our most eminent faculties, the understanding and will. It doth a man's heart good to study these statutes. A child of God, that seeth others stumble and fall, how may he stand and bless God for the direction of the word, that God hath given him counsel in his reins, that he hath a clue to lead him out of those labyrinths in which others have lost their way, and know not know to escape!

[2.] It is their support. The word is κοινὸν ἰατρεῖον, as Basil expresseth it. It is God's shop, from whence they fetch all their cordials in a time of fainting, and so are freed from those fears and discontents and despairing thoughts under which others languish: Ps. 119:50, 'This is my comfort in my affliction, thy word hath

quicken me.' When a believer is damped with trouble, and even dead at heart, a promise will revive him again: ver. 92, 'Unless thy law had been my delight, I had perished in my affliction.' And many such like experiences the saints have had. The worth of the word is best known in an evil time. One promise in the word of God doth bear up the heart more than all the arguings and discourses of men, though never so excellent. In time of temptation, in the hour of death, oh, what a reviving is one word of God's mouth!

[3.] It is their charter, that which they have to show for their everlasting hopes. There we have promises of eternal joy and blessedness under the greatest assurance, and this makes way for strong consolation, Heb. 6:18. A man that hath a clear evidence to show for a fair inheritance, it is not irksome to hear it read, or to look over it now and then, as a covetous man is pleased to look into his bills and bonds which he has under hand and seal.

Secondly, This delight will be of great use to them.

1. To draw us off from carnal vanities. We have another delight, and the strength of the soul runneth out in another way; there will not be such room for worldly affections. As fear is cured with fear, the fear of men with the fear of God, so is delight by delight; delight in God's statutes is the cure of delight in worldly things. Love cannot lie idle, it must be occupied one way or another; either carried out to the contentments of the flesh, or else to holy things. Now, if you can find a more noble delight, there is a check upon that which is carnal: Ps. 119:37, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way.' The enlargement of the heart straitens the flesh.

2. It will take off the tediousness of religious exercises. What we delight in is not irksome. In hunting, fowling, and fishing, though there be as much labour as in our ordinary employments, yet we

count the toil nothing because of the delight in them. We are very apt to be weary of well-doing, and to tire in a holy course; but now, when it is our delight, it goeth on the more easily. In one sense we must make religion our business, in another, our recreation; our work to prevent slackness, our recreation to prevent tediousness; it is not a task, but a pleasure.

Use 1. This informeth us of the ill choice that many men make of their delights and recreations; they must have cards and dice and foolish mirth to pass away the time, or else idle stories and vain romances. A Christian is everywhere like himself; he showeth himself a Christian in his recreations as well as his business. *Castæ deliciæ meæ sunt scripturæ tuæ*, saith Austin—Lord, my chaste delights are thy Holy Scriptures. If we were as we should be, it would be our recreation to understand our duty, to contemplate the way of reconciliation to God by Christ, and to take a view of our everlasting hopes. Were we seriously persuaded of the benefits which men have by the word, that there is a sure direction to resolve our doubts and our scruples, and the offers of a pardon and a glorious estate by Christ, what need a Christian any other recreation? Will not the sense of God's love and the hopes of heaven make us merry enough? Indeed, because of the weariness of the flesh, we need temporal refreshments; but here should be our great delight, 'I will solace or recreate myself in thy statutes.'

Use 2. Caution to us to fix our delight aright.

1. It is a considerable affection. All the affections depend upon pleasure or pain, delight or grief—the one is proper to the body, the other to the soul—which grow from the contentment or distaste which we receive from the divers objects which we meet with. If we love, it is for that we find a sweetness in the object beloved; if we

hate, we apprehend a trouble in what we hate; if we hope, we promise ourselves a happiness or satisfaction in the possession of the thing hoped for: if we despair, it is because the thing cannot be obtained from which our contentment would arise. Desire is of some good which we judge pleasing. By fear and flight we shun things which we apprehend would breed us vexation. So that, in effect, delight sets all the other affections a-work.

2. It is a choice affection, more proper to fruition than use, and therefore not for the means so much as end, and so reserved for God, who is the last end. There are *fruenta* and *utenda*, God and heavenly things to be enjoyed, but earthly things to be used: for means, those that are in the nearest vicinity to the end, as the law of God and grace: earthly things are to be used with a kind of indifferency, and therefore should have little of our joy; but our solid complacency must be in God, next in the things of God, his law and grace, which are means in the nearest vicinity with our end: Ps. 37:4, 'Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart;' Phil. 4:4, 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.'

3. Delight, if not right set, of all the affections, is apt to degenerate. We have a liberty to delight in earthly things; the affection is allowed, the excess is forbidden. Thou mayest delight in the wife of thy youth, in thy children, estate, in the provisions heaped upon thee by the indulgence of God's providence. Pleasure is the sauce of life, to better digest our sorrows. It is allowed us, but it must be well guarded. We are most apt to surfeit of pleasant things, and to miscarry by sweet affections. Sorrow is afflictive and painful, and will in time wear away of itself. Pleasure is ingrained in our natures, born and bred with us; and therefore, though we may delight in the moderate use of the refreshments of the present life, in estate, honour, reputation, yet we should take heed of excess, that our hearts be not overjoyed, and



too much taken up about these things. Carnal joy is the drunkenness of the mind; it besotteth us, maketh us unmindful of God, weakens our esteem of his favour and blessing; it chaineth us to present things. Pleasure is the great witch and sorceress that enchants with the love of the world, maketh us unmindful of the country whence we came, and whither we are going; therefore we should be jealous of our delight, and how we bestow it.

Use 3. To exhort us to this delight in God's statutes, or this spiritual rejoicing.

1. Here is no danger of exceeding; the greatest excesses here are most praiseworthy. In other things we must exercise it with jealousy, feed with fear, rejoice as if we rejoiced not. A man may easily go beyond his bounds when he rejoiceth in the creature; but here enlarge thy heart as much as is possible, and take thy fill of pleasure: Cant 5:1. 'Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.' This is ebrietas quæ nos castos facit—chaste flagons: Eph. 5:18, 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be ye filled with the Spirit.'

2. We shall never be ashamed of these joys: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience,' &c. All carnal joys have a turpitude affixed to them, and therefore affect to lie hid under a veil of secrecy. The world would cry shame of him that would say of his bags or his dishes, Here is my joy. As much as men affect these things, yet they desire to conceal them from the knowledge of others.

3. We shall never be weary of these joys. The delights of the senses become nauseous and troublesome; our natural dispositions become weary and importunate; a man must have shift and change, pleasures refreshed with other pleasures. But these delights add perfection to nature; therefore, when fully enjoyed, they delight most. A good conscience is a continual feast, a dish we are never

weariness of. The blessed spirits in heaven are never weary of beholding the face of God. God is new and fresh every moment to them. The contemplation of such excellent objects doth not overcharge and weaken the spirits, but doth raise and fortify them. It is true, the corporeal powers being weak, may be tired in such an employment, as much reading is a weariness to the flesh; but the object doth not grow distasteful, as in carnal things.

How shall we get it?

1. Get a suitableness to the word. Every man's delights are as his principles: Rom. 8:5, 'They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit.' A man is much discovered by his savour and relish of things. All creatures must have suitable food. There must be a suitableness between the faculty and the object; spiritual things are spiritually discerned.

2. Be in a condition to delight in the word. A guilty soul readeth its own doom there; it revealeth themselves to themselves, accuseth and condemneth them. As Ahab said of Micaiah, 'He prophesieth evil against me,' and therefore could not endure to hear him: John 3:20, 'Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.'

3. Purge the heart from carnal distempers, lust, envy, covetousness, love of pleasures; these are diseases that need other diet than the word. Such persons must have other solaces; they cater for the flesh, to please the senses. An earthly heart will not delight in spiritual things.

Doct. It standeth God's children upon to see that they do not forget the word.

1. What is it to forget the word? A man may remember or forget two ways—notionally and affectively.

[1.] Notionally, when the notions of things formerly known are either altogether or in part worn out: James 1:25, 'He is like one that looks at his natural face in a glass, but goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of person he was.'

[2.] Affectively, when, though he still retain the notions, yet he is not answerably affected, nor doth act according thereunto. Thus the butler did not remember Joseph; that is, did not pity him. Thus God is said not to remember the sins of them that repent, when he doth not punish them, and to forget the afflictions of his people, when he doth not deliver them; and we are said to forget God, Ps. 106:21, when we do not obey him, and to forget his word when we do not 'remember his commandments to do them,' Ps. 103:18. In this place both are intended, the notional and practical remembrance.

2. The reasons why we should not forget his word.

[1.] Meditation will fail else. A barren, lean soul is unfit to enlarge itself in holy thoughts, shall never grow rich in the spiritual understanding: Col. 3:16, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly, in all knowledge,' &c. Men of small substance grow rich by continual saving, and holding together what they have gotten; but if they spend it as fast as they get it, they cannot be rich: Luke 2:19, 'Mary kept all these sayings, and pondered them in her heart.'

[2.] Delectation will grow cold, unless the memory be rubbed up ever and anon. When they fainted under affliction, the cause is intimated: Heb. 12:5, 'Have ye forgotten the exhortation that speaketh unto you as unto children?' Distrust in straits is from the same source: Mark 8:17, 'They remembered not the miracle of the loaves, for their hearts

were hardened. Ye see and hear, and do not remember. David was under great discomfort till he 'remembered the years of the light hand of the Most High,' Ps. 77:10; Lam. 3:21, 'This I recall to mind, therefore I have hope.'

[3.] Practice and conscience of obedience will grow more remiss. Nothing keepeth the heart in a holy tenderness so much as a presence of the truth; and when we can bring our knowledge to act, and have it for our use upon all occasions, it urgeth us to practice: James 1:25, being 'not a forgetful hearer, but a doer.' Most of our sins are sins of forgetfulness and incogitancy. Peter would never have been so bold and daring, and done what he did, if he had remembered Christ's prediction. The text saith, Luke 22:61, 'When he remembered, he wept bitterly.' A bad memory is the occasion of much mischief to the soul, when we do not call truths to mind in their season, and when fit occasion and opportunity is offered. Memory is a handmaid to understanding and conscience, and keeps truths, and brings them forth when called for.

Use is to press us to caution. Let us not forget the word. Helps to memory are:—

1. Attention. Men remember what they heed and regard: Prov. 4:21, 'Attend to my sayings; keep them in the midst of thy heart.' Where there is attention, there will be retention. Oh! lay up truths with much earnestness and care. Sensitive memory is seated in the hinder part of the head, as one would say in a chamber backward, from the noise of the street. Now, oh! lay up truth safe, and lay it out whenever you have need. But rational memory lieth near the understanding and conscience, in the midst of thine heart. Reverence in the admission of the word helps us in the keeping of it: Heb. 2:1, 'Let us take heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time

they slip from us.' If we did receive it with more heed, we would retain it with more constancy; lay them up, keep them choicely.

2. Affection, that is a great friend to memory. What we esteem most we best remember. *Omnia quæ curant senes meminerunt*—an old man will not forget where he laid his bag of gold. Delight and love will renew and revive the object upon our thoughts. Here in the text we have this truth asserted, 'I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.' Affection to truths cometh from the application. In a public edict a man will be sure to carry away what is proper to his case.

3. Meditation. We must be often viewing and meditating of what we have laid up in the memory. It availeth not to the health of the body to eat much, but to digest what is eaten. Tumultuary reading and hearing, without meditation, is like greedy swallowing much meat. When little is thought on, it doth not turn to profit. This concocteth and digesteth what we have heard. The more a thing is revolved in the mind, the deeper impression it maketh.

4. Beware of inuring the mind to vain thoughts; for this distracts it, and hindereth the impression of things upon it. The face is not seen in running waters; nor can things be written in the memory, unless the mind be close and fixed. Lead is capable of engraving, because it is firm and solid; but quicksilver, because it is fluid, will not admit it. An inconsistent, wandering mind reapeth little fruit from what is read or heard.

5. Order is a help to memory. Heads of doctrine are as cells wherein to bestow all things that are heard from the word. He that is well instructed in the principles of religion will most easily and firmly remember divine truths. *Methodus est catena memoriæ*, to link

truths one to another, that we may consider them in their proportion.

6. Get a lively sense of what you hear or read, and you will remember it by a good token: Ps. 119:93, 'I will never forget thy precepts, for by them thou hast quickened me.' They that are quickened by a sermon will never forget such a sermon.

7. Holy conference. The speaking often of good things keeps them in the heart; and the keeping of them there causeth us to speak to those that are about.

8. Get the memory sanctified, as well as other faculties, and pray for the Spirit; for that faculty is corrupted as well as others.

## **SERMON XVIII**

## **Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.—VER. 17.**

IN the former part we heard of the virtue and excellency of the word, and therefore how much the saints desire to understand it, meditate of it, speak of it, and transfer it into their practice. Now, whosoever will resolve upon such a course, will necessarily be put upon prayer; for mark how David's purposes and prayers are intermingled, I will, and I will; and then presently prayeth again, 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.'

In this request observe—

1. It is generally expressed, together with his own relation to God, deal bountifully with thy servant.
2. It is particularly explained wherein he would have this bounty expressed:—

[1.] In the prorogation of his life, that I may live.

[2.] In the continuance of his grace, and keep thy word; the one in order to the other. David doth not simply pray for life, but in order to such an end; and the general request concerneth both parts, yea, rather the latter than the former, that whilst I live I may beep thy word, as counting that to be the greatest benefit or argument of God's bounty, to have a heart framed to the obedience of his will.

I might observe many things; as (1.) What a great honour it is to be God's servant. David, a great king, giveth himself this title, 'thy servant;' and Constantine counted it a greater honour to be a

Christian than to be head of the empire. (2.) That all we have or expect cometh from God's bounty to us. So doth David express himself, 'Deal bountifully with thy servant;' as intimating not only the measure, but the rise and source of what he expected from God. (3.) That among all the benefits which we expect from the bounty of God, this is one of the greatest, to have an heart to 'keep his word.' (4.) God's word must not only be understood, but obeyed; for this is the meaning of keeping the word: John 14:21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them,' &c. Hath implieth knowledge. We must have them before we can keep them; but when we have them, we must keep them, and do what we know. But omitting all these points, which will be more fitly discussed elsewhere, I shall only point out two lessons:—

1. The cause of life, and that is God's bounty.
2. The end and scope of life; God's service.

First, The cause of life, deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live. Observe—

Doct. The prorogation of our lives is not the fruit of our merits, but the free grace of God.

1. Long life is in itself a blessing, and so promised, though more in the Old Testament than in the New, when eternity was more sparingly revealed. That it is promised as a blessing is evident: Prov. 28:16, 'He that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days.' And in the fifth commandment: Exod. 20:12, 'That thy days may be long in the land of the living.' So Ps. 91:16, 'With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation;' not only heaven hereafter, but long life here. It is in itself a benefit, a mercy to the godly and the wicked. To the godly, that they may not be gathered till ripe; for God hath set a



mark upon it: Prov. 16:31, 'The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in a way of righteousness.' It is some kind of resemblance of God, who is the Ancient of days. It was a title of honour, 'Paul the aged.' It giveth many advantages of glorifying God, and doing good to others. It is no small benefit to those that employ it well. To those that are in a state of sin, the continuance of life is a mercy, as it affords them time to repent and reconcile themselves to God. And the contrary is threatened as a curse: Eccles. 8:13, 'He shall not prolong his days, because he feareth not God.' For wicked men to have the sun go down at noon-day, and to be cut off before their preparations or expectations, and so thrown headlong into hell by a speedy death, is a great misery.

2. It is such a mercy as we have by God's gift. He is interested in it upon a double account.

[1.] There is a constant providential influence and supportation, by which we are maintained in life, and without which all creatures vanish into nothing; as the beams of the sun are no longer continued in the air than the sun shineth, or as the impress is retained no longer upon the waters than the seal is kept on. When God suspendeth his providential influence and supportation, all doth vanish and disappear: Heb. 1:3, 'He upholdeth all things by the word of his power;' as a weighty thing is held up in the air by the hand that sustaineth it, or the vessels of the house hang upon 'a nail in a sure place.' God, that made all things by his word, upholdeth all things by the same word. A word made the world, and can undo the world. So Acts 17:28, 'In him we live and move and have our being.' We cannot draw breath without him for a moment; as the pipe hath no breath but what the musician puts into it. We can neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor drink, without this intimate support and influence from him. The scripture sets it out by a man's holding a thing in his hand: Job

12:10, 'In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.' Now, if God do but loosen his hand, his almighty grasp, all cometh to nothing: Job 6:9. 'Let him loose his hand, and cut me off.' Life, and the comforts of life, depend upon God in every kind.

[2.] There is a watchful eye and care of his providence over his people, whereby their life is preserved against all the dangers wherewith it is assaulted. God taketh care of all his creatures: Ps. 36:6, 'He preserveth man and beast;' but man much more: 1 Cor. 9:9, 'Doth God take care of oxen?' He dealeth bountifully with his enemies, but much more doth he 'preserve the feet of his saints,' 1 Sam. 2:9. The care of his providence hath its degrees; it is more intensively exercised about things of worth and value, and most of all about the life of his saints. When Satan had a commission to exercise Job, first his person was exempted: Job 1:12, 'Upon himself put not forth thy hand;' next his life: Job 2:6, 'Behold he is in thy hand, but save his life.' A godly man hath an invisible guard and hedge round about him. We are not sensible of it; but Satan, who is our enemy, he is sensible of it: when he would make his assault, he cannot find a gap and breach, till God open it to him. Both these notions are sufficient to possess us how much God is interested in prolonging our lives.

3. The next thing is, that we have it by the mere bounty and free grace of God. It is not from his strict remunerative justice, but his kind love and tender mercy. The air we breathe in, we have it not by merit, but by grace: Lam. 3:22, 'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.' The reasons are two:—

[1.] We deserve nothing at his hand.

[2.] We deserve the contrary.

(1.) We cannot merit of God: Job. 22:2, 'Can a man be profitable to God, as he that is wise is profitable to himself?' Job 35:7, 'If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he at thy hand?' Whatever God doth for creatures, he doth it freely, because he cannot be obliged or pre-engaged by us. In innocency Adam could impetrate, but not mereri—obtain it by covenant, not challenge by desert. Therefore God conferreth as freely as he createth.

(2.) If God would deal with us upon terms of merit, we cannot give him a valuable compensation for temporal life—Gen. 32:10, 'I am less than the least of all thy mercies.' None of God's mercies can simply be said to be little; whatever cometh from the great God should be great in our value and esteem; as a small remembrance from a great king. Yet in comparison between the blessings, one may be said to be least, the other greatest. Temporal life with its appendages, compared with spiritual and eternal, is in the rank of his least mercies. God giveth life to the plants, to the trees, to the beasts of the field; and yet, when we and our deservings come into the balance, we are found wanting: 'I am not worthy,' &c. All our righteousness doth not deserve the air we breathe in. It is so defective, if a man were to pay for his life, it could not merit the continuance of it.

[2.] We have deserved the contrary; we have put ourselves out of God's protection by sin. Death waylaid us when we were in our mother's womb; and as soon as we were born, there was a sentence in force against us: 'Death came upon all, for that all have sinned,' Rom. 5:12; and still we continue the forfeiture, and every day provoke God to cut us off; so that it is a kind of pardoning mercy that continueth us every moment. Of this we are most sensible in case of

danger and sickness, when there is but a step between us and death; for then the old bond beginneth to be put in suit, and God cometh to execute the sentence of the law; and deliverance in such a case is called forgiveness and remission, and that even to the wicked and impenitent. As Ps. 78:38, 'And he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not.' It is called a remission improperly, because it was a reprieve for the time from the temporal judgment; it was not an executing the sentence, or a destroying the sinner presently; and that not from anything in the sinner, but from God's pity over him as his creature. But now a godly man hath a true pardon renewed at such time, and he is 'loved from the grave;' for so it is in the Hebrew: Isa. 38:17, 'Thou hast loved my soul from the pit of destruction.' To be loved out of a danger, and loved out of a sickness, oh! that is a blessed thing.

Use 1. To acknowledge the Lord's goodness in these common mercies. We did not give life to ourselves, and we cannot keep it in ourselves. God made us, and God keepeth us. It was not our parents that fashioned us in the womb; they could not tell what the child would prove, male or female, beautiful or deformed. They could not tell the number or posture of the veins, or bones, or muscles; it was all the curious workmanship of a wise God; and it is the same God that hath kept us hitherto: Isa. 46:3, 4, 'By me ye are borne from the belly, and carried from the womb; even to old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you,' &c. We have been supported and tenderly handled by God, as parents and nurses carry their younglings in their arms. Many times wanton children are ready to scratch the faces of those that carry them; so have we put many affronts upon him, yet to the very last doth he carry us in the arms of his providence. In infancy we were not in a capacity to know the God of our mercies, and to look after him; but nevertheless he looked after us. Afterwards we knew how to grieve him and offend him, long

before how to love and serve him. Oh, how early did our naughty hearts appear! and all along how little have we done for God, 'in whom we live and move and have our being!' 'He is not far from us,' in the effects of his care and providence; but we are far from him by the distance of our thoughts and affections, by the carnal bent of our hearts. It is a good morning exercise for us humbly and thankfully to consider of his continual mercies. For God's 'compassions are new every morning,' Lam. 3:22—as fresh as if never tired with former acts of grace, nor wearied with former offences. It is some recompense for the time of sleep; half our time passeth away, and we do not show one act of love and kindness unto God; therefore, as soon as we are awakened we should be with God, Ps. 139:18. How many are gone down to the chambers of death since the last night!

2. It quickeneth us to love and serve God, who is 'the strength of our lives, and the length of our days,' Deut. 30:20. Thy life is wholly in God's hands. Man cannot add a cubic to his stature, nor make one hair white or black at his own pleasure. It is the Lord's providential influence that keepeth thee alive; in point of gratitude, thou shouldst serve him: 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live.' But I may urge also, in point of hope, God's servants can best recommend themselves to his care and keeping by prayer, and expect to walk continually under divine protection. Those that provoke God continually, they may be continued by the bounty and indulgence of his providence; but yet they can look for no such thing, and in the issue it proveth to be in wrath, for their sins are more and judgments greater: it is but to 'treasure up wrath to the day of wrath.'

3. If life temporal be the fruit of God's bounty, much more life eternal: Rom. 6:23, 'The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.' One is wages, the other a gift.

4. It informeth us that we may lawfully pray for life, with submission to the will of God, and that death may not come upon us suddenly, contrary to the ordinary course of nature. I was loath to make a distinct doctrine of it, yet I could not decline the giving out of this truth.

How will this stand with our desires of dissolution, and willingness to depart and to be with Christ, which certainly all Christians that believe eternity should cherish in their hearts?

To this I answer—1. By concession; that we are to train up ourselves in an expectation of our dissolution, that we may be willing when the time is come, and God hath no more work for us to do in the world; we are to awaken our desires after the presence of Christ in heaven, to show both our faith in him and love to him. Since Christ was willing to come down to us, though it were to meet with shame and pain, why should we be loath to return to him? Jacob's spirit revived when he saw the waggons which Joseph sent to carry him. Death is the chariot to carry you to Christ, and therefore it should not be unwelcome to us.

2. By correction; though it be lawful and expedient to desire death, yet we are not anxiously to long after it till the time come; there may be sin in desiring death, as when we grow weary of life out of desperation, and the tiresomeness of the cross; and there may be grace in desiring life, that we may keep his word, longer express our gratitude to him here in the world, to mourn for sin, to promote his glory. More fully to make this evident to you, I shall show how we may desire death, how not. To answer in several propositions:—

[1.] There is a great deal of difference between serious desires and passionate expressions. The desires of the children of God are deliberate and resolved, conceived upon good grounds, after much

struggling with flesh and blood to bring their hearts to it. Carnal men are loath that God should take them at their word; as he in the fable that called for death, and when he came, desired him to help him up with his burden. Alas! they do not consider what it is to be in the state of the dead, and to come unprovided and unfurnished into God's presence. We often wish ourselves in our graves; but if God should take us at our word, we would make many pauses and exceptions. Men that in their miseries call for death, when sickness cometh will run to the physician, and promise many things if they may be recovered. None more unwilling to die than those that in a passion wish for death.

[2.] We must carefully look to the grounds of these wishes and desires. First, Carnal wishes for death arise either—(1.) Out of violent anger and a pet against providence; as Jonah 4:8, 'The sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than live.' The children of Israel murmured when they felt the famine of the wilderness: Exod. 16:3, 'And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt,' &c. When men are vexed with the world, they look upon death as a relief, to take vengeance upon God, to deprive him of a servant. (2.) In deep sorrow; as Job 3:3; Elijah, 1 Kings 19:4: 'He requested for himself that he might die; and he said, It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.' (3.) From the peevishness of fond and doting love: 2 Sam. 18:33, 'And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O Absalom, my son, would God I had died for thee! O Absalom, my son, my son!' like the wives of the East Indians, that burn themselves to follow their dead husbands. (4.) From distrust and despair, when the evil is too hard to be resisted or endured: Job 7:15, 'My soul chooseth strangling and death rather

than my life.' In all these cases it is but a shameful retreat from the conflict and burden of the present life, from carnal irksomeness under the calamity, or a distrust of God's help. There may be murder in a rash wish, if it proceed from a vexed heart. These are but froward thoughts, not a sanctified resolution. Secondly, Such desires of death and dissolution as are lawful, and must be cherished, come from a good ground, from a heart crucified and deadened to the world, and set on things above: Col. 3:1, 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.' From a competent assurance of grace: Rom. 8:23, 'Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.' From some blessed experience of heavenly comforts, having tasted the fruits, clusters of Canaan, they desire to be there. So Simeon: Luke 2:29, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;' the eyes of his faith, as well as the eyes of his body. Now, Lord, I do but wait, as a merchantman richly laden desireth to be at his port. A great love to Christ excites desires to be with him: Phil. 1:23, 'I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better;' Phil. 3:19, 20, 'For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.' They long to see and be where he is; heart and head should be together. Weariness of sin, and a great zeal for God's glory, are powerful incentives in the saints: Rom. 7:23, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' They would be in heaven, that they may sin no more.

[3.] You must look to the end; not have a blind notion of heaven, and look for a Turkish paradise full of ease and plenty; a carnal heaven, as the Jews looked for a carnal Messiah; but for a state of perfect union and communion with the blessed and holy God.



[4.] The manner must be regarded; it must be done with submission, Phil. 1:24; otherwise we encroach upon God's right, and would deprive him of a servant without his leave. A Christian will die and live as the Lord willeth; if it be the Lord's pleasure, a believer is satisfied with long life: Ps. 91:16, 'With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation;' he will 'wait till the change come,' when God shall give him a discharge by his own immediate hand, or by enemies. God knoweth how to choose the fittest time, otherwise we know not what we ask.

Secondly, Now let me speak of the scope of our lives. David simply doth not desire life, but in order to service. The point is—

That if we desire long life, we should desire it to glorify God by obedience to his word.

Let me give you some instances, then reasons.

1. Instances: Ps. 118:17, 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.' This was David's hope in the prolongation of life, that he should have farther opportunity to honour God; and this argument he urgeth to God when he prayeth for life: Ps. 6:5, 'For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in the grave who shall give thee thanks?' It would be better for him to be with God; but then the life is worth the having, when the extolling of Christ is the main scope at which we aim. So Paul: Phil. 1:20, 'According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death,' &c. Paul was in some hesitation which he should choose, life or death; and he determineth of both as God might be magnified by either of them, and so was at a point of indifference. If God should give him his option or wish, he would give the case back again to God, to

determine as it might be most for his service and glory. He was not swayed by any low and base motives of contentment in the world, or any low and creature enjoyments; these are contemptible things to come into the balance with everlasting glory. It was only his service in the gospel, and the public good of the church, that made the case doubtful.

Reas. 1. This is the perfection of our lives, and that which maketh it to be life indeed. Communion with God is the vitality of it, without which we are rather dead than alive. Life natural we have in common with the beasts and plants; but in keeping the word, we live the life of God: Eph. 4:18, 'Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God.' To natural men it is a gloomy thing; but to believers this is the life of life, and that which is the joy of their hearts. To increase in stature, and to grow bulky, that is the life of plants; the greatest and biggest of the kind are most perfect. To live and enjoy pleasures without remorse, that is the perfection and life of beasts, that have no conscience, that shall not be called to an account. To gratify present interests, and to be able to turn and wind worldly affairs, that is the life of carnal men, that have no sense of eternity. But the perfection of the life of man as a reasonable creature is to measure our actions by God's word, and to refer them to his glory.

Reas. 2. It is the end of our lives that God may be served: 'All things are by him, and through him, and to him,' Rom. 11:36; angels, men, beasts, inanimate creatures. He expects more from men than from beasts, and from saints than from men; and therefore life by them is not to be desired and loved but for this end: Rom. 14:6–8, 'He that regardeth a day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the

Lord eateth not, and giveth God thanks: for none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.'

Use 1. For reproof. Every man desireth life. The whole world would all and every one of them put up this request to God, 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live;' but there is not one man in a hundred that considereth why he should live. Some would live to please the flesh, and to wallow in the delights of the present world; a brutish wish! An heathen could say, he doth not deserve the name of a man that would spend his time in pleasure one day. These would not leave their husks and their hog trough. This was not David's desire, but that he might keep the law, and faithfully worship God.

Some, again, desire to see their children well bestowed, or to free their estate from incumbrance; this is distrust, as if we did not leave a God behind us, who hath promised to be a father of the fatherless, and to take care of our little ones. Can we venture ourselves in God's hands, and can we not venture our families with him, whose goodness extendeth to all his creatures? Some are loath to leave such as are dear to them, wife and children and friends; and is not God better, and Christ better? These must be loved in God and after God. We set friends in the place of God and Christ, when we can be content to be absent longer from God merely upon this ground, because we are loath to be separated from our friends. 'He that loveth father and mother, and husband and wife, more than me, is not worthy of me,' saith Christ. Oh, how far are these from any Christian affection! Surely to a believer it is a piece of self-denial to be kept out of heaven longer; therefore it must be sweetened by some valuable compensation; something there must be to calm the mind

contentedly to spare the enjoyment of it for a while. Now, next to the good pleasure of God, which is the reason of reasons, there is some benefit which we pitch upon. Nothing is worthy to be compared but our service, if God may have glory, if our lives may do good. A gracious heart must be satisfied with gracious reasons. Some may desire life, because they are dismayed with the terrors of death; but this is unbelief. Hath not Christ delivered us not only from the hurt of death, but the fear of death? Heb. 2:14, 'And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.' Where is your faith? 'Death is yours,' 1 Cor. 3:22. It is a sin simply to desire life; but look to the causes and ends of it.

Use 2. It directeth us how to dispose of our lives. For this end take a few considerations.

[1.] This life is not to be valued but by opportunities of service to God. It is not who liveth most plentifully, but most serviceably to God's glory: Acts 13:36, 'David, after he had served his generation, by the will of God he fell asleep.' Every one was made to serve God in his generation, and hath his office and use as an instrument of divine providence, from the king to the peasant. We are undone if the creatures, made to serve us, should fail in their season. We were made to serve God in our season.

[2.] This service is determined by the course of God's providence. He is the great master of the scenes, that appointeth us what part to act, and sets to every man his calling and state of life. John 17:4, our Saviour saith, 'I have finished the work thou hast given me to do.' We must not be our own carvers, prescribe to God at what rate we will be maintained, nor what kind of work we will perform. Those that are free may covenant with you, and make their bargain, what kind of

service they will undertake; but we are at God's absolute dispose, to be used as vessels of honour or dishonour, as fitted and disposed.

[3.] In the management of this work we must measure our actions by God's word, and refer them to his glory. By God's word: Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my paths.' His glory: Col. 3:17, 'And whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.'

[4.] Death shall not prevent us, till we have ended our appointed service. As long as God hath work for us to do, he will maintain life and strength: Gal. 1:15, 'Who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace.' The decree taketh date from the womb. God frames parts and temper; God rocketh us in our cradles, taketh care of us in our infancy, and all the turns of our lives.

[5.] If God will use us to a great age, we must be content. You may adorn your profession, and bring forth fruit in old age. The longest life is too short to honour God: Ps. 92:13, 'Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.' We should count it our happiness to be still used, and that we are fully rewarded by being employed in further service.

[6.] Life must be willingly laid down when we cannot keep it but with forsaking the world: Luke 14:26, 'If any man come unto me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.'

[7.] The life of eternity must be subordinate to this great end, the glory of God; our desire of it must be, that we may be to the praise of God.

## SERMON XIX

### **Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.—VER. 18.**

THE heathens thought that man had not a power over his life, but a power over his actions—*Quod vivamus, Deorum munus est; quod bene vivamus, nostrum.* But the Psalmist acknowledged God in both: 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy law;' that he could not live nor keep the word without God's grace. This latter he amplifieth in this verse, that he was so far from keeping it, that he could not so much as know it savingly and practically without divine grace: 'Lord, open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.' Here is—

1. A request, 'open thou mine eyes.'
2. The reason, from the end, benefit, and fruit of it, 'that I may,' or then I shall, 'behold wondrous things out of thy law.'

In which reason is intimated the necessity of divine illumination, and then the profit of it.

1. The necessity, that I may behold, &c.—i.e., otherwise I cannot.
2. The profit, then I shall behold wondrous things out of thy law.

Doct. 1. That we need that God should open our eyes, if we would have a right understanding of his word.

1. What is meant by opening the eyes.

2. The necessity of such a work in order to a right understanding of the word of God.

First, What is meant by opening the eyes. Before I come to the particular explication of the terms, let me premise two observations.

1. The saints do not complain of the obscurity of the law, but of their own blindness. The Psalmist doth not say, 'Lord, make a plainer law,' but, 'Lord, open mine eyes.' Blind men might as well complain of God that he doth not make a sun whereby they might see. The word is 'A light that shineth in a dark place,' 2 Peter 1:19. There is no want of light in the scripture, but there is a veil of darkness upon our hearts; so that if in this clear light we cannot see, the defect is not in the word, but in ourselves.

2. The light which they beg is not anything besides the word. When God is said to enlighten us, it is not that we should expect new revelations, but that we may see the wonders in his word, or get a clear sight of what is already revealed. Those that vent their own dreams under the name of the Spirit and divine light, they do not give you mysteria, but monstra, portentous opinions; not show you the wondrous things of God's law, but the prodigies of their own brain; unhappy abortives, that die as soon as they come to light: Isa. 8:20, 'To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' The light which we have is not without the word, but by the word.

Now to the phrase. The Hebrew signifieth 'unveil mine eyes.' There is a double work—negative and positive: there is a taking away the veil, and an infusion of light. Paul's cure of his natural blindness is a fit emblem of our cure of spiritual blindness: Acts 9:18, 'Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales, and he received sight

forthwith.' First the scales fall from our eyes, and then we receive sight.

1. There is a taking away the veil before we can have a true discerning of the mysteries that are revealed in the word of God: 2 Cor. 3:14, 15, the apostle, speaking of the Jews, saith, 'But their minds were blinded; for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away, in the reading of the Old Testament; which veil is done away in Christ: but even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their hearts.' Now this veil is diverse.

[1.] The veil of ignorance. Though man hath reason, and is capable of understanding the sense and importance of the words that are used about the mysteries of godliness, yea, and the matter too, yet he gets not the saving knowledge of them by his natural abilities. There is a grammatical knowledge and a spiritual knowledge; a man may know things grammatically and literally that is ignorant of them spiritually; as a child may read the letters and words that doth not conceive of the sense. So a man may know what is said concerning God and Christ, and sin and grace, the vanity of the creature, the excellency of heaven, and have yet no saving knowledge of these things; and therefore the scripture useth the expression that they oversee in seeing; as Acts 28:26, 'Hearing, ye shall hear, and not understand; seeing, ye shall see, and not perceive.' Though truths are never so plainly delivered, never so powerfully pressed, and though they are capable to understand the words, yet they do not take the truth into their hearts, so as to profit by it. So Deut. 29:2–4, 'Ye have seen,' yet 'ye have not an heart to see.' Most will declaim against the vanity of the creature and evil of sin; but they do not see with an affective heart-piercing light; they have on them the veil of spiritual ignorance.



[2.] The veil of carnal knowledge and wisdom, that puffeth up, 1 Cor. 8:1, 2, by which, seeing not, we think we see. This is a great hindrance to the entertaining of the word. So Christ telleth the Pharisees, who were conceited of their own knowledge, John 9:39, 'For judgment am I come into this world, that they which see not might see, and they which see might be made blind.' The Pharisees were the rabbis of the age, the most seeing and learned men of that time. Carnal men are puffed up with a conceit of their own abilities, and so are obstructed by them from profiting by the gospel.

[3.] The veil of prejudice and corrupt affections. The passions of the mind, love and fear, desire and anger, hinder us from judging aright in the things of God. Our hearts are overcast with strong affections to the world, and so cannot clearly judge either of practical truths or of the controversies of the age. Not of practical truths: When Christ had taught that they 'could not serve God and mammon,' it is said, Luke 16:14, 'And the Pharisees, that were covetous, derided him.' Holy mortifying truths are displeasing to a carnal ear, though they be represented with never so much evidence. How will men distinguish themselves out of their duty! They shift, and stretch, and turn and wind hither and thither, and prove truth to be no truth, rather than part with their lusts. So present truths, as the apostle calls them, 2 Peter 1:12, when the dust of interest is raised, are not discerned. The orthodoxy of the world is usually an age too short: 2 Cor. 4:4, 'The god of this world hath blinded their eyes.'

[4.] The veil of carnal sense: 2 Peter 1:9, 'He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off.' There are so many mists and clouds in the lower world, that men cannot outsee time, and without the prospective of faith have a sight of eternity. Nature is short-sighted, so inured to present things that we receive no light concerning things to come. These are the scales that are upon our eyes.

2. There is an infusion of light, without which men of excellent wit and sharp understanding in other things are stark blind in the things of God. What this light is will appear by the degrees of knowledge and the uses of this light.

[1.] The degrees of knowledge.

(1.) In some there is a simple nescience, both of terms or notions, and things, as in those that have not a revelation, or have not regarded it when the revelation is made. As the Gentiles, that have not a revelation: Eph. 4:18, 'Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.' Or rude and ignorant Christians, that have not the advantage of education, so as to understand the notions in which the doctrine of God is propounded: Isa. 28:9, 10, 'Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts: for precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little.' So sottish and brutish are some, that a man had need teach them as he teacheth little children, letter after letter, and line after line, little good done.

(2.) In others there is a grammatical knowledge but not a spiritual, a repeating things by rote, a talking of all that a Christian enjoyeth.

(3.) Besides the grammatical knowledge, there is a dogmatical knowledge, when the truths of the word are not only understood, but begin to settle into an opinion that we bustle for in the world. An opinionative receiving of the truth is different from a saving receiving of the truth. Many are orthodox, or have so much judgment and knowledge as to hold the truth strictly, but the heart is not possessed with the life and power of it. Those are intended in Rom.

2:20, 'An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which have the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.' And such are described 2 Tim. 3:8, 'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.' It is not to be imagined that this is always in design, though many times carnal men swim with the stream, and take up with the opinions that are current in their age; but also out of conviction of judgment; there is somewhat of conscience in it. A sound judgment is a different thing from a sound heart. The truths of God have great evidence with them; and therefore a rational man, being helped with some common work of the Spirit, may close with them, though they have no experience of the power and prevailing influence of them.

(4.) Besides this dogmatical knowledge, by which we see round about the compass of truths revealed in the word, there is a gracious illumination when men are taught so as drawn to God, John 6:44, 45, and they do so understand Christ's doctrine as to apply and make a right use of it; such a knowledge as is called not only sight, but taste: 1 Peter 2:3, 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious;' and a feeling of what we understand: Phil. 1:9, 'And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.' This sense and experimental knowledge is that which the saints seek after.

[2.] The uses of this spiritual illumination.

(1.) To give us a clear sight of the truths of God.

(2.) An applicative sight.

(3.) An affective sight.

(4.) A transforming sight.

(5.) Such a sense of the truth as is prevalent over lusts and interests.

(1.) A clear sight of the truths of God. Others have but an hearsay knowledge, gathered out of books and sermons, and the common report which is made of Christ; but he that is divinely enlightened drinks of the fountain, and so his draught is more fresh and sweet. They do not talk of things by rote after others, but it is written upon their hearts: Heb. 8:10, 'I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts;' and so groweth more intimate and satisfactory, and moving upon them.

(2.) An applicative sight; not only knowledge, but prudence: Prov. 8:12, 'I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence.' Wisdom is the knowledge of principles; prudence is an ability to apply them to our comfort and use, that we may know it for our good, Job 5:27. Many are right in generals; but the Spirit doth not only reveal the truths of the gospel, but applieth those truths to awaken the conscience that was asleep in sin. Many men that are unrenewed may be stored with general truths concerning the misery of man, redemption by Christ, the privileges of a Christian; but they do not reflect the light of these truths upon themselves, so as to consider their own case; and so it serveth rather for matter of opinion and discourse than for life and conversation; it is not directive.

(3.) An affective sight: Prov. 2:10, 'When wisdom entereth upon thy heart,' which is the seat of affections, it stirs up in the soul answerable motions to every truth; whereas when truths rest in empty barren notions, without feeling and an answerable touch upon the heart, the knowledge of them is like a winter's sun, that shineth, but warmeth not; the misery of man is not affective, and doctrines of redemption by Christ are apprehended without any joy and relish.

(4.) A transforming sight: 2 Cor. 3:18, 'We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' It is a light that is both directive and persuasive. A man may hear the gospel νομικῶς, when it is only known as a rule, not as a means to convey the Spirit; whereas a believer hears the law εὐαγγελικῶς. The apostle preferreth the gospel above the law in the afore-mentioned place, for comfortableness, perspicuity, efficacy, &c.

(5.) It is a light that prevaileth over our lusts and interest, such a light as hath fire in it to destroy lusts: 1 John 2:3, 4, 'He that saith I know him, and doth not keep his commandments, is a liar.' A true knowledge and sight of God is able to bridle lusts and purify the conscience. Therefore it is said, 'He that doth evil hath not seen God,' 3 John 11; hath not a true sight, whatever speculations he may have about the nature of God. Other light doth not check and control vicious desires; reason is not restored to its dominion: Rom. 1:18, the reputed wise men of the world 'held the truth in unrighteousness.' Truth may talk its fill, but can do nothing; as a man that is bound hand and foot may rave and evaporate his passions, but cannot relieve himself from the oppressor or the force that he is under.

Secondly, Reasons that show the necessity of this work.

1. Spiritual blindness is natural to us, as that man that was blind from his birth, John 9:1. We are not all born blind in body, but all in mind. By tasting the tree of knowledge, all Adam's sons have lost their knowledge. Satan hath brought a greater shame upon us than Nahash the Ammonite would have brought upon the men of Jabesh-Gilead in putting out their right eyes. The eye of the soul is put out, so as we cannot see the light that shineth in the word. By the fall we lost the true and perfect light of reason, but retain the pride of

reason. It is no small part of our blindness that we cannot endure to hear of it: Rev. 3:17, 'Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing: and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.' Man desireth to be thought sinful rather than weak, and will sooner own a wickedness in morals than a weakness in intellectuals. Men are dishonest out of choice, and therefore think there is more of liberty and bravery in it; but to be simple argueth imperfection; Job 11:12, 'Vain man would be accounted wise, though man be born like a wild-ass's colt;' not only for untamedness and affectation of liberty, but for rudeness and grossness of conceit; yet man would be accounted wise. The Pharisees took it ill that Christ charged them with blindness: John 9:40, 'Are we blind also?' We all affect the reputation of wisdom, more than the reality; that is the reason why we are so touchy in point of error; we can easier brook a sin reprov'd than an error tax'd. Till we have spiritual eye-salve, we do not know it, and will not hear of this blindness, Rev. 3:17. It is a degree of spiritual knowledge to know that we know nothing.

2. Observe how much spiritual blindness is worse than bodily. Those that are under bodily blindness are glad of a remedy, glad of a guide.

[1.] Glad of a remedy. How feelingly doth that man speak, Mark 10:51, 'What wouldst thou have me to do? Lord, that mine eyes may be opened.' Those that are blind spiritually are not for a remedy; not only ignorant, but unteachable; and so their blindness groweth upon them; to their natural, there is an adventitious blindness. If we cannot keep out the light, we rage against it.

[2.] Glad of a guide; as Elymas the sorcerer, when he was stricken blind, looked about for somebody to lead him by the hand, Acts 13:11. But the blind world cannot endure to be directed, or 'the blind lead

the blind, and both fall into the ditch.' He that prophesieth of strong wine is the teacher of this people, saith the prophet. Men love those that gratify their lusts and humours: let one come soundly, and declare the counsel and will of God to them, he is distasted.

3. We cannot help ourselves out of this misery without God's help. Our incapacity is best understood by opening that noted place, 1 Cor. 2:14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things that are of God, for they are folly to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' Let us a little open that place: ἄνθρωπος ψυχικός, 'the soullly man,' that is, a man considered in his pure naturals. Jude 19; ψυχικοί, πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες, 'sensual, having not the Spirit.' However, he useth the best word by which a natural man can be described; he doth not say σάρκικοι, not only those that are brutish and depraved by vicious habits, but take nature in its excellency, soul-light in its highest splendour and perfection, though the man be not absolutely given up to vile affections. Well, it is said of him that he neither doth nor can receive the things of God, οὐδέχεται, and οὐ δύναται γινῶναι. The τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος, 'the things of the Spirit,' are such truths as depend upon mere revelation, and are above the reach and knowledge of nature. There are τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, 'things of God,' that may be known by a natural light: Rom. 1:19, 'That which may be known of God, is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them;' but τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος, things revealed in the word, though a natural man be able to understand the phrases and sentences, and be able to discourse of them, yet he wanteth faith, and a spiritual sense and relish of them; they are folly to him. It noteth the utter contempt of spiritual things by a carnal heart, who looketh upon redemption by Christ crucified, with the consequent benefits, as things frivolous and vain. Paul at Athens was accounted 'a babblers,' Acts 17:18. The same disposition is still in natural men; for though these truths, by the prescription and consent of many ages,

have now obtained veneration and credit, yet carefully to observe them, to live to the tenor of them, whatever hazards and inconveniences we are exposed to in the world, is still counted foolish. Mark, for greater emphasis, it is μωρία, folly, as carnal wisdom is ἔχθρα, 'enmity against God,' Rom. 8:7. 'Neither can he know them.' It is out of sloth and opposition and moral impotency; as it is said, Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be.' Reason is a short and defective light, not only actually ignorant, but unable to conceive of them. It is not only through negligence he doth not, but through weakness he cannot. Take mere nature in itself, and, like plants neglected, it soon runs wild; as the nations barbarous and not polished with arts and civility have more of the beast than the man in them: Jude 10, 'But what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.' suppose they use the spectacles of art, and the natural light of reason be helped by industry and learning, yet how erroneous in things of religion: Rom. 1:21, 'When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish hearts were darkened,' &c. The most civil nations were 'most foolish in matters of worship; and many placed fevers, and human passions, and every paltry thing, among the gods. The Scythians worshipped thunder, the Persians the sun; the most stupid and blockish nations seemed most wise in the choice of their gods; others were given up to more gross superstitions. All the arts in the world could not fully repair the ruins of the fall. The heathens invented logic for polishing reason; grammar and rhetoric for language; for government, and as a help to human society, laws; for bodily necessities, physic; for mollifying and charming the passions, so far as concerned human conversation, ethics; for families and private societies, economics: but for the soul and religious concernments, how blind and foolish were they! Nay, go higher. Suppose, besides



the spectacles of art, nature be furnished with the glass of the word; yet John 1:5, 'The light shined in darkness and the darkness, comprehended it not.' We see how great scholars are defective in the most useful and practical points. Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel, was ignorant of regeneration, John 3:10. They always err in one point or another. And in these things of moment, if they get an opinion and a dogmatical faith, and have an exact model and frame of truth, yet as long as they are carnal and unregenerate, how much doth a plain godly Christian exceed them in lively affection and serious practice! And whilst they are disputing of the natures and offices of Christ, and the nature of justification and sanctification, others enjoy what they speak of, and have a greater relish and savour and power of these truths upon their hearts. For ever it was a truth, and ever will be, Rom. 8:5, 'They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; and they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.' Nature can go no farther than itself, than a fleshly inclination moveth it. They have not this transforming light, and that sense of religion which is prevalent over lusts and worldly interests.

The next reason is, because they must be 'spiritually discerned;' that is, to know them inwardly, thoroughly, and with some relish and savour; there must be a higher light, there must be a cognation and proportion between the object and the faculty. Divine things must be seen by a divine light, and spiritual things by a spiritual light. Sense, which is the light of beasts, cannot trace the workings or flights of reason in her contemplations. We cannot see a soul or an angel by the light of a candle; so fleshly wisdom cannot judge of divine things. The object must be not only revealed, but we must have an answerable light; so that when you have done all, you must say, 'How can I understand without an interpreter?' Acts 8:31. And this interpreter must be the Spirit of God—*Ejus est interpretari, cujus est*

condere. To discern, so as to make aright judgment and estimate of things, dependeth upon God's help.

4. When this blindness is in part cured, yet still we need that God should open our eyes to the very last. We know nothing as we ought to know. David, a regenerate man, and well instructed, prayeth to have his eyes opened; for we need more light every day: Luke 24:45, 'Then opened he their understandings, that they might understand the scriptures.' Christ first opened the scriptures, then he opened their understandings.

Use 1. To show us the reason why the word prevaileth so little when it is preached with power and evidence; their eyes are not opened: Isa. 53:1, 'Who hath believed our report; and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? 'No teaching will prevail till we are taught of God.

Use 2. What need we have to consult with God, whenever we make use of the word, in reading, hearing, study. In reading, when thou openest the Bible to read, say, 'Lord, open mine eyes.' When thou hearest, beg a sight of the truth, and how to apply it for thy comfort. *Hæc audiunt quasi somniantes*, Luther saith of the most—in seeing they see not, in hearing they hear not. There was a fountain by Hagar, but she could not see it: Gen. 21:19, 'God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad to drink.' So for study; it is dangerous to set upon the study of divine things in the strength of wit and human helps. Men go forth in the strength of their own parts, or lean upon the judgment of writers, and so are left in darkness and confusion. We would sooner come to the decision of a truth if we would go to God, and desire him to rend the veil of prejudices and interests.

Use 3. Is to press us to seek after this blessing, the opening of the eyes. Magnify the creating power of God: 2 Cor. 4:6, 'God, who

commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Make use of Christ: Col. 2:3, 'In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;' beg it earnestly of him. The apostle prayeth, Eph. 1:17, 18, 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling,' &c. Yea, mourn for it in cases of dubious anxiety. John wept when the book of the seven seals was not opened, Rev. 5:4. Mourn over your ignorance; refer all to practice: John 7:17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' Wait for light in the use of means, with a simple, docile, sincere, humble mind: Ps. 25:9, 'The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.'

Doct. 2. Those whose eyes are opened by God, they see wondrous things in his word, more than ever they thought.

'Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.' Law is not taken strictly for the covenant of works, nor for the decalogue as a rule of life; but more generally for the whole word of God, which is full of wonders, or high and heavenly mysteries. In the decalogue or moral law there is wonderful purity, when we get a spiritual sense of it: Ps. 119:96, 'I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandments are exceeding broad;' and Ps. 19:7, 8, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.' A wonderful equity: Rom. 7:12, 'The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, just, and good.' A marvellous wisdom: Deut. 4:6, 'Keep therefore, and do them; for this is your

wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' In the whole word of God, the harmony and correspondence between all the parts, how the mystery grew from a dark revelation to clearer, is admirable. In the gospel, every article of faith is a mystery to be wondered at. The person of Christ: 1 Tim. 3:16, 'Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit,' &c. A virgin conceiveth, the Word is made flesh, the redemption and reconciliation of mankind, are the wonderful works of the Lord's grace. It is 'the hidden wisdom of God in a mystery,' 1 Cor. 2:7. 'We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world to our glory;' and it is called the 'mystery hidden from ages,' Eph. 3:9. The glory of heaven is admirable: Eph. 1:18, 'The riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints in light.' That a clod of earth should be made an heir of heaven, deserves the highest wonder. All these are mysteries. So the wonderful effects of the word in convincing sinners: 1 Cor. 14:25, 'Thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.' Heb. 4:12: 'The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.' It is a searching and discovering word: John 4:29, 'See a man that hath told me all that ever I did.' In changing sinners: 1 Peter 2:9, 'That ye may show forth the praises of him that hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.' Peter's getting out of prison was nothing to it. In comforting, every grace is a mystery, to depend upon what we see not, to be as a rock in the midst of a storm. 'Dying, yet we live; as poor, yet making many rich,' 2 Cor. 6:9, 10. All the operations of the Spirit are wonderful: 1 Peter 1:8, 'Joy unspeakable and full of glory;'

Phil. 4:7, 'Peace that passeth all understanding;' Rom. 8:26, 'Groans that cannot be uttered.'

And now, what divine illumination contributeth to the sight of these wonders?

1. It revealeth the truth of them, which otherwise is incomprehensible to the flesh: Mat. 16:17, 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.' Without this, no certain knowledge of Christ's person and office.

2. It more intimately acquainteth us with them: Mat. 13:11, 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; to others it is not given.' All God's works are full of wonder, yet blind men cannot see them, though the sun shineth never so clearly. A beautiful room into which there is but a crevice, when we lay our eye close to it, we see it.

Use 1. From hence we may learn, that it is one degree of profit to see so much in the word of God as to admire it; either at the mysteries of godliness or ungodliness, which the word discovereth, ὧ βᾶθος. They that are most enlightened have most cause to wonder; for then they find truths which exceed all common reason, such as do not come into the minds of others, or, if they do, they seem incredible.

Use 2 is to encourage us to study the word; the wonders of God's works are many, but the wonders of his word greater. Quot articuli, tot miracula, the Papists say of Aquinas's Sums; but more truly may it be said of the word of God; all the doctrines of the word are a continued mystery. After man was fallen, it came not into the head of any creature how to satisfy justice, to make up the breach. Oh, the folly of them that despise the word, as curious wits and world lings do, as if it were a mean knowledge in comparison of what may be

acquired from Aristotle and Plato or the politicians of the world! If there be in it some rudiments, something common with other writings, yet there are greater things than these: 'The deep things of God,' 1 Cor. 2:11; never such a revelation made to the world. And worldly men, that despise this study of the word, they despise that which angels wonder at, Eph. 3:10, and 'desire to pry into,' 1 Peter 1:12, and make great matters of trifles. The Sun of righteousness, is not he worth the beholding?

Use 3. Let us cease wondering at worldly things, great places, honours, heaps of wealth, fair buildings, as the disciples, Mark 13:1, 'Master, see what manner of stones and buildings are here!' It is said of Christ, Col. 2:9, 'In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily!' Fulness of the Godhead! oh, wonderful! The people wondered at that mass of money provided by David to build God a house, 1 Chron. 29:7, 8. Oh! but the unsearchable riches of grace, the rare plot of man's redemption, μέγα μυστήριον, how wonderful! All in and about Christ is rare. His name is Wonderful. All the promises of God are τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τίμια ἐπαγγέλματα, 'exceeding great and precious promises,' 2 Peter 1:4; they transcend man's capacity. It condemneth the stupidity of them that are nothing moved or taken with things so great and wonderful—great in themselves, and should be precious to us.

## SERMON XX

**I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.—VER. 19.**

IN the 18th verse David had begged divine illumination, 'Open mine eyes,' &c. He doth not desire God to make a plainer law, but to give

him a clearer sight. That request he backs with three reasons in the following verses:—

1. His condition in the world, 'I am a stranger in the earth.' strangers in a foreign country need guidance and direction.

2. His earnest affection to the word, ver. 20, 'My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.' David had an earnest longing to be acquainted more with the will of God.

3. God's judgments upon those that contemn the word, 'Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.' It is dangerous to walk beside the rule: Rom. 1:18, 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,' &c. God hath owned both tables; he hath punished ungodliness, a violation of the first table; and unrighteousness, a violation of the second table. Here God hath declared how he will own his name, therefore he begs illumination.

Now, the text giveth you this first reason, his condition in the world.

Here observe two things:—

1. A representation of his case, I am a stranger upon earth.

2. His request to God, hide not thy commandments from me.

First, A representation of his case with respect to his quality,—what he was, a stranger; and the place where, upon earth; not in heaven, he was familiar there. And how a stranger upon earth, in point of happiness,—I do not find here that which satisfieth my soul; he had his home, his rest elsewhere; but not in point of service, for he had much work to do.

Doct. God's children are strangers upon earth, and do so account themselves.

They live here as others do, but they are not at home; their hearts are above, they do not take up their rest here; they are strangers, and account themselves to be so when they have most of worldly conveniences.

First, To open it. Sometimes it may be understood in a literal sense, and sometimes in a moral.

(1.) Sometimes in a literal sense. Thus the patriarchs, that had a wandering life, and were forced to flit from place to place without any certain abode, they confessed themselves to be strangers. Jacob saith, Gen. 47:9, 'Few and evil have the years of my life been.' (2.) Morally also, and more generally, it is true of the saints, they are strangers. In some sense it is true of good and bad. We are all travelling into another world, and are every day nearer to eternity. As in a ship, whether men sleep or wake, stand or sit, whether they think of it, yea or nay, the voyage still goes onward. So, whatever we think, and whatever we do, we hasten towards death. In this sense even wicked men may be strangers and pilgrims in condition, though not in affection. All men in condition, will they nill they, must into the other world, as they yield to the decays of nature, and every day they are a step nearer to their long home. Heathens have had a sense of this notion. Saith one of them, *Ex hac vita discedo tanquam ex hospitio, non tanquam ex domo*—I go out of this life as out of an inn. Here we are but passengers, not inhabitants to dwell. But now to be strangers and pilgrims in affection, that is proper to the children of God; Heb. 11:13–15, it is made the fruit of their faith; 'Because they were persuaded of the promises, therefore they confessed themselves pilgrims and strangers on earth.' The voice of nature saith, It is good



to be here; let God do with heaven what he pleaseth. Natural men are contented with their present portion, and cannot endure to think of change; and therefore, though they are travelling to eternity, yet they are not pilgrims in affection. But now God's children are so in condition and in affection too; they count heaven their home, and the world to be a strange place. They are pilgrims in affection in a threefold regard:—

1. Because they are most sensible of their frailty. The frailty of the present life is a common lesson, but not easily believed. None have such a sense of it upon their hearts as they that are taught by God: Ps. 90:12, 'So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom;' and, 'Teach me to know how frail I am,' saith David. Worldly men, though they are of this opinion, and cannot deny it, yet they do not consider it; in seeing they see not; their minds are taken up with other things; they are not sensible.

2. The term is proper to the children of God, because they are unsatisfied with their present estate; they would not abide here for ever if God would give them leave. Wicked men are pilgrims against their will; but saints are ever looking for, longing for, groaning for a better estate: Rom. 8:23, 'We which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.' They desire and 'groan to be clothed upon,' 2 Cor. 5:2.

3. The notion is most proper to them, because they have an interest in a better inheritance. Wicked men are sure to go out of the world, but they are not sure to go to heaven. Now, the children of God they know there is an inheritance kept for them; here they have the right, but there they shall have the possession, 1 John 3:1. So that well might I form the point thus: That godly men are, and count

themselves to be, strangers and pilgrims upon earth. Others are in a journey, but they are not sensible of it, and they have no home to go to, and no desire to part with the world.

Now take some instances of this. That this is proper to God's children to count the world a strange place, and heaven to be their home. Those that had the best right and the greatest possessions here, they will do so; those that had the greatest right: Heb. 11:9, 'Abraham sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country.' What right could there be greater than that which was demised and made over to him by God? Yet in the land of promise he lived as in a strange place. So David here, and in other places, that had so ample a possession; he was king over an opulent and flourishing kingdom; yet, Ps. 39:12, 'I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.' Not only he that was a wandering partridge, and flitted up and down; but David that was settled in a throne, he that was so powerful and victorious a prince. But you will say, Possibly David might speak thus when he was chased like a flea upon the mountains, when he was hunted to and fro like a partridge. No; but when he had peace, and was fully settled in the throne; when he could offer so many cart-loads of gold and silver, 2 Chron. 29:13; then he doth acknowledge, 'Lord, I am a stranger.' Jesus Christ, who was Lord paramount, he tells us, 'I am not of this world,' John 17:14. He was 'a stranger to his brethren, and an alien among his mother's children,' Ps. 69:8. He that was Lord of all had neither house nor home. He passed through the world to sanctify it for a place of service; but his heart and constant residence was not here, to fix it as in a place of rest. And so all that are Christ's have the spirit of Christ, and say, as David in the text, 'I am a stranger upon earth.' We do not dwell upon earth, but only pass through it.

But why do the children of God count themselves to be strangers here?

1. They are born elsewhere. Everything tends to the place of their original, as men love their native soil; things bred in the water return thither; inanimate things tend to their centre; a stone will fall to the ground, though it be broken in pieces with the fall; wind that is imprisoned in the bowels of the earth raiseth terrible convulsions and earthquakes until it get up to its own place. All things seek to return thither from whence they came. And so grace, which came from heaven, it carrieth the soul thither again: 'Jerusalem from above is the mother of us all.' Heaven is our native country, and therefore thither is the tendency and aim of the gracious soul that is born from above. It is very notable that contempt of the world is usually made the fruit of our regeneration: 1 John 5:4, 'Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world;' and 2 Peter 1:4, 'Made partakers of the divine nature, that we might escape the corruptions of the world through lust.' There is somewhat of God in it then; and that which comes from God carries the soul thither where God is. In the new nature there is a strong inclination which disposeth us to look after another world; therefore it is said, 'Begotten to a lively hope,' 1 Peter 1:3. As soon as we are made children, we begin to look after a child's portion. There is another aim when we are born again; then the heart is carried out to God.

2. There lies their inheritance: Eph. 1:3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.' Why! he hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in earthly places. Why is it said only 'in heavenly places'? There was their beginning, and there is their accomplishment. The main thing Christ aimed at was that we might be translated to heavenly places. Christ will set us high enough, and

therefore he will not give us our portion in the world; that is an unquiet place. Here we are not out of gunshot and harm's way. He would not give it us in an earthly paradise; there Adam enjoyed God among beasts. He would give it us in the most glorious manner, that we might enjoy God among the angels. The world is not a fit place. Here God will show his bounty to all his children. It is a common inn, where sons and bastards are entertained; a place of trial, not of recompense; God's footstool, and not his throne, Isa. 66:1. The world is Satan's walk, the devil's circuit: 'Whence comest thou? From compassing the earth,' Job 1. A place defiled with sin, Isa. 24:5; 'given to the children of men,' Ps. 115:16. Here God will show his bounty to all his creatures, to beasts, and to all kinds of men. It is sometimes the slaughter-house and shambles of the saints: they are 'slain upon earth,' Rev. 18:24; a receptacle for elect and reprobate. Therefore here they have not their blessing; our inheritance lies elsewhere.

3. There are all our kindred. Ubi pater, ibi patria—where our father is, there our country is. Now when we pray, we say to him, 'Our Father which art in heaven.' There are we strangers, where we are absent from God, Christ, and glorified saints; and while we are here upon earth we have not such enjoyment of God. There is our Father; it is his house. Heaven is called our Father's house; and there is 'our elder brother:' Col. 3:1, 'Set your hearts upon things above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God;' and there is the best of our kindred and family: 'They shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,' Mat. 8:11. Well, then, the children of God, they count themselves to be strangers here, because their kindred are elsewhere.

4. There they abide longest. That we account our home where we abide. An inn cannot be called our home, where we come but for a night, and away; but now there we are 'for ever with the Lord.' Here

we are in motion, there in rest. The world must be surely left. If we had a certain term of years fixed, yet it would be very short in comparison of eternity. All the time we spend here it is but a night, but a moment, in comparison of eternity. We live longest in the other world, and therefore there is our home: Micah 2:10, 'Arise, depart hence; this is not your rest.' God speaks it of the land of Canaan, when they had polluted it with sin. It is true of all the world. Sin hath brought in death, and there must be a riddance. It is but a passage from danger. Israel dwelt first in a wandering camp, before they came to dwell in cities and walled towns; and the apostle alludes to that, 'Here we have no abiding city; we look for one to come.' As the Israelites did look for walled towns and cities of the Amorites to be possessed by them, so here we have but a wandering camp, we look for a city. And mark, as it was with them in their outward estate, so in the mysteries of their religion; they were first seated in a tabernacle, and then in a temple: in a tabernacle, which was a figure of the church; then in a temple, which was a figure of heaven; for you know, as in the temple there were three partitions—the outward court, the holy place, and the holy of holies—so there are three heavens. The third heaven Paul speaks of—'the heaven of heavens'; and there is the starry heaven, and the airy heaven, the outward court. This life being so frail, so fickle, we cannot call our abode here our home. 'What is your life?' saith the apostle; 'it is but as a vapour,' James 4:14; a little warm breath turned in and out by the nostrils: Job 7:1, 'Is there not an appointed time for man upon earth? His days are as the days of an hireling.' A hired servant you do not intend should live with you for ever; you hire him for a day or two, and when he hath ended his work, he receives his wages and is gone. So all our days are but a little while; we do our service, and then we must be gone. Actors, when they have finished their parts, are seen no more. They go within the curtain. So when we have fulfilled our course, God furnisheth the world with a new scene of acts and actors.

5. The necessary exercise of their graces doth make them count their lives here but a pilgrimage, and themselves but strangers upon earth, viz., faith, love, hope.

[1.] Faith shows the truth and the worth of things to come. Faith will make them strangers: Heb. 11:13, 'They saw these things and were persuaded of them, and they counted themselves pilgrims and strangers.' Oh! were we persuaded of things to come, we would be hasting towards them. We cry, Home, home! We talk of heaven and eternity, but we do not believe them. Sense and reason cannot out-see time, nor look above the clouds and mists of the lower world, 'afar off,' in the apostle's phrase, 2 Peter 1:9; but faith shows the truth of things to come. We that are here upon earth, when we look to heaven, the stars seem to us but so many spangles. Oh! but when we get into heaven and look downward, the world then will seem but as a molehill. That which now to sense seems such a glorious thing will be as nothing.

[2.] The love of Christ which is in the saints makes them to account themselves as strangers. A child of God cannot be satisfied with things here below, because his love is set upon God. Two things the heart looks after, as soon as it is awakened by grace, and love puts us upon them both, viz., a perfect enjoyment of God, and a perfect obedience to God. (1.) That they may be with God and Christ. The saints have heard much of Christ, read much of him, tasted and felt much of him; they would fain see him, and be with him, Phil. 1:23. If they had the choicest contentment the world could afford, this would not satisfy them so much as to be there 'where Christ is, and to behold his glory.' The apostle thinks this to be motive enough to a gracious heart to seek things above, for there 'Christ is at the right hand of God;' love will catch hold of that, Col. 3:1. The place is lovely for Christ's sake. Love will not suffer them to count this to be their

home. Though Christ is present with them now spiritually while they are here, yet the presence and nearness is but distance, but a kind of absence, compared with that which is to come; and therefore this very presence doth not quench their desires, but kindles them, and sets them a-longing for more. All the presence, the communion, the sight of Christ they get now, is but mediate, through the glass of the ordinance, 1 Cor. 13:12; and it is frequently interrupted, his face is many times hidden, Ps. 30:7; and it is not full, as it shall be there, Ps. 16:11. But now in heaven it will be immediate; God will be 'all in all;' and there it will be constant, 'they shall be ever with the Lord;' and there they shall be 'satisfied with his likeness,' Ps. 17:15; then they shall enjoy his presence indeed. So that love upon these considerations sets them a-longing and groaning. (2.) As love makes them desire the company of Christ, so entire subjection to God; they would have perfect grace and freedom from sin, therefore are ever groaning,—Oh! when shall we be rid of this body of death? Rom. 7:23. There is a final perfect estate for which the new creature was made, and they are ever tending towards that happy state wherein they shall grieve God no more.

[3.] Hope was made for things to come, especially for our full and final happiness. God fits us with graces as well as happiness; not only grants us a glorious estate, but gives us grace to expect it. Hope would be of no use if it did not lift up the head, and look out for a better estate than the world yieldeth. Hope fastens upon God's title in the covenant, 'I am thy God.' Now God could not with honour take this title, and give us no better than present things: Heb. 11:16, 'Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city.' Mark the apostle's reason. Many expound these words so as if the meaning were but this, that they did only express God's condescension, that he would take his title, not from the potentates of the world, but from a few wandering patriarchs;

that God was not ashamed to be called their God. Alas! the words have a quite other sense. Rather it expresseth an answerable bounty: unless the Lord would give them something answerable to their hopes, more than was visible in the lives of the patriarch, God would be ashamed to be called their God. Do but look upon the slenderness of their condition. If that he gave them in the world were all their reward, what is this to own that magnificent title, 'I am the God of Abraham,' &c. No; now he hath something better than all the honours and riches of the world; now he may fitly be called their God. Christ builds the doctrine of the resurrection upon the same argument, 'God is the God of Abraham,' &c.; therefore they shall have a blessed estate in soul and body, Mat. 22:32. To be a God to any, is to be a benefactor, and that according to the extent and largeness of an infinite and eternal power.

Use 1. Are you strangers and pilgrims? David, and such as he was, that were of his stamp, counted themselves strangers upon earth. If you be so—

1. You will always be drawing home, and would not desire to stay long from Christ. A traveller would pass over his journey as soon as he can, and be hastening homeward: Phil. 1:23, 'I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.' Is there any looking, longing, waiting for your blessed estate? It is no hard matter to get a Christian out of the world; his better part is gone already, his heart is there. Do your hearts draw homeward? Are your desires stronger and stronger every day after eternal life? Natural motion grows swifter and swifter still, as it draws nearer and nearer its centre. So certainly a Christian, if he had the motions of the new nature, he would be drawing homeward more every day.



2. What provision do you make for another world if you are strangers? Many bestow all their labour and travail about earthly things, and neglect their precious and immortal souls. They are at home; all their care is that they may live well here. O Christians! what provision do you make for heaven? A traveller doth not tray such things as he cannot carry with him, as trees, houses, household stuff; but jewels, pearls, and such as are portable. Our wealth doth not follow us into the other world, but our works do. We are travelling to a country whose commodities will not be bought with gold and silver, and therefore are we storing ourselves for heaven, for such things as are current there. Men that make a voyage to the Indies will carry such wares as are acceptable there, else they do nothing. Do you make it your business every day to get clearer evidences for heaven, to treasure up a good foundation, 1 Tim. 6:19; and do you labour every day to grow more meet for heaven, Col. 1:12. That is the great work of a Christian, to get evidences and a meetness for heaven. These are the months of our purification; we are now to cleanse ourselves for the embraces of the great God. When we grow more mortified, strict, holy, heavenly, then we ripen apace, and hasten homeward: Ps. 84:7, 'They shall go on from strength to strength,' &c. Every degree of grace it is a step nearer; and therefore do you grow more meet for this blessed estate.

3. In the fulness of your worldly enjoyments do you mind your country? He that was going pilgrim to Jerusalem, cried out, Oh, this is not the holy city! So, whatever enjoyments you have, do your hearts call you off, and say, Soul, this is not thy rest; this is not that thou shouldst take comfort in; thou art bound for heaven? Do you miss your country and your parents? The men of the world would have their portion here, here is their rest; but when you have most of the world at will, are you strangers? 1 Cor. 7:31, 'Using this world as not abusing it;' that is, so making use of God's bounty as expecting a

greater happiness. How do we use the world as not abusing it? When we use it as a type, as a motive, and as a help to heaven. As a kind of type, the enjoyment of temporal things should stir us up to a more serious consideration of heavenly; as the prodigal's husks put him in mind of bread in his father's house. The company of your relations puts you in mind of the company of God and Christ. The cities of the Amorites, their walled towns, put the patriarchs in mind of a city which had foundations, Heb. 11:16. If an earthly city be so glorious, what is the heavenly city? These are the comforts of a strange place. You abuse them when you forget home, and therefore take heed; if the creature be sweet, heaven is better. And when you use them as a motive to serve God more cheerfully, the more you find him a good master: 1 Tim. 6:17, 'Trust in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;' to make you more earnest in good works. 2 Sam. 7:2, saith David there, 'I dwell in a house of cedar, and the ark of God within curtains.' When you have such kind of reasonings stirred up within you—What do I for God, that hath enlarged my house here? And when you use them as a help, your worldly enjoyments as instruments of piety and charity. Here is a man's trial, what he doth in a full condition, whether his heart be for home still, yea or nay; when he hath the world at will, if then he be treasuring up a good foundation, and encouraging himself to serve God faithfully.

4. What is your solace in your affliction, and the inconveniences that you meet with in your pilgrimage? Doth this comfort you—Home will pay for all? Heb. 10:34, 'Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and enduring substance.' Do you reckon upon a more enduring substance? Though the world frown upon you as a step-mother, yet you remember you have a better home. From whence do you fetch your supports in any cross? Doth this comfort you in the midst of the molestations of the world?—They do not know your birth, your breeding, your hopes,

nor your expectations. Strangers may be abused in a foreign place; when we come home, this will be forgotten. The saints walk up and down like a prince that travels abroad in disguise; though he be slighted, abused, he doth not appear what he shall be. You have a glorious inheritance reserved for you; this is your cordial and the reviving of your souls, and that which doth your heart good to think of; and so you can be contented to suffer loss and inconveniences upon these hopes. The discourse between Modestus, a governor under Valens, and Basil, in Nazianzen his twentieth Oration, is very notable. I shall only transcribe what is exactly to the purpose in hand. When he threatened him with banishment, I know no banishment, saith he, who know no abiding-place here in the world. I do not count this place mine, nor can I say the other is not mine; rather all is God's, whose stranger and pilgrim I am. This was that which supported him in the midst of those threatenings. Therefore from whence do you fetch your support.

5. If religion be kept up in height and majesty, the world will count you strangers, they will stand wondering at your conversation, 1 Peter 4:4. Men gaze upon those that come hither in a foreign habit, that do not conform to the fashions of the country; and so a child of God is wondered at, that walks in a counter-motion to the studies and practices of other men, as one that is not conformed to the world, Rom. 12:2. What do you discover of the spirit of your country, so as to convince others?

This much by way of inquiry, namely, whether we are strangers, yea or nay?

Use 2. Behave yourselves as strangers here upon earth.

1. Avoid 'fleshly lusts,' 1 Peter 2:11; these cloud the eye, and besot the heart, and make us altogether for a present good; they weaken our

desires of heaven. It is the apostle's argument, 'As strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts.' The flesh-pots of Egypt made Israel to despise Canaan; and so this is that which will take off our hearts from things to come, from the inheritance of the saints in light, and from that blessed estate God hath promised.

2. Grasp not at too much of the world; but what comes with a fair providence upon honest endeavours, accept with thanks: 1 Tim. 6:9, 'They that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare,' &c. The devil hath you upon the hip, when you make that your business and scope; not he that is, but will be rich, that fixes that as his scope. Then the heart is filled with sins, and the head with cares.

3. If an estate comes in slowly, remember, a little will serve our turns to heaven; more would be but a burden and snare. Those that have their portion here, most of worldly things, what do they get by it? A little belly-cheer, Ps. 17:14, 'and they leave the rest to their babes.' Dainty cheer is no great matter; and to leave our posterity great is but to leave them in a snare. Children are under a providence and a covenant as well as we, and it is blasphemous to think we can provide for them better than God.

4. If God give abundance, rest not in it with a carnal complacency: Ps. 62:10, 'If riches increase, set not your heart on them.' Suffer not thy heart to rejoice in them as your only portion, so as to grow proud of them, so as to count them your good things, Luke 16:25; you that are strangers have better things to mind.

5. Keep up a warm respect to your everlasting home. It is not enough to despise the world, but you must look after a better country. Many of a slight temper may despise worldly profits; their corruptions do not run out that way: Heb. 13:14, 'We have here no abiding city, but we seek one to come.' Desires, thoughts, and groans, these are the

harbingers of the soul that we send into the land of promise. By this means we tell God that we would be at home.

6. Enjoy as much of heaven as you can in your pilgrimage, in ordinances, in the first-fruits of the Spirit, in communion with saints, Grace is but young glory, and joy in the Holy Ghost is the suburbs of heaven; and therefore you should get somewhat of your country before you come at it. As the winds do carry the odours and sweet smells of Arabia into the neighbouring provinces, so by the breathings of the Holy Ghost upon our hearts do we get a smell of the upper paradise; it is in some measure begun in us before we can get thither; and therefore enjoy as much of heaven as possibly you can in the time of your pilgrimage. We have our taste here; it is begun in union with Christ, and in the work of grace upon the heart. And in ordinances. Prayer brings us to the throne of grace; it gives us an entrance into God's presence: Heb. 10:19, the apostle calls it, 'a boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.' A Christian enters heaven while he is here in the world. In the word preached heaven is brought down to us. The gospel is called the kingdom of heaven. And by reading we do as it were converse with the saints departed, that writ what we read. Meditation brings us into the company of God; it puts our heads above the clouds, in the midst of blessed spirits there. As if we saw Jesus Christ upon the throne, and his saints triumphing about him. Communion of saints is heaven begun; therefore you that are strangers should much delight there. A man that is abroad would be glad to meet with his own countrymen; we should be glad of company to go with us to heaven; these are to be our companions for evermore, therefore we should converse with them here.

Secondly, I proceed to the latter clause, 'Hide not thy commandments from me.' Here is his request. To make short work

of it, I shall endeavour to make out the connection and sense of these words in these propositions.

1. Every man here upon earth, especially a godly man, is but a stranger and passenger. Every man is so in point of condition; he must go hence, and quit all his enjoyments in the world—wicked men whether they will or no; but a godly man is so in affection, and cannot be satisfied with his present state. This I have insisted upon.

2. It concerns him that is a stranger to look after a better and more durable state. Every man should do so. He that lives here for a while is concerned; his greatest care should be for that place where he lives longest; therefore eternity should be his scope. A godly man will do so. Those whose hearts are not set upon earthly things, they must have heaven. The more their affections are estranged from the one, the more they are taken up about the other, Col. 3:2. Heaven and earth are like two scales in a balance; that which is taken from the one is put into the other.

3. There is no sufficient direction how to attain this durable estate but in the word of God. Without this we are but like poor pilgrims and wayfaring men in a strange country, not able to discern the way home. A blessed state is only sufficiently revealed in the word: 2 Tim. 1:10, 'Life and immortality is brought to light in the gospel.' The heathens did but guess at it, and had some obscure sense of an estate after this life; but it is brought to light with most clearness in the word; so the way thither is only pointed out by the word. It is the word of God makes us wise to salvation, and our line and rule to lead us to the heavenly Canaan; and therefore it concerns those that look after this durable state, to consult with the word.

4. There is no understanding God's word but by the light of the Spirit: Job 32:8, 'There is a spirit in man; but the inspiration of the

Almighty, that giveth understanding.' Though the word have light in it, yet the spirit of man cannot move till he enlightens us with that lively light that makes way for the dominion of the truth in our hearts, and conveyeth influence into our hearts. This is that light David begs when he saith, 'Hide not thy commandments from me.' David was not ignorant of the ten commandments, of their sound; but he begs their spiritual sense and use.

5. If we would have the Spirit, we must ask it of God in prayer; for God 'gives the Spirit to those that ask him,' Luke 11:13; and therefore we must say, as David, Ps. 43:3, 'Oh, send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me to thy holy hill, to thy tabernacle.'

6. When we beg it of God, we must do it with submission to his sovereignty, and with subscription to his justice. Therefore doth David use this manner of speech, 'Hide not thy commandments from me.' God doth hide when he doth not open our eyes to see. Now the Lord may choose whether he will do this or no; for he is sovereign, and may in justice forbear to do so, because we have abused the light we have; it will be hid from us unless he reveal it. The mystery of grace is wholly at God's dispose; and whosoever begs it, he must refer himself to the holy and sovereign good pleasure of God, who may give out and withhold his efficacious grace according to his pleasure: Mat. 11:25, 26, 'I thank thee, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.' Here is the Lord's sovereignty; he doth in these things as he pleaseth; therefore David submits to it. And then it implies, it may be just with God to leave us unto our natural blindness, and suffer Satan to blind us more. It is fully consistent with the honour of his justice; therefore it is said, John 12:40, 'He

hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts,' &c.; that is, judicially, suffering them to increase their own blindness by their sin; blindness, that is their sin; and the Lord may leave it as a judgment upon them.

Use. Here is direction to you that know you are but pilgrims. The great thing you should seek after is the straightest way to heaven. If you have a sense of eternity, and a sense of your present frailty, you should look how to get home to your country. To this end—

1. Study the word. Why? This is your antidote against infection, and a cordial to cheer us in the way. It is an antidote against infection: 2 Peter 1:4, 'By the promises we escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.' The world is an infectious place; therefore you had need take the promises next your heart to keep your hopes alive. And here is your cordial to keep you from fainting, that which makes you to rejoice in the midst of present afflictions, Ps. 119:54. It is a cordial to cheer us up, to revive us in the way, till we come to our journey's end. This will make up losses, sweeten difficulties, allay your sorrows. Then it is your direction, the way to lead you home: Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a light to my feet and a lantern to my paths.' We shall soon pass over this life; all our care should be to pass it over well, there are so many by-paths in the world, and in a strange place we may soon miscarry.

2. Entreat the Lord of his abundant grace to pity poor strangers, who are ignorant; and desire him he would not hide his word from you, that you may walk in the nearest, closest way wherein he would have you walk. He may hide it from you as an absolute supreme Lord, for he is bound to give his grace to none; and he may do it as a just judge; he may leave you to your own infatuations and prejudices. Say, Lord, pity a poor stranger and pilgrim.



The word may be hidden two ways, and take care of both:—

1. In point of external administration, when the powerful means are wanting. Oh! it is a great mark of God's displeasure, when men are given up by their own choice to blind guides, to those that have no skill or no will to edify, or no abilities rightly to divide the word of truth; only fill the ear with clamour and noise, but do not inform conscience, or move the heart by solid and powerful instruction from the word of God.
2. In point of internal influence, when the comforts and quickenings of the Spirit are withholden: 'Lord, withhold not thy Spirit from me.'

## **SERMON XXI**

**My soul breaketh for the longing it hath  
unto thy judgments at all times.—VER.**

**20.**

DAVID had begged divine illumination, ver. 18. The reason of his request was, because he was a stranger upon earth, and a stranger may easily be bewildered. Now here is a second reason why he would have God to open his eyes, because his heart was carried out with so strong an affection to the word. He that asketh a thing coldly doth but bespeak his own denial. But David was in good earnest when he prayeth for light; it was not a dead-hearted, perfunctory petition, but such as came from an ardent, strong affection, 'My soul breaketh,' &c.

In the words we have—

1. The object of David's affection, thy judgments.

2. The quality or kind of his affection:—

[1.] It was vehement, my soul breaketh with longing.

[2.] It was constant, at all times.

By *misphalim*, judgments, is meant the word, which is the infallible rule of God's proceeding with sinners.

For the affection, I shall open that, and there first speak of the vehemency, 'My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath.' It is a metaphorical expression, to set forth the earnestness of his affection. The Septuagint renders it thus: *ἐπεπόθησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι τὰ κρίματά σου*—'My soul coveteth to desire thy judgments.' Desire is the stretching forth of the soul to the thing desired. Now as things that are stretched out do break and crack in stretching; so, saith David, 'My soul breaketh for the longing.' Here is no respect to brokenness of heart in this place, it is only strength of desire that is expressed; and the expression is used the rather—

1. Because affections, when strong, are painful, and affect the body with impressions answerable thereunto.

2. Not only the denial, but the delay of satisfying the affection, increaseth the pain. When they have not what they do desire, they are even broken in heart; as Prov. 13:12, 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life;' like apples of paradise, comforting and reviving. Now the constancy and continuance of this desire is set forth in these words, at all times; not for a flash and pang, but it was the ordinary frame of his heart.

Doct. God's children have a strong, constant, and earnest bent of affection towards his word.

1. To open the nature of this affection.

2. The reasons of it.

First, The nature. There consider the object, the end, the properties, and the effects.

1. The object of this affection is the word of God written or preached. As it is written in the scriptures, so it is their constant exercise to read it, and consult with it often: Ps. 1:2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night'; and Josh. 1:8, 'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night.' As it is preached and explained: they submit to God's ordinance in that also, who hath appointed pastors and teachers, as well as prophets and apostles: Eph. 4:11—prophets and apostles to write scriptures; so pastors and teachers to open and apply scripture; therefore James 1:19, they are 'swift to hear;' that is, take all occasions for that end and purpose.

2. For the end of this affection; it is a sanctified subjection to God; and strength and growth in the spiritual life: 1 Peter 2:2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby;' not merely that you may know, but that you may grow thereby; not to replenish the head with notions, but that you may increase in spiritual strength, and find more liberty of heart towards God.

3. For the properties of it. You have them here in the text:—

[1.] They must be earnest.

[2.] A constant bent of heart.

[1.] An earnest bent of heart. Common and ordinary affection or desire after the word will not serve the turn; not a faint and cold wish, but such as hath heat and warmth in it. It is good to see by what expressions the desires of the saints are set forth in scripture. By the desire of infants after the breast, 1 Peter 2:2; they cannot live without it. It is set forth also by the panting of the hart after the water-brooks, Ps. 42:1. To meet with God in his word is as a brook of water to a chased hart; it refresheth and revives it. It is set forth by the desires of a longing woman, ver. 40 of this psalm, 'Behold I have longed after thy precepts.' The children of God are fond of nothing so much as of his word and ordinances. It is set forth by the appetite which a hungry man hath toward his meat after a long abstinence: Ps. 84:2, 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord.' Or, as a weary traveller and thirsty man longeth after drink: Ps. 63:1, 'My soul thirsteth for thee,' &c. Or, as cool air to the weary: Ps. 119:131, 'I opened my mouth and panted; for I longed for thy commandments;' a metaphor taken from a man tired with running, gaping for breath to take in some cool air and refreshing. What think you of all these expressions? are they strains and reaches of wit, or the real experiences of the children of God? The truth is, we have such languid motions this way, that we know not how to understand the force of such expressions, therefore we think them to be conceits, we that are so cold and indifferent whether we meet with God in his word, yea or nay.

[2.] As it is not cold, so it is not fleeting, but constant. Many men have good affections for a while, but they abide not; as I shall give you some kinds.

(1.) Some out of error in judgment think the word of God is only fit for novices (as the Stancarists), to enter us into the rudiments of religion, but too low a dispensation for our after growth. It is milk for babes, they think; but afterwards we must live immediately upon the Spirit. But we see that David's affection ever carried him to the word, not only at his first acquaintance with God, but at all times, as in the text.

(2.) Some prize the word in adversity, when they have no other comforts to live upon; then they can be content to study the word to comfort them in their distresses; but when they are well at ease they despise it. But David made use of it at all times; in prosperity, to humble him; in adversity, to comfort him; in the one, to keep him from pride; in the other, to keep him from despair: in affliction the word was his cordial; in worldly increase it was his antidote; and so at all times his heart was carried out to the word either for one necessity or another.

(3.) Some during a qualm of conscience have an affection for holy things; as we desire strong waters in a pang, not for a constant diet. While the terrors of God are upon them, nothing will satisfy them but the word: Oh, 'send for Moses and Aaron,' then when the plague was upon them; but as their trouble wears off, so doth their affection to the word of God. It is fear that drives them to the word, and not love.

(4.) Some out of a general sense of the excellency that is in the word; they go on smoothly for a while, as Herod, who heard gladly, Mark 6:20. So do many till the word come to cross their lusts and touch their darling sin, then they run to earthly pleasures again, and out of a sense of difficulty and carnal despondency, they give over the pursuit.

(5.) Some are taken with the mere novelty: John 5:35, 'Ye were willing to rejoice in his light for a season;' while the doctrine is novel, and ministers have countenance from great men, as John had from Herod, and their gifts are in the flourish—none but John in their account; but when the conceit of novelty was gone, and John fell under the cross, then their affection was spent.

(6.) Some in case of dubious anxiety, or in doubtful debates, may desire to know the truth, and be much and earnest in the study of the word; but when they get above their scruples, and in plain truths, ordinary cases, they neglect it. Whereas David longed for the word of God at all times, to feel the power of God accompanying it, so as to find strength against his corruptions, and that he might be established in waiting upon God. This was the constant and stable desire of his soul.

Thus you see the word of God is the object, either read or preached. The end of it is, that they may grow in grace, and that their hearts may be more subjected to God, and may be strengthened in waiting upon him: and the manner of this desire is vehement and constant; not at times; but it is the usual frame and temper of their hearts.

4. The effects of this desire, what it worketh. I will mention but two:  
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[1.] It draws off the heart from other things: Ps. 119:136, 'Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not unto covetousness;' implying, that when the heart is drawn out after God's testimonies, it is drawn off from carnal pursuits. Desires are the vigorous bent of the soul, and therefore, as the stream of a river, they can run but one way. Our passionate desires of earthly things certainly will be abated if spiritual desires prevail in us; for being acquainted with a better object, they begin to disdain and loathe other things.

[2.] It maketh us diligent and painful in the use of means, that we may get knowledge and strength by the word. Where strong desires are, there will be great endeavours: Prov. 8:34, 'Watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.' A man that hath a desire after grace and strength by the word of God will daily be redeeming occasions of waiting upon God. It is but a slight wish, not serious desire, that is not seconded with answerable endeavours.

Secondly, Having opened the nature of these desires, let me show the reasons of this vehement and constant bent of heart towards the word of God.

1. Of the vehemency.

2. Of the constancy.

First, The reasons of this vehemency; they are these—natural instinct, experience, and necessity.

[1.] Natural instinct: 1 Peter 2:2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word.' Children desire the dug, not by instruction, but by instinct, without a teacher. All creatures desire to preserve that life which they have; and therefore by a natural propension they run to that thing from whence they received life. Mere instinct carrieth the brute creatures to the teats of their dams; and every effect looks to the cause, to receive from thence its last perfection. Trees, that receive life from the earth and the sun, they send forth their branches to receive the sun, and stretch their roots into the earth which brought them forth. Fishes will not out of the water which breeds them. Chickens are no sooner out of the shell, but they shroud themselves under the feathers of the hen. The little lamb runs to the dam's teat, though there be a thousand sheep of the same wool and colour; as if it said, here I received that I have, and here I'll seek

that I want. By such a native inbred desire do the saints run to God, to seek a supply of strength and nourishment; and the desire is very strong and vehement: 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after,' &c. There were other things David might desire, but this one thing his heart was set upon, that he might enjoy constant communion with God in the use of public ordinances. What is the reason of this? I answer—The spiritual nature. You may as well ask what teacheth the young lambs to suck, as who taught the regenerate to long for the word. What teacheth the chicken to run under the wing of the hen? The cause of appetite is not persuasion and discourse, but inclination; not argument, but nature. Appetite is an effect of life. By natural tendency the new creature is carried out to its support from the word of God, there to be comforted and nourished. It shows that all who have not such a kindly appetite to the word of God, that can relish nothing but meats, drinks, wealth, vanity, they were never acquainted with this new nature.

[2.] Experience is another cause of this desire. A child of God is not satisfied with a slight taste of the word, but he desires more; when he hath felt the comfort of it, he is still longing to receive more from God: James 1:18, 'He hath begotten us by the word of truth.' What follows? 'Wherefore be swift to hear.' A man that hath had experience of the power of the word taketh all occasions; he knows there is strength, grace, and liberty of heart to be found there. So 1 Peter 2:3, 'As new-born babes, &c., if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' Certainly a man that hath had any taste of communion with God will desire a fuller measure, as by tasting of excellent meats we get an appetite to them. Carnal men do not know what it is to enjoy God in ordinances, and therefore do not long for them; they do not taste the sweetness of the word: Ps. 19:10, 'The statutes of the Lord are sweeter than the honey or the honeycomb.' The children of God find more true pleasure in the ordinances, in the



statutes of God, than in all things in the world, though to carnal men they are but as dry sticks, burdensome exercises. The reason follows, ver. 11, 'Moreover, by them is thy servant warned; and in keeping of them there is great reward.' He commendeth the word from his own experience; he had felt the effects and good use of it in his own heart; he had been warned, and had a great deal of comfort and refreshing by it; therefore it is sweeter than the honey and the honeycomb. So Ps. 63:1, 2, 'O God, my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee.' What to do? 'To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.' He that hath had once a sight of God, would not be long out of his company. He compareth his desire of communion with God with hunger and thirst; his desire is greater than the hunger and thirst that men suffer in a dry wilderness where there is no water to give refreshment. He had seen God, and would now see him again; the remembrance of those former pleasures of the sanctuary revived his desires: so that besides nature, there is this experience.

[3.] The next cause is necessity. We should take delight in the word of God for its excellency, though we stood in no need of it. But our necessity is very great, and this awakens desire. The word is not only compared to things which make for conveniency of life, as to wine and honey, but is compared also to things that are of absolute necessity, bread and water. It is called 'bread of life,' and 'water of life.' Bread of life; we cannot live without it: Job 23:12, 'I have esteemed the words of thy mouth more than my necessary food.' Food is that which keeps us in life, and enables us to action and work. And as water: Isa. 12:3, 'With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.' This is as water to a fainting traveller. Christian, the soul is better than the body, and eternal life is to be preferred before life natural; therefore the necessities of the soul are greater, and should be more urging than the necessities of the body. The

famine of the word is threatened as a very great evil, Amos 8:11. Now because the necessities of the saints are so great, therefore have they their hearts carried out with such longing after the statutes of God. And this necessity is not only at first, when they are weak, but it continueth with them as long as the imperfection continueth with them, and till they come to heaven. Every grace in a child of God needs increase and support; there is something that is lacking to their faith, to their love, to their knowledge: 1 Thes. 3:10, the apostle saith, 'That I might perfect that which is lacking to your faith.' They that are above ordinances are not acquainted with their own hearts, they are not men of spiritual experience, they do not know the weaknesses and languishings a child of God is incident to; it is wholly inconsistent to the nature of grace. Wherever there is life there must be food, because of the constant depastion of the natural heat upon the natural moisture. Though the stomach be never so full at present, yet anon it will be hungry again. So because of the constant combat that is between the flesh and spirit, wherever there is spiritual life it will be sensible of the necessity of food. Well, then, it is hunger and necessity that sharpens appetite; being sensible of spiritual languishing, and need to repair strength daily, therefore are their hearts carried out. Thus you see the reasons of this vehement affection.

Secondly, The reasons of the constancy of this respect.

1. Because it is natural and kindly to the regenerate; therefore, as it is vehement, so it is constant. For it is not a light motion, but such as is deeply rooted; not a good liking, but a thorough bent of heart; it is that which setteth into another nature. Now that which is as a nature to us is known by its uniformity and constancy.

2. They love the word for its own sake, as it is God's word; therefore they ever love it. Other men love it for foreign reasons, as out of novelty, which is an adulterous affection; or out of public countenance, as it is in fashion and repute, and therefore are soon weary of it. He that loves a woman for foreign reasons, as beauty and portion, when these cease, his love ceaseth.

Use 1. Is to reprove the coldness and cursed satiety and loathing of the word of God that is abroad. There is a plenty of means, even to a surfeit. Men are gospel-gluttled, Christ-gluttled, and sermon-gluttled; and therefore are at a very great indifferency, and under a mighty coldness as to the word of God. Usually we are more sensible of the benefit of the word in the want of it than we are in the enjoyment of it: 1 Sam. 3:1, 'The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision.' When the public ministry of the prophets was rare and scarce, then it was precious and sweet. When the Papists denied the use of the scripture in the vulgar tongue, oh! what would we give then for a little scrap and fragment of the word of God in English!—a load of hay for a chapter in James. So in times of restraint, how savoury is a godly sermon! But now visions are open, men begin to surfeit of the word. In semet ipsam, saith Tertullian, semper abundantia contumeliosa est—plenty lesseneth the price of things. As in Solomon's time, gold and silver were as dirt in the streets, 1 Kings 10:21, so the word of God, though it be so precious and excellent, yet when we have plenty of it, line upon line, precept upon precept, by God's indulgence, then we begin to be gluttled. People grow wanton when they have abundance of means. This is the temper of English professors at this day; they are guilty of surfeiting of the word, and that is very dangerous, either of a people or person. Now, that there is such a fulness and satiety appears partly—

1. By seldom attendance upon the word. We do not redeem time to hear the word; when brought home to our doors, we seldom step out to hear it. They use to say, a surfeit of bread is most dangerous; surely a surfeit of the bread of life is so; when men are full, and begin to despise the word as if not worth the hearing. God usually sends a famine to correct that surfeit of the word: Amos 8:11, 12, 'I will send a famine of hearing the word of the Lord, and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.' Usually that is the way that God taketh for a gluttoned people, that scorn and neglect the word, when they might gather it in like manna from heaven every day; that they may ride many miles before they hear a savoury sermon; and then those that were not for the word, or desirous to be rid of it, may long for a little comfort and reviving by it, and cannot enjoy it.

2. Men bewray this satiety and fulness of the word by fond affectation of luscious strains; wholesome doctrines will not down with them, unless it be cooked and sauced to their wanton appetites. O Christians! the spiritual appetite desires τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα, 'the sincere milk of the word,' 1 Peter 2:2—unmixed milk; give them plain, simple milk, without human mixtures and compositions. The relish of the word is spoiled by the garish strains of a frothy eloquence. A plain solid truth is more suitable to a gracious heart. A man that hath a natural instinct to the word delights in the simplicity of it. An infant hath a distinguishing palate, and knows the mother's milk, and pukes and casts when it sucks another. So certainly, if we had true spiritual life, we would be delighted in the word for the word's sake, the more plain it is, provided it be sound. I am not for a loose, careless delivering of God's message; but it is the sound, plain, and wholesome ministry which suits with a gracious appetite. It argues a distempered heart when we must have quails and dainties,

and loathe manna. Consider; in heaven, where we have the most simple apprehension of things, we have the highest affection to them; no need of rhetoric in heaven. And certainly the more heavenly we are, the more perfect in grace, the more wisdom shall we see in plain scriptural truth, infinitely exceeding all the wisdom of the heathen. Many think the word of God too plain for their mouths to preach it; others too stale for their ears to hear it; and they must have the fancies of men: Jer. 8:9, 'They have rejected my word; and what wisdom is in them?' It is strange to see how many will disguise religion to please the lusts of men. They mock Christ, as the soldiers did, that put a centurion's coat upon him for a robe, and then, 'Hail, King of the Jews.' so they wrap up Christ in the foolish garments of their own fancy, and so expose him to mockage rather than reverence.

3. This satiety bewrays itself by our affections to novel opinions, and erroneous conceits: 2 Tim. 4:3, 'The time will come that they will not endure sound doctrine, having itching ears, and shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.' Observe it when you will, that soul is nigh to spiritual blasting that begins to have a loathing of a plain truth; and men must have new things and conceits in religion, and so grow weary of opinions, as they do of fashions; and then by God's just judgment they run from one fancy to another, till they quite run themselves out of breath, and have shaken off all religion and good conscience. Therefore take heed of being given up to this vertiginous spirit, to be turned and 'tossed up and down with every wind of doctrine,' Eph. 4:14. Περιφερόμενοι, the apostle's word, signifies to be carried round in a circle; he alludes to a mariner's compass, that is carried by every wind; this wind takes them, and then another; such light chaff are men when they begin to loathe the plain truths of God. But it is an argument of a gracious

heart when we can receive old truth with new affections, and look for the power of God and new quickenings.

4. This levity and instability of spirit is because they look for all the virtue of religion from their notions and their opinions, and not from Christ; then they think this change of opinion shall make them better; their hearts shall be changed. They try experiments so long, till the Lord hath given them up to a spirit of infatuation, and then all comes to nothing, but they as a brand are fit for the burning.

5. By our worldly projects. Men show a loathing of this word by their eagerness to the world; their hearts, with Martha, are cumbered with many things, while Mary sat at the feet of Jesus to hear his word, Luke 10. We are very fervorous in worldly affairs; there we can experiment this kind of affection which David speaks of to the word. Beware of this coldness to the word; it is an ill symptom both to nations and persons.

Use 2. To press us to get this fervent and constant affection to the word. To this end consider—

1. Whose word it is. God's word; and your best affections are due to him: Isa. 26:8, 'Our desires are to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name;' there you shall hear of God, there God hath displayed his name. Our desires are to thee; not only so, but to thy 'memorial,' to 'the remembrance of thy name;' that is, to his word, which is as the bellows to blow up the sparks, and to quicken our affections to him.

2. See what benefits we have by the word of God; how beneficial it is to enlighten and direct us, quicken and comfort us, supply and strengthen us.

[1.] To enlighten and direct us. 'Light is pleasant,' saith Solomon; 'it is a good thing to behold the sun with our eyes,' Eccles. 11:7. If light natural be pleasant, what is light spiritual? Therefore the Psalmist compares the word to the sun. The visible world can no more be without the one than the intellectual world can be without the other; and the one doth as much rejoice the heart as the other: Ps. 19:8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the judgments of the Lord are pure, enlightening the eyes.' Oh! it is a comfort to have light to see our way. When men begin to have a conscience about heavenly things, oh! then they judge so indeed. To others we speak in vain when we tell them what light they shall have by the word. They say those that live under the arctic pole, at the autumnal equinoctial the sun setteth to them, and doth not rise again till the vernal, and so are six whole months under a perpetual night, as if they were buried in a grave; but at the time of its return, with what clapping of hands and expressions of joy do they welcome the sun again into their parts! So when the word of God is made known to us, how should we welcome it! The city of Geneva gave this for a motto, *Post tenebras lux*—after darkness, light; implying that the return of the gospel was as light after a long darkness; as the coming of the sun again to those northern people. While Paul and his company were in that great storm at sea, when they saw neither sun nor stars for many days, and were afraid they should fall upon rocks and dangerous shelves, oh! with what longing did they expect to see day again! Acts 27. So a poor bewildered soul that had lost its way, or when a child of God doth see but by half a light, how desirable is sure direction! Now this cannot be had but from the word of God, 'To the law and to the testimony.'

[2.] To comfort us in all straits. In the word of God there is a salve for every sore, and a promise for every condition. God hath plentifully opened his good-will to sinners. Therefore the children of God, when

they labour under the guilt of sin, there they can hear of God's promises of pardon: Isa. 55:7, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.' Against apostasy they have that promise: Jer. 32:40, 'I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.' When they are under weak performances, the word will tell them, 'The Lord will spare you, and pity you as a man spares his only son,' Mal. 3:17; and when they lie under troubles, inconveniences, and deep crosses, there is a promise—the Lord will be with them in affliction; the word will show them Christ in the affliction, and heaven beyond the affliction; and then they are comforted, 1 Cor. 10:13. When they are troubled about worldly provisions, providing for themselves and families, it saith, Be contented, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,' Heb. 13:5. When their children come to their minds and thoughts, what will become of them when we are dead and gone, the word will tell you of promises made to you and your children, and of God's taking care of them. In short, God is a sun and shield, and no good thing will he withhold,' &c. Ps. 84:11. There is all manner of blessings adopted and taken into covenant. Look round about the covenant, look into the word of God; there is nothing wanting for the comfort of believers; in every condition there is a promise to support and bear them up. Now, because of this comfort they have in the word of God, therefore it quickens their desires.

[3.] To supply and strengthen us. It is our food. Alas! what a poor languishing Christian will a man be that doth not often make use of the word! This strengthens him against corruptions, quickens him in duties, and gives success in conflicts. The sword of the Spirit is the choicest weapon. It is 'the power of God to salvation,' Rom. 1:16; and 'the word of his grace, which is able to build us up,' Acts 20:32. If our heart be dead in prayer, here is the rod of Moses to strike upon the



rock to make the waters gush out. Therefore, since we have such benefit by the word, we should long and desire to get such a strong affection.

3. Consider what benefit you will have by these desires after the word. It will keep up our diligence, and will make us exercise ourselves therein. Desire doth all that is done in the world; digging for knowledge is tedious, but the end sweetens it. They that have an affection to the word shall never be destitute of success therein; 'God will fulfil the desire of the saints.' He that satisfieth the gaping of the young raven will these desires A strong affection to the word is the argument that moves God: Ps. 145:19, 'He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them.' And if this desire be painful, yet it is salutary and healthful to the soul. In this sickness there is health; in this weakness there is strength; in this thirst, comfort; and in this hunger, satisfaction.

For means—

[1.] Get a high esteem of spiritual enjoyments. Valuation and esteem precede desire. Wicked men, that value themselves by carnal comforts, their souls run out with vehement longing that way. A child of God, that values himself by spiritual enjoyments, by knowledge, grace, subjection to God, that counts these his greatest benefits, his main desire is to be acquainted with the word of God. The word hath a subserviency to his end. Poor low-spirited creatures, that value themselves by the plenty of external accommodations, they will never feel this longing after the word. Prov. 8:10, 'Receive instruction rather than silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold.'

[2.] Let a man live in the awe of God, and make it his business to maintain communion with him, and then he will be longing after him. This will show the necessity of the word of God for his comfort

and strength upon all occasions. A lively Christian, that is put to it in good earnest, he must have the word by him to direct, comfort, and strengthen him; as he that labours hard must have his meals, or else he will faint and be overcome by his labour. We content ourselves with a loose profession, and so do not see the need of food, have not this hungering longing desire after the bread of life. Painted fire needs no fuel; a dead formal profession is easily kept up; but a man that makes it his business to maintain communion with him, and much exercised to godliness, is hungering and thirsting that he might meet with God.

## SERMON XXII

### **Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.—VER. 21.**

IN the 18th verse, the prophet had begged divine illumination, that his eyes might be opened to see more into the nature of the word. He backeth that petition with three arguments. The first is taken from his condition in the world, 'I am a stranger upon earth.' The second argument is taken from the vehemency of his affection to the word, 'My soul breaketh,' &c. A man that is regenerate, as David was, he hath not only some faint and languid motions towards holy things, but a great and strong affection of heart, 'My heart even breaketh for

the longing,' &c. In this verse here is the third reason, 'Open mine eyes.' Why? Because erring from the commandment is dangerous, and bringeth us under God's curse, which will be executed by the rebukes of his providence. There have been ever some that opposed God, but yet they have ever been blasted by God; he hath always vindicated the contempt of his law by the severe executions of his justice upon the contemners of it, 'Thou hast rebuked the proud.' We should not let pass God's judgments without profit; but the more the law is owned from heaven, the more entirely should we apply ourselves to the obedience of it. Therefore this is one reason why David begs for light, direction, and strength, for 'thou hast rebuked the proud,' &c.; therefore, Lord, teach me, that I may not come under the rebukes of thine anger.

Some read the words in two distinct sentences, 'Thou hast rebuked the proud;' and then, 'Cursed are they which do err from thy commandments.' But it comes all to one with our reading; therefore I shall not stand to insist upon examining the ground of this difference.

In the words observe—

1. The term that is given to wicked men, the proud, so commonly called in scripture: Mal. 3:15, 'They call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up.'
2. The instance and discovery of their pride, they err from thy commandments.
3. The evil state in which they are, they are cursed. Though the wicked are not presently punished, yet they are all cursed, and in time they shall be punished.

4. The begun execution of this curse, thou hast rebuked them, that is, punished or destroyed: Ps. 6:1, 'Rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.'

The points are—

1. That the worst sort of proud creatures are those that do err from God's commandments; for so is the description here, 'The proud have erred,' &c.

2. These proud ones, they are cursed. Those that continue in obstinacy and impenitency in their sins and errors, they are under a curse.

3. They are not only cursed, but are also rebuked; that is, not only threatened, but this curse shall be surely executed. In this world it is begun many times, and in part executed, but in the next fully and sorely.

Doct. 1. That the worst sort of proud creatures are those that err from God's commandments.

Here we must distinguish of erring, then of pride.

First, Of erring from God's commandments. There is an erring out of frailty, and an erring out of obstinacy.

1. An erring out of frailty; and so David saith, Ps. 119:176, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep;' and again, Ps. 19:12, 'Who can understand his errors?' This is not meant here of every failing and slip, every sin of ignorance and incogitancy; no, nor every act of rebellion and perverseness of affection which may be found in the children of God. Though there be a pride in all sins against knowledge and light, that kind of sinning is interpretatively a

confronting of God, a despising of his commandments; as David is said to do, 2 Sam. 12:9, *pro hic et nunc*, for the time; the will of the creature is set up against the creator; yet this is not the erring here spoken of.

2. There is an erring out of obstinacy, impenitency, and habitual contempt of the lawgiver. This is spoken of, Ps. 95:10, 'It is a people that do err in their hearts.' To err in mind is bad, to err out of ignorance; but it is a people that stubbornly refuse to walk in the ways God hath enjoined them. Some err out of simple nescience, ignorance, or mistake, or else through the cloud with which some present temptation overcasts the mind. These err in their minds, but others err in their hearts, that care not for, or do not desire to hear of, their duty to God. A man that erreth out of ignorance can say, 'Lord, I know not;' but those that err in their heart, they say, 'We desire not the knowledge of thy ways,' Job 21:14; they do not only fall into sin, but love to continue in it. The apostle speaks of 'ungodly deeds ungodly committed,' Jude 15. The matter of sin is not so much to be regarded as the manner, with what heart it is done, ungodly committed, with contempt of God. Now, such contemners of God and his law are here described, as all obstinate and impenitent sinners are.

Secondly, We must distinguish of pride, which is either moral or spiritual.

1. Moral pride is an over-high conceit of ourselves, or our own excellencies, discovered by our disdain and contempt of others. So it is said of Nebuchadnezzar, 'his heart was lifted up.' This is that pride that is spoken of 1 Peter 5:5, 'God resisteth the proud.' There should be a mutual condescension between men; for God resisteth the proud, that is, those that are lifted up above others.

2. Spiritual pride, that is, disobedience and impenitency, which is discovered by a neglect of God and contempt of his law; and that pride is often so taken appeareth by these scriptures: Mal. 4:1, 'The day of the Lord shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble.' Mark, they that do wickedly, and the proud, are made synonymous expressions. So Neh. 9:16, 'But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments.' Their obstinacy in sin, or unsubmission to God, is made to be pride. So Jeremiah, when he gives the people good counsel to prevent ensuing judgments, 'Hear ye, give ear, be not proud,' Jer. 13:15; that is, do not obstinately refuse to comply with God's will. And afterward, ver. 17, 'My soul shall weep sore for your pride.' So that unhumiliated sinners are guilty of this spiritual pride, of contempt of God himself.

Having opened these things, that by erring is meant not out of frailty, but by obstinacy; that by pride is not meant that moral pride by which we condemn others, but that spiritual pride, when our hearts are unhumiliated and unsubdued to God, my work is now to prove—

1. That obstinacy and impenitency is pride.
2. That it is the worst sort of pride.

First, That there is pride in impenitency and obstinacy in a course of sin. Why?

1. Because they neglect God. To slight a superior, and not to give him due respect, hath ever been accounted pride. Surely then this is pride with a witness, to neglect 'God, who is over all, blessed for ever:' Ps. 10:4, 'The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God;' that is, of his heart, betrayed by his countenance, he will not seek after God, and 'God is not in all his thoughts;' that is, scarce

troubled with such a thought of what will please or displease God; he doth not think it necessary or worth the time to look after.

2. They oppose God, and set themselves as parties against him: James 4:6, 'God resisteth the proud;' God standeth in a posture of war against the proud. The word implies that every proud man is in battle array or posture of war against God: so every impenitent person sets himself against God. The quarrel between God and him is, who shall stoop, whose will shall stand? whether God shall serve or they? Isa. 43:24, 'You have made me to serve with your sins, and wearied me with your iniquities.' Indeed, they do not only oppose him, but they would depose him, or put him out of the throne, while they would subject God's will to their own. He that would be at his own dispose, and do what pleaseth him, is a god to himself.

3. In all this opposition they slight God, and despise—(1.) His authority in making the law; (2.) His power and greatness in making good the sanction of the law.

[1.] They despise the authority of God in the law itself. When men will set up their own will in a contradiction to God, it is a mighty dishonour to God: 2 Sam. 12:9, 'Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord?' Every sin that is committed slights the law that forbids it, as if it were not to be stood upon; it is no matter what God saith to the contrary. There is fearing the commandment, and despising the commandment. Fearing the commandment, that is the effect of a wise heart: Prov. 13:13, 'He that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.' If God interpose, it is more than if there were an angel in the way with a flaming sword. There is a commandment in the way; he fears it, his way is hedged up, he dares not go on. But now impenitency, that slights the commandment. A sinner dares do that which an angel durst not do. It is said of Michael

the archangel, Jude 9, that 'he durst not bring a railing accusation;' he had not the boldness. Thus they despise the authority of God in the law.

[2.] They despise the power of God in the sanction of the law, when they will run the hazard of those sad threatenings, as if they were a vain scarecrow, as if they could make good their cause against God: 1 Cor. 10:22, 'Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?' Sinning is an entering the lists with God, as if they could carry their cause against him; and therefore one great cure of hardness of heart and impenitency is seriously to meditate upon God's power: Deut. 10:16, 17, 'Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.' Why? 'For the Lord your God is a God of gods and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty and terrible.' Do you know what God is? and will you contend with him? Certainly you will fail in the enterprise and undertaking.

Secondly, Let me prove there are none so proud as they that can brave it thus with God. I will take the rise of my argument thus—

1. Of all pride, that against superiors is most heinous.
2. Of all superiors, God is the highest, and deserveth our chiefest respect.
  1. Of all pride, that against superiors is most heinous. Pride bewrayeth itself either by a disdain of inferiors, neglect of equals, or contempt of superiors. Now, of all the others, this is the most offensive, because there is more to check it; therefore it is threatened as a great disorder, Isa. 3:4, 5, that 'the base should rise against the honourable, and the child should behave himself proudly against the ancient.' When men carry themselves insolently to those that are far their betters, that is counted a great arrogancy in the world: to injure



equals or contemn inferiors is not so much. There is the ground of the argument.

2. Of all superiors, God is the highest, and deserves our chiefest respect; therefore to deal proudly against him is worst of all. Consider—

[1.] That God hath an absolute jurisdiction.

[2.] His supremacy is not precarious.

[3.] In the management of his supremacy he useth much condescension. Now, to stand out against him, oh, what egregious pride is this!

[1.] He hath an absolute jurisdiction over us. Those that are our betters, we are to honour and respect them, though they have not power over us; but God is not only honourable, but chief and supreme, and hath a full right in us. In the civil law they distinguish of a twofold dominion; there is dominium jurisdictionis and dominium proprietatis—the dominion of jurisdiction and of propriety. The dominion of jurisdiction is proper to reasonable creatures, who only are capable of government. Propriety, that respects other things, as our goods and lands; and propriety argues a greater right and a greater dominion. A man may have a jurisdiction over others when he hath not an absolute dispose over them, as a prince over his subjects. Nay, a man that hath a jurisdiction and propriety too, his propriety is greater over his lands and estate than over his servants, though they be slaves; yet, because they partake of the same nature with himself, he hath not such a power to dispose of them as he hath to dispose of his goods and lands. Now God hath not only an absolute jurisdiction over us, which were enough in the case, but he hath a propriety, a more absolute power over every man than

the greatest monarch hath—what shall I say—over his subjects, over his slaves? nay, a greater propriety than he hath over his goods and lands. Why? For he made us out of nothing; he is our potter, we his clay: he hath such a power over us, to dispose of us according to his will, as a potter over his clay to form what vessel he pleaseth. Now for a man to strive with his maker, it is as if the clay should lift up itself against the potter. So much the prophet saith, Isa. 45:9, 'Woe unto him that striveth with his maker.' What! shall the pot lift up itself against the potter? That were monstrous, since it is his. Now the potter did not make the matter, only bestows form and art upon it, but God gives us form, matter, and all, and shall we rise up against him, and contemn him?

[2.] Consider that his supremacy is not precarious; it doth not stand to the courtesy of man, that is, whether man will yield God to be supreme, yea or nay; but it is backed with a mighty power: 1 Peter 5:6, 'Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.' God's hand is a mighty hand, and therefore we should humble ourselves. It is a madness to contend with the Lord of hosts. What are we to the Lord, who can stop our breath in a moment? Job 4:9, 'By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils they are consumed.' With a breath God can destroy us all, and resolve us into nothing; therefore, to rise up against God, this is the greater pride. Other superiors cannot always maintain their right; they may be foiled in the contention; but surely God will have the best of it; it is madness to contest with him.

[3.] God hath not only right, and that backed with an almighty power, but in the management of his supremacy over men he useth much condescension. To instance that in two things.

(1.) In making motions of peace to such proud and obstinate creatures as we are, that can be of no use or profit to him; ay! and though he be the wronged party. There is in us that which Austin calls *infirmetas animositatis*—the weakness of strength of stomach. We are striving who shall yield first. Though it be for our interest and advantage to be reconciled, yet we are looking who shall submit first; but the Lord, though he can back his sovereignty with power, yet he comes down from the throne of sovereignty, and makes offers of grace, and prays you to be reconciled. When he might destroy, then he beseecheth, and speaketh supplications to the creature; he comes and entreats you with a great deal of affectionate earnestness. Oh! that God should stoop thus to a handful of unprofitable dust—creatures that can no way be of use and profit to him! What pride is this, to stand it out against such a God!

(2.) In seeking to reclaim us, and soften us by many mercies, and by his kind dealing with us. God would break the heart rather than the back of the sinner, and therefore he seeks to melt us with acts of kindness. Now for us to continue our pride and rebellion after all this, what a pride is this—of how horrible a nature? Rom. 2:4, 'Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance, not considering that the goodness of God should lead us to repentance?' God withholds his hand, and is loath to strike; nay, not only so, but doth follow us with acts of grace and kindness, and maintain us with his own expenses, and yet the proud heart of man will not relent. Mark that word, they despise his goodness;' they do in effect say, God shall not have my heart for all this. Oh, how great is this pride! These are considerations that may give us a little light to judge of that pride that is in obstinacy and impenitency in sin. If you consider God's absolute right, he hath not only a dominion of jurisdiction over us, but a full propriety in us, to use us at his pleasure; and this right of his is backed with almighty power, and doth not stand with the

creature's courtesy; and though it be so, yet it is managed with a great deal of condescension and love; he beseecheth poor creatures, and tendereth offers of peace, and they are fed and maintained at his charge, and taste of his goodness and bounty.

Use 1. It informs us, how humble soever men appear otherwise, yet they are proud if they have never submitted to God with brokenness of heart, seeking his pardon and favour. There are many which are facile to men, and yet full of contumacy and stoutness of stomach against God; they can stoop to the poorest worm, and court their favour, but yet deal insolently with their maker. But if men were persuaded of the truth of God's being, they would sooner be convinced of the naughtiness of their hearts, by comparing their carriage to God and men. Many there are that are tender of wounding the reputation of men, yet dishonour God and are never troubled. Many that look upon it as an uncomely thing to despise their neighbour, to deal hotly with an underling, and vaunt it, yet never made conscience of submitting themselves to God, who is their undoubted superior. Men count it part of humility and good manners to yield to those that are over them, and to pay them all kind of respect and subjection; yet they never care to seek the favour of God, and humble themselves seriously for their offences against him. You take it ill in the world when the people of mean quality insult over you, when such times fall out as the base rise up against the honourable. What are you to God? Poor base worms! will you contend with your maker? Do you count it to be heavy disorder, and a strange inversion of all states and conditions, that men of mean and low fortunes should brave it over you, and sway things in the world? and how ill may God take it that you stout it out against him? There is a greater distance between him and you, than between you and your fellow-creatures; therefore, if it be grievous to you, what a heinous offence is it to stand out against God?

Use 2. It instructs us what is the way to reduce and bring home sinners to God, by breaking their pride, or, as the expression is, Job 33:17, by 'hiding pride from man;' by which is meant taking away pride; for that which is taken away is hidden or cannot be seen. As the hiding of sin is the taking away sin, so the hiding of pride is the cure of it.

1. By humble and broken-hearted addresses to God for his pardon and his grace. There is no way to cure the pride of unregeneracy but by brokenness of heart. Come and put your mouths in the dust, and acknowledge that you have too long stood it out against God. As the nobles of the king of Assyria came with ropes about their necks, and submitted themselves; so, Jer. 31:9, 'They shall return with weeping and supplications.' This is the way to come out of your sins, to go and bemoan the stubbornness and pride of your hearts; as Ephraim bemoaned himself, and smote upon his thigh, and complained of his obstinacy, Jer. 31:18. Christians, first or last God will bring you to this; if you do not stoop voluntarily, you shall by force; if your hearts be not broken by the power of his grace, they shall be broken in pieces by the power of his providence: Rom. 14:11, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me.' God hath sworn, 'As I live;' now in every oath there is an implicit imprecation, that is, if this be not done, then let this befall me. So there is an implicit imprecation in that oath, Count me not a living God if I do not make the creature stoop. If you stand it out against the power of his word, can you stand it out against the power of Christ when he comes in glory? Ezek. 22:14, 'Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong in the days that I shall deal with thee? 'Oh, how will your faces gather blackness and darkness in that day!

2. Yield up yourselves to be governed by his will and pleasure. It is not enough to come weary and heavy laden, not only to be sensible of

the burden of sin, and beg for pardon, but we must take Christ's yoke, Mat. 11:29. Nature sticks at this: a proud heart is loath to come under the yoke. We would taste of the sweetness of mercy, but cannot endure the bonds and restraint of duty; as Ephraim would tread out the corn, but was loath to break the clods, Hosea 10:11. The prophet alludes to the manner among the Jews; their fashion was to tread or thresh out their corn by the feet of beasts, and the ox his mouth was not to be muzzled; it was easy work, and afforded abundance of food, Deut. 25:4. We would have comfort, but not duty.

3. We must constantly cherish a humble frame of spirit, if we would maintain communion with God, Micah 6:8; not only walk with God, but humble thyself to walk with God. Why? He is a great sovereign, and he will be exactly observed and constantly depended upon; and if you slip, you must bewail your failings, and from first to last all must be ascribed to grace.

Doct. 2. These proud are cursed, or, those that obstinately and impenitently continue in their sins, they are under a curse.

1. I shall open the nature of this curse.

2. Show how impenitent sinners come under this curse.

First, The nature and quality of this curse; or what is that curse which lies upon all wicked men? That will best be understood by considering that scripture wherein the tenor of the law is described: Deut. 27:26, 'Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them;' and Gal. 3:10, 'Cursed is every one which continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.' Where there is considerable, the duty which the law exacteth, and then the penalty which the law inflicteth.

1. The duty which the law exacteth; every one must continue in the words of this law to do it. An innocent holy nature, that is presupposed, for it is said the person must continue. It doth not consider man as lapsed or fallen, or as having already broken with God. And then he must continue in all things; there is a universal, a perfect obedience, that is indispensably required, while we are in our natural condition. And then the perpetuity; he must hold out to the last; if he fail in one point he is gone. All this is indispensably exacted of all them that live under the tenor of this covenant: 'He that doth them shall live in them;' and 'the soul that sinneth shall die.' There is required perpetual, perfect, personal obedience. What will you do if this covenant lie upon you, as it doth upon all men in their natural condition? If God call you to a punctual account of the most inoffensive day that ever you past over, what will become of you? 'If thou, O Lord, shalt mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?' Ps. 130:3. Better never have been born than be liable to that judgment. Oh! therefore, when the law shall take a sinner by the throat, and say, 'Pay me that which thou owest,' what shall a poor sinner do? This is the duty exacted.

2. The penalty that shall be inflicted, 'Cursed is everyone that continueth not in the words of this law to do it.' The law hath a mouth that speaketh terrible things. Cursed, it is but one word, but it may be spread abroad into very large considerations. In one place it is said. 'The Lord will not spare him. All the curses that are written in this book of this law shall light upon him,' Deut. 29:20. The book of the law is full of curses, and all together they show you what is the portion of an impenitent sinner. In another place it is said, 'Every curse and every plague which is not written in the book of this law will the Lord bring upon thee,' Deut. 28:61. Mark, though it be not specified in the law. God hath threatened sundry sorts of punishments, yet he hath many plagues in store which are not

committed to record or writing; therefore, whatever is written or unwritten, revealed in the word or dispensed in providence by way of plague and misery, it is but the interpretation of this one word, 'Cursed is he that continueth not,' &c. However, because particulars are most affective, I will name some parts of the curse.

[1.] This is one part of the cursed condition of a sinner that is under the law, that the knowledge of his duty doth but the more irritate corruption: Rom. 7:9, 'The commandment came, and sin revived.' The more we understand of the necessity of our subjection to God, the more is the soul opposite to God. Sin takes occasion by the commandment, as oppositions do more exasperate and enrage a waspish spirit.

[2.] This exaction of duty doth either terrify or stupify the conscience; he that escapeth the one suffereth the other. Either men are terrified: indeed all sinners are liable to it; the conscience of a sinner is a sore place, and the apostle saith they are 'liable to bondage all their days,' Heb. 2:14; as Belshazzar trembled to see the handwriting upon the wall, and Felix trembled to hear of judgment to come; so a carnal man is afraid to think of his condition, and some are actually under horror, and wherever they go, as the devils do, they carry their own hell about them. Or if conscience be not terrified, then it is stupified; they grow senseless of their misery, and are 'past feeling,' Eph. 4:19; and that is a very sad estate, and dangerous temper of soul, when men have outgrown all feelings of conscience, and worn out the prints of conviction. These are the two extremes that all Christless persons are incident unto.

[3.] There is a curse upon all that a man hath, as long as he continues in his rebellion and obstinacy against God; he is 'cursed in his basket and store, in his going out, and coming in,' &c., Deut. 28:15–17. A



man is cursed in his table; that becomes a snare; his afflictions are but beginnings of sorrows. It is a miserable thing to lie in such an estate. If the curse do not break out so visibly or sensibly, it is because now it is the day of God's patience, and he waits for our return. But mark, God's spiritual providence is the more dreadful. When God 'rains snares' upon men, all the seeming comforts which they have do but harden them in an evil course, and hold them the faster in the bonds of iniquity.

[4.] There is a curse upon all he doth; his duties are lost, his prayers are 'turned into sin,' his hearing is 'the savour of death unto death,' whilst he remaineth in his impenitency. It is said: Prov. 21:27, 'The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination; how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?' Though he should come in the best manner he can with his flocks and herds, yet all will be to no purpose, it is an abomination to God.

[5.] Impenitency binds over a man, body and soul, to everlasting torment. In time it will come to that, 'Go ye cursed,' &c., Mat. 25:41. They are only continued until they have filled up their measure, and are ripened for hell, and then they lie eternally under the wrath of God. Look, as it is sweet to hear, 'Come ye blessed,' &c., so dreadful in that day to hear, 'Go ye cursed,' &c. Thus are the proud cursed, that is, obstinate, impenitent sinners, while they stand off from God.

Secondly, Let me examine upon what score they are cursed.

1. Every man by nature is under the curse; for until they are in Christ they are under Adam's covenant, and Adam's covenant will yield no blessing to the fallen creature: Gal. 3:10, 'As many as are under the works of the law are under the curse,' &c. Mark, every man that remains under the law, that hath not gotten an interest in Christ, the curse of the first covenant remains upon him, and accordingly at the

last day he shall have judgment without mercy; he shall be judged according to the terms of that covenant: for there are but two states, under the law, or under grace; therefore, while they are in a state of nature, they must needs be under wrath. So John 3:18, 'He that believeth not is condemned already;' that is, in the sentence of the law; there is a curse gone out against him; the man is gone, lost, condemned already.

2. This curse abideth upon us until we believe in Christ. The sentence of the law is not repealed: John 3:36, 'He that believeth not, the wrath of God abideth on him;' Gal. 3:13, 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us,' &c.

3. When Christ is tendered, and finally refused, then the sentence of the law is ratified in the gospel or the court of mercy. A court of chancery God hath set up in the gospel for penitent sinners. But then it follows, 'This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men choose darkness,' &c. When God shall tender men better conditions by Christ, and they turn their backs upon it, then is this curse confirmed.

Use 1. Consider how matters stand between God and us; examine how it is with you. Here let me lay down these propositions by way of trial:—

1. Every man by nature is in a cursed condition, Eph. 2:3; every man is liable to Adam's forfeiture and breach; the elect children of God as well as others are liable to the curse.

2. There is no way to escape this curse but by flying to Christ for refuge, Heb. 6:18. As a man would flee from the avenger of blood, so should we flee from the curse of the law that is at our heels. Wrath is

abroad seeking out sinners; now, saith the apostle, 'Oh, that I might be found in him!'

3. A sense of this benefit we have by Christ will necessarily beget an unfeigned love to him; else we can have no evidence, but the curse doth still remain: and therefore it is said, 1 Cor. 16:22, 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha,' accursed till the Lord come, that is, for ever and ever. How can a man think he shall be the better for Christ that doth not love Christ, nor delight in him, and have no value for him? And therefore, if you have not this love to Christ, it is a sign you have no benefit by him, you have not that faith that will give you a title.

4. This love must be expressed by a sincere obedience; for 'this is love, to keep his commandments,' 1 John 5:3; and Gal. 5:24, 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the lusts thereof.' They are not Christ's, are not to be reckoned to him, that merely make a profession of his name, and with whom his memory seems to be precious; but they are Christ's that testify love to Christ. Do you perform duties for Christ's sake?

Use 2. To press you to come out of the curse which cleaves to all impenitent sinners. Oh, what a dreadful condition are they in! And how soon God may take advantage of this curse, and cut us off from a possibility of grace, we cannot tell; and at the last day this curse will be ratified. Therefore be sensible of the burden; come out of it. This is God's end in shutting up a sinner under such a fatal necessity; either you must perish for ever or run to Christ. This should quicken us the more to fly to his mercy.

Thirdly, They are not only cursed, but rebuked, 'Thou hast rebuked the proud,' &c. Observe—

Doct. 3. The rebukes of God's providence upon impenitent sinners are of great use to the saints.

1. They are arguments of his displeasure against the proud and against the impenitent. God, that is so merciful to the humble and broken-hearted, that looketh to him that is poor and contrite and trembles at the word, Isa. 66:3, he can be severe and just against those that deal proudly, that lift up the heel against him, Ps. 68:21: it is twice repeated, 'Our God is a God of salvation, but he will wound the head of his enemies,' &c. Mark, though mercy be God's delight—verily he is a God of salvation—yet we must not imagine a God all honey and all sweetness. If men be proud, obstinate, and impenitent, they shall be cursed; and not only cursed, but they shall be rebuked.

2. It is a proof and document given to the world how tender God is of his word, how willing to satisfy the world. This is the rule we must stand by, 'Thou hast rebuked them.' Why? 'Because they erred from thy commandment.' God hath authorised and ratified the law by the rebukes of his providence, and made it authentic and valid in the hearts and consciences of men: Rom. 1:18, 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,' &c. Mark, it is revealed from heaven. The events which fall out in the world we should not look upon as casual strokes, or a chance that happened to us in the way, but as discoveries from heaven. The word is the rule of life. Mark, against all ungodliness; this is the breach of the first table; and against all unrighteousness, which is the breach of the second table. God hath owned both tables: Heb. 2:2, 'The word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' He means the law, which was delivered by the ministry of angels. Now, every transgression, by that he means sins of commission; and every disobedience, by that he means sins of omission; and God hath met

with every breach and every violation of the law. How punctually God hath exemplified every commandment in his judgment! And if we would make collections of providence, we might easily find this, how God hath rebuked pride, and that because they err from his commandment.

Again, it may be improved as a check against envy at the prosperity of the wicked. Do not call the proud happy; they are cursed already, and in time shall be punished: 'Mark the end of the wicked,' Ps. 36:17. First or last, God will manifest from heaven his displeasure against their impenitency. By daily experience we may see that they thrive ill that set themselves against God.

And then it serves to confirm the truth of the threatening. Oh! when God inflicteth judgments, remember the curse of the law is not in vain. After the thundering of the threatening, there will break out the bolt of confusion and destruction upon the wicked, so that you must either do or die for it.

Use. Let this persuade men to break off their sins by repentance, that you may be sensible of the wretchedness of your condition. God's words are deeds. Men may curse, and yet God may bless for all that; but God's curse is sure to take place. Let us make that use which David doth of it, to excite our affections to the word of God by the vengeance which God taketh of the pride and scorn of others. The examples of others shipwrecking themselves by their rebellion against God are sanctified when they make us more careful and watchful 'that we err not from God's commandments.'

## **SERMON XXIII**

## **Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.—VER. 22.**

DAVID was derided for keeping close to God's word, possibly by those proud ones mentioned in the former verse. They contemned the word themselves, and would not suffer others to keep it; as the Pharisees would neither enter into the kingdom of God themselves, nor suffer others to enter. But David makes this an argument to beg the Lord's grace, to wit, light and strength, that he might give no occasion to their reproach; and if it lighted upon him, that it might not rest upon him. Or by the proud men may be meant Saul's courtiers, who traduced his innocency, and sought to overwhelm him with slander. Now, God knew his conscience and integrity, and therefore could best clear him.

In the words, as in most of the other verses, you have—

1. A request, remove from me reproach and contempt.
2. A reason and argument to enforce the request, for I have kept thy testimonies.

First, for the request, 'Remove from me reproach and contempt.' The word signifies, Roll from upon me, let it not come at me, or let it not stay with me.

And then the argument, 'for I have kept thy testimonies.' The reason may be either thus:—(1.) He pleads that he was innocent of what was charged upon him, and had not deserved those aspersions. (2.) He intimates that it was for his obedience, for this very cause that he had kept the word, therefore was reproach rolled upon him. (3.) It may be conceived thus, that his respect to God's word was not abated for

this reproach. He still kept God's testimonies, how wicked soever he did appear in the eyes of the world. It is either an assertion of his innocency, or he shows the ground why this reproach came upon him; or he pleads his respect to God, and his service was not lessened, whatever reproach he met with in the performance of it.

The points from hence are many.

1. It is no strange thing that they which keep God's testimonies should be slandered and reproached.
2. As it is the usual lot of God's people to be reproached, so it is very grievous to them, and heavy to bear.
3. It being grievous, we may lawfully seek the removal of it. So doth David, and so may we, with submission to God's will.
4. In removal of it, it is best to deal with God about it; for God is the great witness of our sincerity, as knowing all things, and so to be appealed to in the case. Again, God is the most powerful assertor of our innocency; he hath the hearts and tongues of men in his own hands, and can either prevent the slanderer from uttering reproach, or the hearer from entertainment of the reproach. He that hath such power over the consciences of men can clear up our innocency; therefore it is best to deal with God about it; and prayer many times proves a better vindication than an apology.
5. In seeking relief with God from this evil, it is a great comfort and ground of confidence when we are innocent of what is charged. In some cases we must humble ourselves, and then God will take care for our credit. We must plead guilty when by our own fault we have given too much occasion to the slanders of the wicked: so Ps. 119:39, 'Turn away my reproach which I fear, for thy judgments are good.'

My reproach, for it was in part deserved by himself, and therefore he feared the sad consequences of it, and humbles himself before God. But at other times we may stand upon our integrity, as David saith here, 'Turn away my reproach and contempt, for I have kept thy testimonies.'

These are the points which may be drawn from this verse; but I shall insist but upon one of them, which, in the prosecution of it, will comprise all the rest; and that is this—

Doct. That reproaches are a usual, but yet a great and grievous, affliction to the children of God. I will show—

1. They are a usual affliction.
2. They are a grievous affliction.

First, They are a usual affliction. Reproaches are either such as light upon religion itself, or upon our own persons.

1. Upon religion itself. Sometimes the truth is traduced, and the way of God is evil spoken of, disguised with the nicknames of sedition, heresy, schism, faction. Look, as astronomers miscall the glorious stars by the name of the dog-star, the bear, the dragon's tail, and the like—they put upon them names of a horrid sound—so do carnal men miscall the glorious things of God, his holy ways; they put an ill name upon them: Acts 24:14, 'After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers.' The Jews called Christianity a heresy, or an apostasy from the old religion; and so do Papists call the Reformation. Luther, when he was charged with apostasy from the faith, answered thus: I confess I am an apostate, but from the devil's cause; I have not kept touch with the devil. Cant. 5:7, we read that the spouse's veil was taken from her by the watchmen; so the



comeliness of the church is taken away by the imputations of evil men. Thus there may reproaches light upon religion itself.

2. On our persons; and so either for religion's sake, or upon a private and personal respect.

[1.] For religion's sake; and thus God's children have been often calumniated. It is foretold by Christ as the lot of his people; and therefore he provides against it: Mat. 5:11, 'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.' Those who have no strength and power to inflict other injuries have these weapons of malice always in readiness. When other kinds of persecutions and violences are restrained, yet men take a liberty of censuring and speaking all manner of evil falsely of the children of God; and ever this hath been verified in the experience of the saints. Their lives are a real reproach to the wicked, they do upbraid them; and therefore, to be quits with them, the wicked reproach them by censures and calumniations. I shall give some instances. Moses had his portion of reproaches: Heb 11:26, 'Esteeming the reproaches of Christ better riches than the treasures of Egypt.' Possibly the Holy Ghost means there when he was scoffed at for joining himself with so mean and afflicted a people; they thought Moses was mad to quit all his honours. Christ himself was accused of the two highest crimes of either table—blasphemy and sedition: of blasphemy, which is the highest crime against the first table; and of sedition, which is the highest crime against the second. And all that will be Christ's they must expect to bear his reproach: Heb. 13:13, 'Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.' The apostle alludes to the sacrifice of atonement, which was to be slain without the camp. So Jesus Christ was cast out of the city; and we must be contented thus

to be cast off by the world, to be cast forth from among men as vile and accursed, bearing Christ's reproach.

[2.] For personal reproaches; this is very usual with God's children also, reproaches upon private and personal occasions. God may let loose a railing Shimei against David. Many times he complains of his reproaches, often in this psalm, more in other psalms: Ps. 31:13, 'For I have heard the slander of many; they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life.' Sundry sorts of persons made him the butt upon which they let fly the arrows of censure and reproach: Ps. 35:15, 'The abjects gathered themselves together against me; they did tear me, and ceased not;' meaning his name was torn and rent in pieces, and that by the abjects: such bold and saucy dust will be flying in the faces of God's people. So I may speak of Jeremiah, and Joseph, and other servants of God; yea, our Lord himself endured the contradiction of sinners. Jesus Christ, that was so just and innocent, which did so much good in every place, yet meets with odious aspersions. So Ps. 64:3, 4, 'They bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words; that they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not.' Perfection meets with envy, and envy will vent itself by detraction—a usual affliction for the people of God, and therefore we cannot say they are wicked because they are traduced, and we should not presently condemn all those of whom we hear evil. It was the fashion of the primitive times to clothe Christians with bear-skins, and bait them with the dogs. God's best children may be clad in an ill livery; and therefore we should not easily take up these slanders. Thus it is a usual affliction.

Secondly, It is a grievous affliction. Ver. 39, David saith he looked upon it as a great evil. In the account of scripture it is persecution. Ishmael is said to persecute Isaac: Gal. 4:29. How? Because he

mocked him. Compare it with Gen. 21:9: 'Sarah saw the son of the bondwoman mocking Isaac;' and in the reddition and interpretation, the Holy Ghost calls it a persecution. So they are called 'cruel mockings,' Heb. 11:36. There is as much cruelty, and as deep a wound made by the tongue of reproach many times as by the fist of wickedness. Reproach must needs be grievous to God's children, upon a natural and upon a spiritual account.

1. Upon a natural account, because a good name is a great blessing. See how it is against nature. It is more grievous than ordinary crosses. Many would lose their goods cheerfully, yet they grieve more for the loss of their name. Some constitutions are affected more with shame than with fear, and above all their possessions they prize their name and credit. To most proud spirits, disgraceful punishment is much more dreadful than painful: Ps. 22:7, 'All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head.' A good name is more precious than life to some: Eccles. 7:1, 'A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.' The coupling of these two sentences shows men had rather die than lose their name. If a man die, he may leave his name and memory behind him that may live still; therefore it is more hateful to have our names and credit mangled than be pierced with a sharp sword.

2. Upon a spiritual account it is a grievous affliction. It is not barely for their own sake, because their innocency is taxed; but for God's sake, whose glory is concerned in the honour of his servants, and whose truth is struck at through their sides. This is grievous to grace. Why? Next to a good conscience there is no greater blessing than a good name; and certainly he that is prodigal of his credit will not be very tender of his conscience; and therefore the children of God, upon gracious reasons, stand upon their name, it is the next thing to

conscience they have to keep. Grace values a good name, partly because it is God's gift; it is a blessing adopted and taken into the covenant, as well as other blessings. It is one of the promises of God: 'He will hide us as in a pavilion from the strife of tongues,' Ps. 31:20. This is frequent in the Old Testament, where heaven is but sparingly mentioned; a good name is often mentioned. Partly because it is a shadow of eternity. When a man dies, his name lives, which is a pledge of our living with God after death; as spices, when broken and dissolved, leave an excellent scent, so he leaves his name behind him. And partly because it is put above riches: Prov. 22:1, 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.' It is better, more pure and sublime than wealth, and more worthy our esteem. They are low and dreggy spirits whose hearts run after wealth; the greatest spirits run out upon fame and honour: so Eccles. 7:1, 'A good name is better than precious ointment.' Aromatical ointments were things of great use and esteem among the Jews, and counted the chief part of their treasures; now a good name is better than precious ointment. And partly because of the great inconveniences which follow the loss of name. The glory of God is much interested in the credit of his servants. The credit of religion depends much upon the credit of the persons that profess it. When godly men are evil spoken of, the way of truth suffers; and when we are polluted, God is polluted: Ezek. 36:20, 'They profaned my holy name when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land;' that is, by their scandals. The offences are charged upon us, but in effect they prove the disgrace of Christ. Christ, that will hereafter be admired of his saints, will now be glorified and honoured in them. The shame of those things charged upon us redounds to God and religion till we be clear. And as the honour of God is concerned in it, so again their safety lies in it. Observe it, Satan is first a liar, then a murderer. First, men are smitten with the tongue of slander, and afterwards with the fist of wickedness: the showers of slander are but

presages and beginnings of grievous storms of persecution; wicked men take more liberty when the children of God are imprisoned as criminals; therefore it is the usual practice of Satan first to blast the repute of religious persons, then to prosecute them as offenders. Possibly this may be the meaning of that, Ps. 5:9, 'Their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue;' that is, the slanders of the wicked are a preparation to death, as an open sepulchre is prepared to swallow and take in the dead carcase. I expound it thus, because we find the phrase used in this sense. The force and power of the Babylonian, Jer. 5:16, is called an 'open sepulchre;' they are all mighty men; that is, you can expect nothing but death from the force and puissance of their assaults. So here their reproach is not only a burying-place for our names, but our persons; for first men slander, then molest the children of God. When the Arian emperor raged against the orthodox Christians, and the bishops and pastors of the churches were suppressed everywhere, they durst not meddle with Polonus, out of a reverence of the unspottedness of his fame; and therefore a good report is a great security and protection against violence. And then they desire a good name to honour God with it. A blemished instrument is little worth. Who would take meat from a leprous hand? It is Satan's policy, when he cannot discourage instruments from the work of God, then to blemish and blast them. Therefore, those that have anything to do for God in the world should be tender of their credit, especially those that are called to public office, that they may carry on their work with more success. Therefore one of the qualifications of a minister is, 'He must have a good report of them that are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil,' 1 Tim. 3:7. I suppose it is taken there appellatively, lest he fall into the snare of the slanderer; I will not absolutely determine. Men set snares for you, and they watch for your halting. Thus grace presseth a good name, because of the consequences of it.

Use 1. Here is advice to persons reproached. Acknowledge God in the affliction, though it be great and grievous. God hath an aim in all things that befall you. The general aim of all afflictions is to try, purge, and make white: Dan. 11:35; or as it is in Deut. 8:13, 'To humble thee, prove thee, and do thee good at the latter end.' Your enemies may intend harm, but God means good; you should receive good by this, as by every affliction. Plutarch, in his excellent discourse, How a man should profit by his enemies, brings in a comparison of one Jason, that had an impostume, which was let out by the wounds an enemy gave him; so many times our impostumes, and the corrupt matter that is within us, is let out by the gashes and wounds which those that meant harm to us give to our name and credit.

First, God doth it to humble thee. Carnal men shoot at rovers, but many times we find the soul is pricked in the quick; when they shoot their arrows of detraction and slanders, it may revive guilt, and put us upon serious humiliation before God. There are many sins to which this affliction is very proper.

1. It seems to be a proper cure for the sin of pride; be it pride in the mind, which is self-conceit; or pride in the affections, which is called vainglory; all sorts of pride; there is no such effectual remedy as this. Possibly we have been too self-conceited, then God giveth us to such scandals that may show us what we are. Many times our very graces do us hurt, as well as our sins; and we may be puffed up with what we have received. So for vainglory, when we are apt too much to please ourselves in the opinions others have of us, which is an evil the people of God are liable to, this pride God will cure by reproach. Pride is one of the oldest enemies ever God had; it was born in heaven in the breast of the fallen angels, for which they are laid low; and when his children harbour it, God hath a quarrel against it.

When Paul was puffed up, when the bladder was swollen, God sent him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure, 2 Cor. 12:7. Possibly it was some eminent affliction; but when he expresseth it afterwards, he mentioneth reproaches, ver. 10, 'Therefore I will rejoice in infirmities,' that is, sickness; nay, 'I will rejoice in reproaches.'

2. For carnal walking. When we are negligent, and do not take notice of the fleshliness and folly we are guilty of and allow in our hearts, that breaks out into our actions. God suffers others to reproach us and gather up our failings, that we may see what cause we have to take our ways to heart. Every man that would live strictly had need of faithful friends or watchful enemies; of faithful friends to admonish him, or watchful enemies to censure him. God makes use of watchful enemies to show us the spots in our garments that are to be washed off. Many times a friend is blinded with love, and grows as partial to us as ourselves; therefore God sets spies for us to watch for our halting: Jer. 20:10, 'I heard the defaming of many: report, say they, and we will report it: all my familiars watched for my halting.' They lie in wait to take us tripping; and God sees it needful that we should have enemies as well as friends; how ignorant else should a man be of himself! Therefore God useth them as a rod to brush the dust from our clothes.

3. The sin God would humble us for is censuring. If we have not been so tender of the credit of others, God will make us taste the bitterness of affliction ourselves, and recompense the like measure into our bosoms: Mat. 7:1, 2, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.' We shall find others to judge as hardly of us as we do of them. Good thoughts and speeches of others are the best preservative of our own name; and therefore,

when reproach falls upon you, it is not enough you should not slight it, though you know the report to be false; but a Christian is to examine himself: have we not drawn it upon ourselves by slandering others, or talking intemperately of others? and doth not God pay us home in our own coin? He that is much given to censuring seldom or never escapes severe censuring from others. It is said, 'Let his own words grieve him.' Your own words will fall upon you; therefore humble thyself before God for the reproaches thou hast cast upon others. Thus the Lord ordereth it with good advice to humble us, and that for pride, careless walking, and for censuring others.

Secondly, It is to try thee.

1. To try your faith in the great day of accounts. Can you comfort yourselves in the solemn vindication of the day of judgment, and in God's approbation then? 2 Cor. 10:18, 'He is approved whom the Lord commendeth.' Men cannot defend thee if God condemn thee, they cannot condemn thee if God acquit thee; and therefore canst thou stand to God's judgment? In a race it is not what the standers-by say, but what he that is the judge of the games will determine. We are all in a race, and it is not what men say of us, but what God saith, who is judge of all: 1 Cor. 4:3, 4, 'It is a small thing that I should be judged of man's judgment; but he that judgeth me is the Lord.' In the original it is 'man's day,' and so in the margin. We shall never be resolute for God, until we come to this, to count it a very small thing to be judged of man's judgment. Now is man's day, but God hath his day hereafter. So to try our faith in particular promises: Ps. 119:42, 'So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me; for I trust in thy word.' A Christian, when he gives up himself to God, he gives up everything he hath to God; not only gives his soul to God to keep, but that God may take charge of his person, estate, and good name. Now God requires a trust according to the extent of the



covenant, a waiting and confidence in his power. He can turn the hearts of men, and give them favour in their eyes: Ps. 37:6, 'He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.'

2. As to try our faith, so our patience. We should prevent reproach as much as we can; but then we must bear it when we cannot avoid it. They reproach, but I pray, Ps. 109:4; that was David's exercise and revenge; he took that 'advantage, to pray for them. God will try how we can bear the injuries of men. The grace of patience must be tried as well as other graces. We read that Shimei went railing upon David to the peril of his life; saith David, 'It may be God hath bid him curse.' A mad dog that bites another makes him as mad as himself; so usually the injuries and reproaches of others foster up our revenge, and then there is no difference between us and them: they sin, and we sin. Revenge and injury differ only in order; injury is first, and revenge is next. Saith Lactantius, If it be evil in another, for thee to imitate him, to be as mad as they, break out in passion and virulency, it is more evil in thyself, because thou sinnest twice, against a rule and against an example; therefore God tries whether we will be passionate or patient. The patience of his servants is mightily discovered by reproaches: 1 Cor. 4:12, 'Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat.' There must be a season to try every grace; and therefore now God trieth us, whether we can with a meek humble submission yield up ourselves; or whether we are exasperated and drawn into bitterness of passion, yea or nay.

3. God tries our uprightness. Many are turned out of the way by reproaches; the devil works much upon stomach and spleen. Tertullian being reproached by the priests of Rome, in revenge turns Montanist. Now God tries us to see whether we will hold on our

course. The moon shines and holds on its course though the dogs bark; so a child of God should hold on his way though men talk their fill. In the text, though proud men reproached and contemned David, yet all this did not unsettle him. Some men can be religious no longer than when they are counted to be religious; but when their secular interest is in danger, they fall off. Thus when men injure them, they do as it were take a revenge upon God himself. Those carnal men that fall off from God are like pettish servants that run away from their master when he strikes them; a good servant will take a buffet patiently, and go about his master's work; and if we were seasoned as we should be for God, we would pass 'through evil report and good report,' 2 Cor. 6:8, and still keep our integrity.

Thirdly, God ordereth this grievous and sharp affliction to do you good or to better you. Reproach is like soap, which seems to defile clothes, but it cleanseth them. There is nothing so bad but we may make some good use of it, a Christian may gain some advantage by it. Dung seems to stain the grass, but it makes the ground fruitful, and to rise up at spring with a fresh verdure. Reproaches are a necessary help to a godly conversation, to make us walk with more care; and therefore there is another piece of holy revenge we should take upon them, to make us walk more strictly and more watchfully, the more they slander us and speak of us as evil-doers; the way is not to contend for esteem, so much as to stop their mouths by a good apology. Passionate returns will but increase sin, but a holy conversation will silence them.

Use 2. To them that either devise or receive reproaches; both are very sinful.

First, To you that devise them, that speak reproachfully of others. Consider—

1. You hazard the repute of your own sincerity: James 1:26, 'Whosoever seemeth religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.' Hypocrites, and men that put themselves into a garb of religion, and are all for censuring, take a mighty freedom this way; these men bewray the rottenness of their hearts. Those that are so much abroad are seldom at home; they do not inquire and look into their own hearts. Alas! in our own sight we should be the worst of men. The children of God do ever thus speak of themselves as 'the least of saints,' the 'greatest of sinners,' 'more brutish than any men,' of 'sinners whereof I am chief.' Why? Because we can know others only by guess and imagination, but they can speak of themselves out of inward feeling; therefore we should have a deeper sense of our own condition. But now a man that is much in judging and reprovng others is seldom within; for if he did but consider himself, if he had but an account of his own failings, he would not be so apt to blemish others. It is a cheap zeal to let fly at the miscarriages and sins of others, and to allow our own. Consider, thou hast enough to observe already in thyself.

2. You rob them of the most precious treasure. He that robs thee of thy name is the worst kind of thief: Prov. 22:1, 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.' A man that is taken pilfering another man's goods, he is ashamed when he is found; so should a censurer: you rob him of a more excellent treasure.

3. You offend God, and draw public hatred. It is the devil's work to be 'the accuser of the brethren,' Rev. 12:10. The devil doth not commit adultery, doth not break the Sabbath, nor dishonour parents; these are not laws given to him. If the devil will bear false witness, he is an accuser of the brethren; it is the devil's proper sin, and therefore slanderer and devil have one name, Diabolus.

Object. But must we in no case speak evil of another? or may we not speak of another's sin in no case?

Sol. 1. It is a very hard matter to speak any evil of another without sin; for if it be without cause, then it is downright slander, and is against truth; if it be for a light and small cause, then it is against charity; if it be for things indifferent, or for lesser failings, indiscretions, or weaknesses, still it is against charity: James 4:11, 'Speak not evil one of another, brethren.' It is worse in brethren. Many take liberty to traduce God's choice servants that are in difference. For a soldier to speak evil of soldiers, or a scholar of scholars, is worse than for those that hate these functions. So for you, Christians, to speak evil one of another, you gratify the triumphs of hell, and bring a reproach upon the ways of Christ. In things doubtful, judge the best; in things hidden and secret we can take no cognisance: when the fact is open, we do not know the aim nor the intent of the heart. It is the devil's work to judge thus: 'Doth Job serve God for nought?' when he could not traduce his action. If the practice be open and public, we do not know what alleviating circumstances it may bear, what grievous temptations they had, or whether they have repented, yea or nay. The devil is called a slanderer, because he doth accuse the saints. It is too true many times what he accuseth them of. Ay! but he accuseth them when they are pardoned; he rakes up the filth God hath covered; he accuseth the brethren after repentance, after they are acquitted by the Lord's grace; and so you may incur the like: and therefore it is a very hard matter to avoid sin; in one way or other we shall dash upon the command; better let it alone.

2. Speak not of him, but to him; and so change a sin into a duty. I say, when you turn admonition into censure, you exchange a duty for

a sin. 'Admonish one another,' is a thing spoken of in scripture; but 'speak not evil one of another.'

3. If you speak of the failings of others, it should be with tenderness and grief; as when they are incorrigible and likely to infect others, or when it is for the manifest glory of God: Phil. 3:19, 'There are some of whom I have told you often, and now tell you weeping,' &c. He speaks of some seducers that, under the form of godliness, did undermine the purport of the Christian religion, merely took up the profession of it for their own ends. It should be done with a mighty deal of caution; not out of idleness for want of talk—that is babble; not out of hatred and revenge—that is malice: though the matter is true, yet we must not speak of men's faults to please others—that is flattery.

Secondly, To them that receive the slander. He is a slanderer that wrongs his neighbours' credit by upholding an ill report against them. It is hard to say which is worse, railing or receiving. Ps. 15:3, when an inhabitant of Sion is described, it is said, 'He that receiveth not a report, and takes it not up against his neighbour;' so Prov. 17:4, 'A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips, and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue.' It is not only a point of wickedness to have a naughty tongue or false lips, but to give heed. He is a liar that receiveth a lie, and loves it when brought to him. God will plague all those that love lies. As in treason, all that are acquainted with the plot are responsible; so you are responsible for your ears, as they for their tongue. It is good to have a spiritual tongue, that will heal the wounds that others make in men's reputation: Prov. 12:18, 'There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword; but the tongue of the wise is health.' Some carry a sword in their mouths, others balsam to heal the wounds that are made.

Use 3. If this be so usual and grievous an affliction, and that even to the children of God, and that not only upon the account of nature, but of grace, then it puts us upon seeking comfort against reproaches.

1. The witness of a good conscience within. If you be innocent, it is not against thee they speak, but against another, whom the slanderer takes thee to be. The hair will grow again though it be shaven, as long as the roots remain. A good conscience is the root of a good credit; and though the razor of censure hath brought on baldness, yet it will grow again. God will either turn their hearts or support thee under it.

2. Reproaches cannot make thee vile in God's sight. The world's filth many times are God's jewels. Many that were praised in the world are now in hell, and many that were disgraced in the world are in great favour and esteem with God; many times their contempt doth increase their esteem with God, and therefore they cannot hurt thee. They may persecute thee; but if thou be patient, they cannot impose upon thee, and burden thy cause in his eyes.' God doth not ask the world's vote and suffrage whether such and such shall be justified or received into glory, yea or nay. If they be infirmities and defects, humble thyself, and God will cover them, Ps. 32:1. God is wont to scatter reproaches cast upon his children, as the sun scatters the clouds, Ps. 37, and heaven will make amends for all.

3. The profit thou gainest by them, the watchfulness, the diligence, all this will be sweet. I might have given comfort against reproaches for religion. These are honourable, they are the reproaches of Christ, Heb. 11:26; Heb. 13:13. It is as honourable before God as ignominious before men. And we cannot expect better fare than our master: 'The disciple is not above his lord, nor the servant above his master: it is enough for the disciple to be as his lord, and the servant

as his master,' Mat. 10:24, 25. We cannot expect to fare better than Christ did, and it is an honour to suffer as he did.

Again, if cripples mock us for going upright, let us pity them. The judgment of wicked men is depraved, not to be stood upon; and this contempt one day will be cast upon themselves: Ps. 49:14, 'The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning.'

## **SERMON XXIV**

**Princes also did sit and speak against me:  
but thy servant did meditate in thy  
statutes.—VER. 23.**

THIS psalm expresseth David's affection to the word, as the result of all that experience which he had of the comfort and use of it. In the present verse two things:—

1. David's trouble.

2. His remedy.

1. His trouble, princes did sit and speak against me.

2. The remedy that he used, but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.

First, The evil wherewith he was exercised. There are several circumstances produced by way of aggravation of his trouble:—

1. Who? 'Princes also;' his trial came not only from the contempt and reproach of base people, spoken of in the former verse, but from princes also, by whom are meant Saul's courtiers and counsellors.

2. How? 'Did sit;' not only when occasionally met together in private in their chambers or at their tables, but when they sat in council, or when they sat together on the seat of judgment, they consulted to ruin him; or upon the throne (where nothing but just and holy should be expected) passed a judicial sentence against him.

3. What? 'Did speak against me;' it was not reproach only that troubled him, but the powers of the world gave false sentence against



him. To be spoken of as an evil-doer is a less temptation than to be condemned as a malefactor.

Secondly, His remedy; where observe—

1. The title he gives himself, but 'thy servant.' He speaketh modestly of himself, in the third person; and fitly doth he say, 'thy servant.' We owe duty to a higher master, when they decree anything contrary to God's word.

2. His practice and exercise, 'Did meditate on thy statutes.' This is spoken for two reasons:—

[1.] That he was not discouraged by their opposition, but held to his duty; he was maligned for God's word's sake, and yet kept up his respect to the word of God, and never left meditating therein.

[2.] To show the way of his relief and cure under this trouble, by exercising himself in the word, which in the next verse he showeth yielded him a double benefit—comfort and counsel.

(1.) It was of use to comfort him and strengthen faith.

(2.) To direct him that he might keep within the bounds of true obedience; there being in the word of God both sweet promises and a sure rule.

Observe from the evil wherewith he was exercised:—

Doct. It is many times the lot of God's people that princes do sit and speak against them in councils and upon the throne of judgment.

1. For consulting against them to their ruin. We have instances of a council gathered against Christ: John 11:47, 'Then gathered the chief

priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doth many miracles.' They meet together, and plot the ruin of Christ and his kingdom; and they were those that were of chief authority in the place. Another instance: Acts 4:27, 28, 'For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.' There is their agreement to put Christ to death. In the Old Testament, Pharaoh and his nobles: Exod. 1:10, 'Come on, κατασοφίζόμεθα, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land.' And against Daniel the princes of the Persian empire consult how to entrap him in the matter of his God, Dan. 6:4-6, &c.

2. For abusing the throne of judgment and civil courts of judicature, to the molestation of the saints. I shall cite but two places: Ps. 94:20, 'Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?' It is no strange, but yet no small temptation, that the oppression of God's people is marked with a pretence and colour of law and public authority, and the mischief should proceed from thence where it should be remedied, namely, from the seat of justice. So, Mat. 10:17, 18, Christ foretelleth they shall have enemies armed with power and public authority: 'Beware of men, for they will deliver you to the councils, and they shall scourge you in their synagogues, and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake.' Not only subordinate, but supreme governors may be drawn to condemn and oppress the godly. In so plain a case more instances need not.

Reasons of it, on God's part, and on the part of the persecutors.

First, On God's part, he permitteth it—

1. To show that he can carry on his work though authority be against him, and that his people do not subsist by outward force, but the goodness of his providence, and so hath the sole glory of their preservation. When the Christian religion came first abroad in the world, 'not many noble nor many mighty were called;' the powers of the world were against it, and yet it held up the head, and was dispersed far and near. Falsehoods need some outward interest to back them, and the supports of a secular arm; but God's interest doth many times stand alone, though God doth now and then make 'kings nursing-fathers, and queens nursing-mothers,' according to his promise, Isa. 49:23. Oftentimes the church is destitute of all worldly props: Micah 5:7, 'And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.' Yea, the power of the world is against it, and yet it subsists. Thus it was in the primitive times; there were only a handful of contemptible people that professed the gospel; yet it got ground daily, not by force of arms or the power of the long sword, but by God's secret blessing. Ambrose, giveth the reason why God suffered it to be so, *Ne videretur auctoritate traxisse aliquos, et veritatis ratio non pompæ gratiâ prævaleret*—lest this new religion should seem to be planted with power rather than by its own evidence, and the authority of men should sway more with the world than the truth of God. There is a wonderful increase without any human concurrence, as the Lord saith, 'The remnant of his people shall be as a dew from the Lord, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men,' without man's consent or concurrence. So that God alone hath the glory of their preservation.

2. That the patience of his people may be put to the utmost probation. When they are exercised with all kinds of trials, not only the hatred of the vulgar, but the opposition of the magistrate, carried on under a form of legal procedure. In the primitive times, sometimes the Christians were exposed to the hatred and fury of the people, *lapidibus nos invadit inimicum vulgus*; at other times exposed to the injuries of laws, and persecutions carried on by authority against them. There was an uproar at Ephesus against the Christians, Acts 19, and there seemed to be a formal process at Jerusalem, Acts 4. This latter temptation seemeth to be the more sore and grievous, because God's ordinance, which is magistracy, is wrested to give countenance to malicious designs, and because it cuts off all means of human help, and so 'patience hath ἔργον τέλειον, its perfect work,' James 1:4. There is some glory in suffering the rage and evil word of the vulgar, for they are supposed not to make the wisest choice; but when men of wisdom and power, and such as are clothed with the majesty of God's ordinance, are set against us, then is patience put to the utmost proof, and whether we regard God or man most, and who is the object of our fear, those that have power of life and death temporal, or him that hath power of life and death eternal.

3. That his people may be weaned from fleshly dependencies, and doting upon civil powers, and so be driven to depend upon him alone. Ps. 94:20–22, 'Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which establish mischief by a law? They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood. But the Lord is my defence, and my God is the rock of my refuge.' There would not be such use of faith and dependence upon God if our danger were not great. It is harder to trust in God with means than without means. We are beaten out when outward helps fail, otherwise we are apt to neglect God, and then a world of

mischief ensueth. When the emperor of the Romans began to favour the Christians, poison was said to be poured into the church; and in the sunshine of worldly countenance, like green timber, they began to warp and cleave asunder; and what religion got in breadth it lost in strength and vigour. God's people never live up to the beauty and majesty of their principles so much as when they are forced immediately to live upon God, and depend upon him for their safety.

4. That their testimony and witness-bearing to God's truths may be the more public and authentic in the view of the world. This testimony is either to them for their conviction and conversion: Mat. 24:14, 'And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations;' or against them: Mat. 10:18, 'And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.' It is for a testimony, and that should comfort them in all their sufferings: Mark 14:9, 'Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.' The testimony is more valid as being confirmed by their courage in troubles; they are principles that they will suffer for; which, as it is a warning to the professors of religion that they should own no principles in a time of peace but what they would confirm by their avowed testimony in the extremity of trials; so also it should convince their enemies in case they be put upon this exercise. It is needful that every truth should have a sealed testimony; that is, we should not only vent opinions, but be willing to suffer for them if God should call us out so to do. God hath been ever tender of imposing upon the world without sufficient evidence, and therefore would not have his people stand upon their lives and temporal concernments, that thereby they may give greater satisfaction to the world concerning the weight of those truths which they do profess.

Secondly, On the persecutors' part, or the persons molesting; so the causes are—

1. Their ignorance and blind zeal: John 16:2, 'They shall put you out of their synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that they do God good service.' They think it to be an acceptable service to God to molest and trouble those that are indeed his people. Those princes that sat and spake against David were not pagans and men of another religion, but of Israel; and it is often the lot of God's people to be persecuted, not only by pagans and openly profane men, but even by men that profess the true religion—pseudo-Christians, Rev. 14:13, those that pretend they are for God and his cause, and seem to be carried on with a great zeal, and do not oppose truth as truth, but their quarrel is coloured by specious pretences.

2. Their prejudices lightly taken up against the people of God. Satan is first a liar, and then a murderer: John 8:44, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him: when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it.' By lies he bringeth about his bloody design. Christ was first called a Samaritan, and one that had a devil; and then they did persecute him as such a one. And, as was observed before, as Christians of old were covered with the skins of wild beasts, that dogs and lions might tear them the more speedily, so by odious imputations God's people are brought into distaste with the world, and then molested and troubled, represented as a company of hypocrites and unjust dealers; and under that cloak, true religion is undermined. Now, in the persecutor, this is faulty, because they lightly take up every false suggestion; and so Christians are condemned διὰ τὴν φήμην, as Justin Martyr complained, because of

the common reproach, without any distinct inquiry into their way and practice, *nolunt audire quod auditum damnare non possunt.*

3. Their erroneous principle in civil policy, that Christ's kingdom and the freedom of his worshippers is not consistent with civil interests. Whatever hath been the matter, worldly rulers have been jealous of Christ's interest and kingdom, as if it could not consist with public safety, and the civil interests of that state and nation where it is admitted; and suggestions of this kind do easily prevail with them: Esther 3:8, 'It is not for the king's profit to suffer them;' and John 11:48, 'If we let him alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.' Reason of state is an ancient plea against the interest of religion. In the Roman empire, though the Christians were inconsiderable as to any public charge, yet they had a jealous eye upon them. Justin Martyr showeth the reason of it, ὅτι βασιλείαν ὀνομάζομεν, because they were often speaking of a kingdom; though they meant it of the kingdom of heaven, and were far enough from all rebellion.

Use 1. It informeth us that we should not measure the verity of religion by the greatness of those that are with it or against it. This was one of the Pharisees' arguments, 'Do any of the rulers believe in him? But this people, that know not the law, are accursed.' John 7:48, 49. Alas! men of authority and great place may be often against God's interest: James 2:1, 'Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, in respect of persons.' Mark that title that is given to Christ, 'the Lord of glory;' he is able to put glory enough upon his worshippers, though they have nothing of outward pomp and splendour; and 'not many mighty are called,' 1 Cor. 1:26. Many will say they have none of quality to join with them, none but ignorant people. If a man had judged so in the first times, when the gospel came first abroad in the world, would not Christianity itself

have seemed a very contemptible thing? Therefore a simple, plain-hearted love to Christ and his truth, whether powers be averse or friendly, is that which is required of us.

2. It reproveth those who are soon discouraged with the reproach which base people cast upon the ways of God. David stood both in the one temptation and in the other, the reproach and contempt of the vulgar, and also when princes sat and spake against him. But to these we may say, as Jer. 12:5, 'If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how wilt thou contend with horses?' If we be such tender milksops that we cannot suffer a disgraceful word from the basest of the people, what shall we do when we meet with other manner of conflicts and oppositions in the farther progress of our duty to God? If we are tired out with the disgrace and affronts of these mean ones, and cannot put up with a scornful word at their hands without disorder, what shall we do when we are to contest for God's interest with those great and masterly ones that are armed with power and authority, and it may be the advantage of laws against us? *Scommata nostra ferre non potes*, said the Antiochians to Julian in another case, *quomodo feres Persarum tela?* God's servants do often receive discouragement from the people and from authority, but the goodness of their cause and the favour of God makes them joyfully persevere.

3. It teacheth us what to do when this is not our case. I have treated as this scripture hath led me of the oppositions of princes and worldly powers against the people of God; it may be you may judge it unseasonable; but how soon it may be seasonable you cannot tell, considering the spirit of enmity against the power of godliness. Blessed be God that it is not so seasonable now. But what use shall we now make of it?



[1.] To bless God when he giveth religious rulers, and such as are well affected to religion. It is a fulfilling of his promise: Isa. 49:23, 'And kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and queens thy nursing-mothers.' God's interest in the world is usually weak, and his people, like little children, had need to be nursed up by the countenance and defence of worldly potentates. Now, when they discharge their duty, and do afford patronage and protection, it should be acknowledged to God's glory, in whose hands their hearts are; and the rather by us, because of the iron yoke that was upon us, and those hard taskmasters under which we formerly groaned. We have our own discontents, as well as former ages; but because all things are not as we could wish them, shall we be thankful for none? The liberty of religion is such a blessing as we cannot enough acknowledge, and doth sufficiently countervail other inconveniences. Oh! therefore let us not sour our spirits into an unthankful frame, by dwelling too much upon our discontents and private dissatisfactions; it is a mercy that the sword of authority is not drawn against religion. When God meaneth good or evil to a nation, he usually dispenseth it by their magistrates. If good, then he puts wisdom and grace into the hearts of those that govern, or government into the hands of those that are wise and gracious. When he meaneth evil, he sendeth them evil magistrates: Isa. 19:4, 'The Egyptians will I give over into the hands of a cruel lord, and a fierce king shall rule over them.' But when good governors, it is a mercy, and a presage of good.

[2.] To pity those whose case it is that princes sit and speak against them, as it is of many of the people of God now in the world. When we suffer not by immediate and direct passion, we should suffer by way of fellow-feeling and compassion. It is charged as a great crime that 'those that were at ease in Sion were not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph,' Amos 6:6, compared with the 1st verse. It may be used proverbially; as the butler forgat Joseph when he was well at

court; and his brethren did eat bread and little regarded the afflictions of his soul when cast into the pit. But I suppose them literally, because the half tribe of Manasseh was carried captive by Tiglath Pileser, that they did not sympathise with them, propter confractionem Joseph—for the breach made upon Joseph. God layeth affliction upon some of his people, to try the sympathy of others; as on Protestants in Poland, the emperor's dominions, Savoy, some parts of France, and elsewhere.

[3.] To be the more strict and holy, and improve this good day of the church's peace. They that are not holy in a time of peace will not be holy and constant in a time of trouble: Acts 9:31, 'When the churches had rest, they walked in the fear of God, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost.' When we are not called to passive obedience and suffering, our active obedience should be the more cheerfully performed. Now where is it so? Our fathers suffered more willingly for Christ than we speak of him. Our inward peace and comfort will cost us more in getting, and therefore we should be more in service. Oh! let us not abuse this rest we have, to the neglect of God, or to vain contentions, as green timber warpeth and breaketh in the sunshine. The contentions of the pastors, saith Eusebius, did usher in the truth, which was Diocletian's persecution.

[4.] Here is caution, and a word of counsel to the princes of the nations, or the heads of the people, that now are met together and sit in council. Oh! do not sit and speak against such as are God's people; that is, do not decree anything against them. Some would have the magistrate to do nothing in religion; but that would leave things at a strange loose and disorder. Certainly you should at least provide for the liberties of God's people, that they should 'lead a quiet life in godliness and honesty,' 1 Tim. 2:2; that they may be secured, and the peace kept, not only as to their civil interests, but whilst they worship

God according to their conscience, which can never be as long as those swarms of libertines are publicly tolerated, which every day increase in number, power, and malice. And again, the great security of magistrates lieth in an oath of fealty, which only receiveth value from religion; therefore the magistrate is concerned in what religion is professed in a nation, as well as in things civil. But now, whilst you interpose in religion, be sure you do not contradict or undermine God's interest; and be not courted by any prepossessions of your own, or the crafty insinuations of others, to oppress by your sentence and suffrage those that fear God in the land, and do make conscience of their ways. The magistrate's interposing in religion is to me an unquestionable duty, and yet to be managed with great caution: Ps. 2:10, 'Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings, and be instructed, ye judges of the earth.' What by natural prejudices against the strict and more severe ways of godliness, what by private whispers and subtle disguises, men may be tempted to oppose Christ's kingdom, cause, and people; therefore they should be wary, as they would be faithful in their places, and love their own souls, to go upon sure clear grounds. You are to promote Christ's service, otherwise you will be answerable for your neglect; and yet you are to take heed, lest, whilst you think you do God service, you subvert not his interest, and so you be answerable for your mistake. To deal more particularly would be a diversion. I only intend it as a warning, and to show you the necessity of consulting with those who are best able to judge in the case where your duty lieth.

Secondly, David's remedy: 'But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.'

Doct. The best way to ease the heart from trouble that doth arise from the opposition of men of power and place, is by serious consulting with God's word.

Because the time will not bear a large prosecution, I shall open the force of this clause in three propositions.

1. A holy divertisement is the best way to ease the trouble of our thoughts. Certainly it is not good altogether to pore upon our sorrows; a diversion is a prudent course. David did not merely sit down and bemoan the calamity of his condition, and so sink under the burden, but runneth to the word. As husbandmen, when their ground is overflowed by waters, make ditches and water-furrows to carry it away; so when our minds and thoughts are overwhelmed with trouble, it is good to divert them to some other matter. But every diversion will not become saints; it must be a holy diversion: Ps. 94:19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.' The case was the same with that of the text, when the throne of iniquity frameth mischief by a law; as you shall see here, when he had many perplexed thoughts about the abuse of power against himself. But now where lay his ease in diversion? Would every diversion suit his purpose? No; 'Thy comforts,' of God's allowance, of God's providing, comforts proper to saints. Wicked men in trouble run to their pot and pipe, and games and sports, and merry company, and so defeat the providence rather than improve it; but David, who was God's servant, must have God's comforts. So elsewhere, when his thoughts were troubled about the power of the wicked, 'I went into the sanctuary, there I understood their end:' Ps. 73:17. He goeth to divert his mind by the use of God's ordinances, and so came to be settled against the temptation.

2. Among all sorts of holy divertisements none is of such use as God's word. There is matter enough to take up our thoughts and allay our cares and fears, and to swallow up our sorrows and griefs, to direct us in all straits. In brief, there is comfort there and counsel there.

[1.] Comfort, whilst the word teacheth us to look off from men to God, from providence to the covenant, from things temporal to things eternal, from men to God, as Moses 'feared not the wrath of the king when he saw him that is invisible,' Heb. 11:27; and Eccles. 5:8, 'If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perversion of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter; for he that is higher than the highest regardeth, and there be higher than they.' There is a higher judge that sitteth in heaven; and if he pass sentence for us when they pass sentence against us, we need to be the less troubled. If he give us the pardon of sins and the testimony of a good conscience, it is no matter what men say against us: Ps. 40:4, 'Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.' Is not God able to bear you out in his work? From providence to the covenant: providence is a very riddle; we shall not know what to make of it till we gather principles of faith from the covenant: Heb. 13:5, 'He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' God overrules all for good: Rom. 8:28, 'We know that all things work together for good to those that love God, to those that are the called according to his purpose.' From things temporal to eternal: 2 Cor. 4:17, 18, 'For our light affliction, that is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal;' Rom. 8:18, 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us.' A feather or a straw against a talent, a man would be ashamed to compare them together.

[2.] For counsel. A Christian should not be troubled so much about what he should suffer, as what he should do, that he may do nothing unseemly to his calling and hopes, but be kept blameless to the

heavenly kingdom. Now, the word of God will teach him how to carry himself in dangers, to pray for persecutors (fire is not quenched with fire, nor evil overcome with evil); how to keep ourselves from unlawful shifts and means, how to avoid revenge, lying, flattering, yielding against conscience, or waxing weary of well-doing, that we may not fight against Satan or his instruments by their own weapons, for so we shall be easily overcome. The wicked shall not be so wise to contrive the mischief, as a saint instructed by the word is how to carry himself under it: Ps. 119:98, 'Through thy commandments thou hast made me wiser than my enemies.' Malice and policy shall not teach them to persecute, as God's word to carry yourselves in the trouble.

3. The word must not be slightly read, but our hearts must be exercised in the meditation of it. A cursory reading doth not work upon us so much as serious thoughts. In all studies, meditation is both the mother and nurse of knowledge, and so it is of godliness, without which we do but know truths by rote and hearsay, and talk one after another like parrots; but when a truth is chased into the heart by deep inculcative thoughts, then it worketh with us, and we feel the power of it. Musing maketh the fire burn, ponderous thoughts are the bellows that blow it up. Eggs come to be quickened by sitting abroad upon them. In a sanctified heart the seeds of comfort by meditation come to maturity; by constant meditation our affections are quickened, this turneth the promises into marrow: Ps. 63:5, 6, 'My soul shall be filled as with marrow and fatness, when I meditate on thee in the night watches.' It giveth more than a vanishing taste, which hypocrites have.

Use 1. In all your troubles learn this method, to cure them by gracious means, prayer or meditation. By meditation on the word of God, that will tell you that we are born to trouble, and therefore we

should no more think it strange to see God's children molested here than to see a shower of rain fall after a sunshine, or that the night should succeed the day: 1 Peter 4:12, 'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, as though some strange thing happened unto you.' It were strange if otherwise; as if a man were told that his journey lay through a rough stony country, and should pass over a smooth carpet-way. Our waymark is many tribulations: Acts 14:22, 'Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of heaven.' God had one Son without sin, none without the cross.

2. That afflictions, though in themselves they are legal punishments, fruits of sin, yet by the grace of God they are medicinal to his people: 1 Cor. 11:32, 'When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.'

3. We never advance more in Christianity than under the cross: Heb. 12:10, 'They verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness;' Ps. 119:71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.'

4. Rather undergo the greatest calamities than commit the smallest sin: Heb. 11:25, 'Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.'

5. That all crosses are nothing to desertions of God and terrors of conscience: Prov. 18:14, 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?'

6. That a meek suffering conduceth much to God's glory: 1 Peter 4:14, 'If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil

spoken of, but on your part he is glorified;' whilst you do nothing; unworthy of his presence in you and the truth you profess.

## **SERMON XXV**

### **Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.—VER. 24.**

DAVID in the former verse had mentioned the greatness of his trial, that not only the basest sort, but princes also were set against him. Then he mentions his remedy; he had recourse to God's word, 'But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.'

Now he shows the double benefit which he had by the word of God, not only wisdom how to carry himself during that trouble, but also comfort; comfort in trouble, and counsel in duty; it seasoned his affliction and guided his business and affairs. What would a man have more in such a perplexed case than be directed and comforted? David had both these, 'Thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors.'

First, Thy testimonies are my delight; or, as it is in the Hebrew, delights.

Secondly, They are my counsellors. In the Hebrew it is, the men of my counsel, which is fitly mentioned, for he had spoken of princes sitting in council against him. Princes do nothing without the advice of their privy council; a child of God hath also his privy council, God's testimonies. On the one side there was Saul and his nobles and counsellors; on the other side there was David and God's testimonies. Now who were better furnished, think you, they to persecute and



trouble him, or David how to carry himself under this trouble? Alphonsus, king of Arragon, being asked who were the best counsellors, answered, the dead; meaning books, which cannot flatter, but do without partiality declare the truth. Now of all such dead counsellors, God's testimonies have the pre-eminence. A poor godly man, even then when he is deserted of all, and hath nobody to plead for him, he hath his senate and his council of state about him, the prophets and apostles, and other 'holy men of God, that spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' A man so furnished is never less alone than when alone; for he hath counsellors about him that tell him what is to be believed or done; and they are such counsellors as cannot err, as will not flatter him, nor applaud him in any sin, nor discourage or dissuade him from that which is good, whatever hazards it expose him to. And truly, if we be wise, we should choose such counsellors as these, 'Thy testimonies are the men of my counsel.'

First, Let me speak of the first benefit, 'Thy testimonies are my delight.'

Doct. That a child of God, though under deep affliction, finds a great deal of delight and comfort in the word of God.

This was David's case, princes sat and spake against him, decrees were made against him, yet 'thy testimonies are my delight.' Let us see—

1. What manner of delight this is that we find in the word.
2. What the word ministereth or contributeth towards it.

First, What kind of delight it is? A delight better than carnal rejoicing. Wicked men, that flow in ease and plenty, have not so

much comfort as a godly man hath in the enjoyment of God, according to the tenor of his word: Ps. 4:7, 'Thou hast put more gladness into my heart, than when their corn, wine, and oil increased.' We have no reason to change conditions with worldly men, as merry as they seem to be, and as much as they possess in the world.

But more particularly, wherein is the difference?

1. This delight is a real joy: 2 Cor. 6:10, 'As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.' Their sorrow is but seeming, but their joy is real; it is joy in good earnest: Heb. 12:11, 'No affliction seemeth joyous but grievous.' As to seeming, they are in a sad condition, but it doth but so seem. A wicked man is as it were glad and merry, but indeed he is dejected and sorrowful; the godly man is as it were sorrowful, but indeed comforted.

2. It is a cordial joy: Ps. 4:7, 'Thou hast put more gladness into my heart.' That is a delight indeed which puts a gladness into the heart, which not only tickles the outward senses, but affects the soul and comforts the conscience. Carnal joy makes a loud noise, and therefore it is compared to 'the crackling of thorns under a pot;' but this is that which goes to the heart, that fills it with serenity and peace. Carnal joy is like the morning dew, which wets the surface; but godly joy is like a soaking shower that goes to the root, and makes the plant flourish. They that indulge false comfort rather laugh than are merry. But now he that is exercised in the word of God, and fetcheth his comfort out of the promises, he is glad at the very heart.

3. It is a great joy: 1 Peter. 1:8. 'In whom believing, ye rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' It doth ravish the heart, so that it is better felt than uttered, it is unspeakable and glorious. The higher

the life, always the greater the feeling. The good and evil of no life can be so great as the good and evil of the spiritual life, because it is the highest life of all, and therefore hath the highest sense joined with it. Man is more capable of being afflicted than beasts, and beasts than plants, and a godly man more than other men; he hath a higher life, therefore the good and evil is greater. A wounded spirit is the greatest misery any creature can feel on this side hell. So answerably are its joys: as the groans and sorrows of the spiritual life are unutterable, so are the joys of it unspeakable.

4. It is a more pure joy than worldlings can have. The more intellectual any comfort is, the more excellent in the kind. Though beasts may have pain and pleasure poured in upon them by the senses, yet properly they have not sorrow and delight. The joy of carnal men is pleasure rather than delight; it is not fed by the promises and ordinances, but by such dreggy and outward contentments as the world affords, and so of the same nature with the contentment of the beasts. But now the more intellectual and chaste our delights are, the more suitable to the human nature. Well, then, none hath a delight so separate from the lees as a Christian that rejoiceth in the promises of God. He that delights in natural knowledge, hath, questionless, a purer object and greater contentment of soul than the sensualist can possibly have, that delights only in meats, and drinks, and sports, in pleasures that are in common with the beasts. Further yet, he that delights in bare contemplation of the word, as it is an excellent doctrine suited to man's necessities, as the stony ground 'received the word with joy,' Mat. 13:20, certainly he hath yet a purer gladness than merely that man that is versed in natural studies. Oh! but when a man can reflect upon the promises, as having an interest in them, that delight which flows from faith, and is accompanied with such a certainty, surely

that is a more pure delight than the other, and doth more ravish the heart; they have more intimate and spiritual joy than others have.

5. It is a joy that ends well. Carnal rejoicing makes way for sorrow: 'The end of that mirth is heaviness,' Prov. 14:13. It is a poor forced thing, saith Cooper. A man in a burning fever is eased no longer by drinking strong drink than while he is drinking of it, for then it seems to cool him, but presently it increaseth his heat; so when men seek ease and comfort in troubles from outward external things, though they seem to mitigate their heaviness for the present, yet they increase it the more afterward.

6. It is not a joy that perverts the heart. Carnal comforts, the more we use them, the more we are ensnared by them: Eccles. 2:2, 'I have said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doth it?' For what serious and sober use doth carnal rejoicing serve? There is no profit by it, but much hurt and danger; therefore Solomon preferreth sorrow before it: Eccles. 7:3, 'Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.' But now, the more of this delight we have, the more we delight ourselves in the word of God, the more we love God, the better the heart is.

7. It is a delight that overcomes the sense of our affliction, and all the evils that do befall us; and therefore it is said of the heirs of promise that they have 'strong consolation,' Heb. 6:18. The strength is seen by the effects; therefore it is strong, because it supports and revives, notwithstanding troubles. It establisheth the heart, notwithstanding all the floods and storms of temptations that light upon it: 1 Thes. 1:6, it is said of them, that 'they received the word with much affliction and joy in the Holy Ghost.'

Secondly, How do we find it in the word? 'His testimonies are my delight.' The word requires this joy in troubles, and the word

ministers it to the soul.

It requires this joy: James 1:2, 'Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.' We are not only with patience to submit to God's will, but also to rejoice in it: so Mat. 5:12, 'When men persecute and revile you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my name sake, rejoice and be exceeding glad.' Many times when other ways of persecution cease, yet there is reviling. Those that have no strength and power to do other injuries, yet have such weapons of malice always in readiness. Some, being not good Christians themselves, will defame those that are so; that so, when they cannot reach them in practice, they may depress them by censure; when they cannot go so high as they, they may bring them as low as themselves by detraction. Now, though this be a great evil, we should bear it not heavily but cheerfully; rejoice and be exceeding glad in hope of the promises: Rom. 5:3, 'We glory in tribulation.' A true believer, that hath received the word of God as the rule of his life and guide of his hopes, he can not only be patient, but cheerful, glory in his tribulation. A carnal man is not so comfortable in his best estate as he at his worst.

Again, it gives us matter and ground of joy. God speaks a great deal of comfort to an afflicted spirit. It was one end why the scriptures were penned: Rom. 15:4, 'That we through patience and comfort of the scripture might have hope;' and Heb. 12:5, 'Have you forgotten the consolation, that speaks to you as children?' The great drift of the word is to provide matter of comfort, and that in our worst estate.

But now, what are the usual comforts that may occasion this delight and joy in the Holy Ghost in the midst of deep affliction?

1. The scripture gives us ground of comfort from the author of our afflictions, who is our Father, and never manifests the comfort of

adoption so much as then when we are under chastening: Heb. 12:5, 'The consolation that speaks to you as children;' and John 18:11, 'The cup which my Father hath put into my hands, shall I not drink it?' It is a bitter cup, but it is from a father, not from a judge or an enemy. Nothing but good can come from him who is love and goodness itself; nothing but what is useful from a father, whose affection is not to be measured by the bitterness of the dispensation, but by his aims, what he intends. If God should let us alone to follow our own ways, it were an argument we were none of his children.

2. The necessity of affliction: 1 Peter 1:6, 'Ye are for a season in trouble, if need be.' Before the corn be ripened, it needs all kind of weathers, and therefore the husbandman is as glad of showers as sunshine, because they both conduce to fruitfulness. We need all kind of dispensations, and cannot well be without the many troubles that do befall us.

3. The nature and use of affliction. It is a medicine, not a poison; it works out the remainders of sin: Isa. 27:9, 'By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit, to take away his sin.' Afflictions are useful, and help to mortification. It is a file to get off our rust; a flail, wherewith we are threshed, that our husk may fly off; a fire to purge and eat out our dross: 'He verily for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness,' Heb. 12:10. If God take away any outward comforts from us, and give us graces instead of them, it is a blessed exchange, if he strip us of our garments, and clothe us with his own royal robe, as holiness is. God himself is glorious in holiness. Now, that we may be partakers of his holiness, surely that is for our profit.

4. For the manner of God's afflicting, it is in measure: Isa. 27:8, 'In measure when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it. He stayeth

his rough wind in the day of the east wind.' So Jer. 46:28, 'Fear thou not, O Jacob, my servant, saith the Lord,' &c. So 1 Cor. 10:13, 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above measure.' His conduct is very gentle: as Jacob drove on as the little ones were able to bear, Gen. 33, so doth God with a great deal of moderation measure out sufferings in a due proportion, not to our offences only, but our strength; as a father, in correcting his children, regards their weakness as well as their wantonness, laying less upon the more infirm, though alike faulty.

5. Another comfort which the scripture propounds is the help we shall have in affliction to bear it, partly from the comforts of his Spirit, and partly from the supports of his grace.

[1.] By way of consolation: 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost' at such a time, Rom. 5:3. Cordials are for those that are fainting. In time of trouble we have most sensible experience of God's love. God deals with his children many times as Joseph did with his brethren; he call's them spies, and puts them in prison, but at length he could hold no longer; but tells them, 'I am your brother Joseph.' So God seems to deal roughly with his people, and take away their dearest comforts from them. Ay! but before the trouble be over, he can hold no longer, but saith, I am your God, your father, and exceeding great reward. His bowels yearn towards us, and he opens his heart to us, and sheds abroad his love in our conscience.

[2.] Partly by the supports and influences of his grace: Ps. 138:3, 'In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.' When David was in trouble, this was his comfort, though he could not get deliverance yet he got support. God is many times gone to appearance, but he will never forsake us as to

inward support and strength: Heb. 13:5, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.'

6. From the fruit and final issue of all: 2 Cor. 4:17, 'This light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' He that can find Christ in his afflictions, and can see heaven beyond it, needs not to be troubled. All the notions of heaven are diversified. Why? That they may be suited to those divers trials and many evils we have in the world. Sometimes it is expressed by glory and honour, to counterbalance the disgrace which God's children meet with here; that the reproach of men may not make us more sad than the eternal glory may make us comfortable. Sometimes it is expressed by substance, because sometimes God's children are poor, and suffer loss of goods, Heb. 10:34. Sometimes it is called our redemption, our country, to comfort us in exile and banishment for the name of Christ, Heb. 11:14, 15. Sometimes it is called life eternal, because we may be called to suffer even to blood. Thus the word offereth this comfort against all the evils that befall us, that we may counterbalance every particular trouble with what the promises hold forth concerning our blessed hopes.

Use 1. Well, then, let us exercise ourselves in the word of God, and let all his promises be as so many cordials to us. To this end get an interest in these promises, for the heirs of promise have 'strong consolation,' Heb. 6:18. There is strong, great, real, and pure comfort, but it is to the heirs of promise. So Rom. 5:4, 'Not only so, but we rejoice in tribulation.' Who are those? Those that are justified by faith in Christ, ver. 1. To others, afflictions are the punishments of sin, and an occasion of despair, not of rejoicing. Ay! but when we are interested in reconciliation with God, then we take this comfort out of the word of God.



2. It informs us of the excellency of God's testimonies above all outward enjoyments. When we have them to the full, they cannot give us any solid true peace of conscience, nor cure one sad thought. Now beg of God that he will comfort you when all things else fail: 'When the labour of the olive shall fail, I will comfort myself in the Lord my God,' Hab. 3:18. I say, when we are under any burden, nay, when we are under any sorrow for sin, when afflictions revive stings of conscience, or else the word hath awakened them, yet there is comfort to be had by running to the word of God.

3. It shows us what is the property of believers, to delight in the testimonies of God, when all things go cross to them. Temporaries, when things run smoothly, they have a comfort in the word. Oh! but when the afflictions of the gospel fall upon them, they fall a murmuring presently. But a true believer can hold up his head; and though he hath much affliction, yet he can have much joy in the Holy Ghost, and a great deal of comfort from the word of God.

There follows another benefit, 'Thy testimonies are my counsellors,' or 'men of my counsel.' From thence observe—

Doct. 2. That one great benefit we have from the word of God is counsel, how to direct our affairs according to his will.

For the clearing of this, let me lay down these propositions—

1. That our great interest is to keep in with God, or approve ourselves to him.
2. Whoever would keep in with God needs counsel and direction in all his ways.
3. The only good counsel we can have is from God in his word.

4. The counsel God hath given us in his word is sufficient and full out for all our necessities.

Prop. 1. That our great interest is to keep in with God, and approve ourselves to him in all our actions; for God is the scope and end of our lives and actions, as the thing pressed, 'That we may walk worthy of God in all well-pleasing,' Col. 1:10. God, being our chiefest good, must be our last end; therefore in every action there must be a habitual purpose, and in all actions of weight and moment there must be an actual purpose, to please God. Every ordinary affair must be carried forth in the strength of the habitual purpose, but in all actions we would make a business of there must be an actual purpose. And because his authority alone can sway the conscience, which is under his dominion, therefore it concerns us in all things to 'exercise our selves that we may have a good conscience, void of offence both towards God and man,' Acts 24:16. And again, we are to approve our ways to God, and to keep in with him, because to him we are to give an account, 2 Cor. 5:9, 10. There will a time come when every action of ours shall be taken into consideration, and weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, with all our principles and ends; therefore we strive, we are ambitious (so the word signifies); our great ambition should be, living or dying, to be accepted with God. Again, surely it should be our business to approve ourselves to God in every action, because all the success of our actions depends upon his concurrence and blessing. Now we shall find this is often asserted in scripture. When a man's ways are full of hazards, likely to be exposed to great opposition, your great work is to keep in with God, approve your hearts to him: Prov. 16:7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he will make even his enemies to be at peace with him.' God hath a mighty power over the spirits of men; therefore this is to go to the fountain-head, to stop all opposition there; and, on the other side, without this care of pleasing God, all goes to loss.

Counsels, though never so wisely laid, yet are blasted if we do not make this our business, to approve our hearts to God in those actions. Remember, in one place it is said, 'The counsel of the froward is carried headlong,' Job 5:13; and in another place, Isa. 44:25, 'The counsel of wise men he turneth backward.' When men do not study to please God, and approve their hearts to him, God leaves them to precipitate counsels; sometimes they are carried forward, at other times they are carried backward; the event is cross to their design. Sometimes God lets them fall into precipitant counsels that they may undo themselves, at other times disappoints their counsels, and that which they have designed.

Prop. 2. Whosoever would keep in with God, he needs good counsel and direction in all his ways. Both in regard of the darkness of his understanding, his corrupt affections, and inordinate self-love, man is not able to rule and govern himself, but needs counsel: Prov. 12:15, 'The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.' When a man engageth in any action, such is the darkness and perverseness of man's heart that he should not be over-confident of his own apprehensions, or of his own inclinations, but should hearken after counsel; and Prov. 28:26, 'He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.' Both these proverbs are to be understood not so much of wise managing of civil affairs as of spiritual direction. Surely it is ill trusting ourselves and counsels and inclinations of our own hearts. Blind affections usually govern a man's life; and all sinners have an evil counsellor in their bosom, some lust or other, and therefore need to be directed. The counsel of the flesh is, Favour thyself. Every evil affection gives ill counsel. Covetousness saith, Preserve thy worldly interest. Voluptuousness saith, You need not be so strict and nice, and abridge yourselves of the comforts of the world. Paul saith, Gal. 1:16, 'I conferred not with flesh and blood.' Flesh and blood are evil counsellors, and under pretence of safety

will suggest what is for our ruin. What will the flesh say when it is to be denied, and the blood say when it is to be spilt and shed for God's sake? These will persuade us rather to please ourselves than please God. They will persuade us to desert our duty.

Prop. 3. The only good counsel that we can have is from God in his word: Ps. 73:24, 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me unto glory.' We have it from God, and we have it from his word; for there is a guide and a rule. Man is so weak and so perverse that he needs both a guide and a rule. The guide is the Spirit of God, and the rule is the word of God: thou shalt guide me, but by thy counsel. By these two alone can we be led in the way to true happiness. The Spirit he is a sure guide; and the word, that is a clear rule. We are dark, but the scriptures are not dark. I observed out of the 18th verse, when the saints called upon God, they do not say, Lord, make a plainer law, but, Lord, give me better eyes. We are dark, and need the illumination of the Spirit; the scriptures are light: Prov. 6:23, 'The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light.' In all matters of practical obedience it is clear and open.

Prop. 4. The counsel that God hath given us in his word is sufficient and full out to all our necessities. Let me instance this in particulars.

1. The word gives us counsel for our general choice; it is the rule of all faith and obedience. The scriptures are the counsel of God, sent to remedy the miseries of the fall; therefore it is said, Acts 20:27, 'I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.' It is God's counsel how man should be reconciled, how he should be converted, and come to the enjoyment of himself. David, when he had chosen God for his portion, he saith, Ps. 16:7, 'Blessed be God who hath given me counsel.' In the word he gives us counsel how to

come to him for our happiness, and by grace he sets it on upon the heart: this is the counsel of God concerning our salvation.

2. Not only in our general choice, but in all our particular actions, so far as they have a tendency unto that end: Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my paths.' It is a lamp and a light. We are full of darkness and error; but as we follow the direction of God, it is a lamp not only to our path, but to our steps, to our feet; not only to our path, to our general course, but it directeth us in every particular action.

3. In dark and doubtful passages, when a man multiplieth consultations and perplexed thoughts, and changeth conclusions as a sick man doth his bed, and knows not what course to take, whether this or that; then the word will direct him what to do, so as that a man may find quiet in his soul. Indeed here is the question, How far the word of God is a counsellor to us in such perplexed and doubtful cases?

[1.] The word of God will help him to understand how far he is concerned in such an action in point of duty and conscience; for otherwise it were not 'able to make the man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto all good works,' 2 Tim. 3:17. Now it is a great relief to the soul when a man understands how far he is concerned in point of duty. The conflict many times lies not only between light and lust, or light and interest—then a gracious man knows what part to take; but when it lies between duty and duty, then it is tedious and troublesome to him. Now the word clearly will tell you what is your duty in any action, whatever it be.

[2.] As to the prudent management of the action in order to success, the word will teach you to go to God for wisdom, James 1:6, and to observe his answer.

[3.] So in all actions, the word will teach you to ask God's leave and God's blessing. Christians, it is not enough to ask God's counsel, but ask his leave in any particular action, in disposing our dwellings, or our concernments of children, and the like: Judges 1, 'Who shall go up and fight against the Canaanites?' They would fain have the Lord decide it. And again, 'Shall I go up to Ramoth-Gilead?' In all actions our business is to ask God's leave. David always runs to the oracle and ephod, 'Shall I go up to Hebron?' And Jacob in his journeys would neither go to Laban nor come from him without a warrant and leave from God. So we ask God's leave in prayer, and observe the bent of our hearts after prayer.

[4.] The word of God teacheth a man; when he understandeth his duty, and hath God's leave, to submit the event to God, and that easeth the heart, because he may be sure of success, comfort, and support: Ps. 37:5, 'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass;' and Prov. 16:3, 'Commit thy work unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.' It easeth us of a great deal of trouble and care; so that when a man hath brought his affections to submit to whatever God should determine in point of success, when he hath moderated and calmed his spirit, that he is resolved to bear the event whatever it be, this easeth the soul of a deal of trouble. Thus you see how we may make the statutes of God to be the men of our counsel.

Use 1. What a singular mercy is it that God hath given us the scripture, where we have counsel upon all occasions, how to manage our affairs prudently, bear afflictions comfortably, and with composed hearts to get through all events and dangers that we meet with in our passage to heaven! We should have groped up and down, as the Sodomites for Lot's door, if we had not this rule of faith and obedience. It is a rule that teacheth us how to think well, for it

reacheth to the thoughts; to speak well, for it giveth a law to all our words; to do well in all our civil actions and trading: how to keep a good conscience, and approve ourselves to God; how in natural actions, eating, drinking, to season them with God's fear; and religious actions, how we may pray and worship; how to govern ourselves, our own hearts and affections; to converse with others in all relations, as fathers, children, masters, servants, magistrates, ministers, people; and how to hold communion with God: all which are demonstrations of the sufficiency of the scripture for our direction, and what reason there is that we should take the testimonies of God to be the men of our counsel.

Use 2. For reproof to those that turn the back upon God's counsels. Who are those?

1. Such as neglect the general duties of Christianity, as faith, and repentance. God hath given us counsel what to do in order to eternal life, and we regard it not. The great quarrel between God and sinners is about the neglect of this counsel, which he hath given them for their soul's good: Prov. 1:25, 'They set at nought all my counsel;' and ver. 30, 'They would none of my counsel.' Oh! when your friends have advised you, and you despise it, and take another course, it troubleth them. You know how heinously Achitophel took it when his counsel was despised. Equals, when their counsel is despised, take it very ill; much more superiors when they give counsel. The entreaty and advice of a superior carrieth the force of a command. So it is here with God; it is called counsel, not as if it were an arbitrary thing whether we did regard it or no; but because of God's mild condescension. When men are in danger of perishing for ever, the Lord gives us counsel. You are in a miserable estate; he is pleased to tell you how to come out of your misery. The word of God, therefore, is called the counsel of God. It is sad when we shall reject the counsel

of God: Luke 7:30, 'They rejected the counsel of God against themselves.' There is two sentences, they rejected the counsel of God, and it was against themselves; it was to their own loss and destruction. God loseth nothing when we despise his counsel; but you lose all—your eternal happiness. This is so great an evil that God punisheth it with itself. When men will not take God's counsel, then it is the most dreadful judgment he can lay upon us to give us up to our own counsel, Ps. 81:11. Oh, what a heavy judgment was it to be given up to the counsels of their own heart!

2. It reproves such as do not consult with God's word about their affairs, but merely live as they are acted by their own lusts, or 'walk at all adventures;' so the expression in the marginal reading is, Lev. 26:21. It is as the action falls; they do not care whether it please God, or be the rule of their duty, yea or nay. These are far from the temper of God's children. It is sad in persons, much more in nations, when men run headlong upon all manner of disorders, against right and honesty; it tends to ruin: Deut. 32:28, 'They are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them.'

3. Such as go flatly against the counsel of God, and, to gratify their own interest, pervert all that is just and honest: Ps. 107:11, 'They rebelled against the word of the Lord, and contemned the counsel of the Most High.' These do but expose themselves to speedy ruin. Job 18:7, Bildad said of the wicked, 'His own counsel shall cast him down.' They need no other means to ruin them than their own brutish course. When men dare break the commandment of God without any reluctancy, to gratify a worldly interest, though for the present no evil comes of it, yet afterwards they shall smart: Prov. 19:20, 'Hear counsel and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise for thy latter end.' Consider what it will come to afterwards, when thou comest to die; then you will wish, Oh that I had taken



God's counsel, that I had not gone with such a daring spirit against the plain counsel of God's word!

4. Such as pretend to ask counsel from the word, but it is according to the idol of their own hearts; that come with their own conclusions and preconceptions and prejudices, against God's counsel: Ezek. 14:3, 4, 'Son of man, these have set up their idols in their heart,' &c. Men will come and pretend to ask God's counsel and leave upon their undertakings, when they are resolved upon a wicked enterprise before; then God must be called upon and sought to, and so they make God's ordinance a lacquey, merely to be a covert to their evil practices; as those in Jer. 42, that came to the prophet, and they were prepossessed, and had their resolutions aforehand.

Use 3. To press us to this consulting with the word of God, to make the testimonies of the Lord the men of our counsel. There are many qualifications and tempers of heart necessary.

1. Fear of God: Ps. 25:12, 'What man is he that feareth the Lord? him will he teach the way that he shall choose;' he that is in doubt and perplexed, and would have counsel from God's word. Who is the man that is like to have it? He that feareth the Lord. There is a great suitableness between the qualification and the promise. Partly he that fears God hath a greater awe of the word than others have, and is loath to do anything contrary to God's will; he would fain know what is God's mind in every particular case: Ps. 119:161, 'My heart standeth in awe of thy word.' To offend God, and to baulk the direction of God's word, that is the greatest terror to him, greater than all other dangers. Now such a man is less apt to miscarry by the rashness and impetuous bent of carnal affections. And he that fears God, he aims at God's glory rather than his own interest, and so is rather swayed by reasons of conscience and religion than of carnal

concernments. Many times the doubtfulness that is upon the spirit is because of conflicts between lust and knowledge; our light is weakened by an inordinate affection to our own interest, otherwise we would soon come to the deciding our case by the word of God. Now he that would fain know God's mind in everything, this is the man whom God will direct.

2. The second qualification is 'the meek:' Ps. 25:9, 'The meek he will guide in judgment, and the meek he will teach his way.' By the meek is meant a man humble, that will submit himself to God, whatever condition he shall appoint. This man God in his word will teach and direct.

3. The third qualification mentioned in order to this is a constant dependence upon God: Prov. 5:6, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' Oh! when a man is brought off from this spiritual idolatry, of making his bosom to be his oracle, and his own heart to be his counsellor, when he doth in the poverty of his spirit humbly and entirely cast himself upon the help of God, and acknowledge him in all his ways, then he shall see a clear direction what God would have him to do. You have another place to this purpose, Ps. 143:8, 'Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.' Oh! when a man goes every morning to God, and desires the direction of his Spirit, and professeth to God in the poverty of his own spirit that he knows not how to guide his way for that day, then God will teach him the way he shall walk. So Ps. 25:4, 5, 'Show me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths.' What is his argument? 'On thee do I wait all the day.' When you live in a constant dependence upon God, then will the Lord undertake to direct and guide you.

4. Obedience or Christian practice, that is one of the qualifications that make you capable for direction from the word of God: John 7:17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.' A man does not know whether this opinion or that be according to God's mind, when there are plausible pretences on every side. He that maketh conscience of known truth, and walketh up to his light, he that doth not search to satisfy curiosity, but out of a thorough resolution to obey and submit his neck to the yoke of Christ, whatever he shall find to be the way of Christ, that man shall know what is the way in times of controversy and doubtful uncertainty. He that will say, as a famous German divine, If we had six hundred necks, let us submit them all to the yoke of Christ; he that is resolved to submit to the mind of Christ, how contrary soever to his interest, to the prejudices and prepossessions of his own heart, he shall know the doctrine that is of God.

## SERMON XXVI

**My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.—VER. 25.**

THE man of God in this psalm had spoken before of the common and universal benefits of the word, as it agreeth to all times and conditions of believers; for it belongeth to all, in what state soever they are, to look upon it as a direction in the way to get true happiness, and to stir up suitable affections in their hearts. Now he showeth what use the word hath in each special condition, especially in the time of great afflictions. David did often change states, but his affection to the word never changeth.

Here is—(1.) A representation of David's case; (2.) His supplication or petition thereupon; wherein—(1st.) The request itself; (2d.) The argument to enforce it.

First, The representation of David's case, 'My soul cleaveth unto the dust.' The speech is metaphorical, expressing the depth of his misery, or the greatness of his sorrow and humiliation. (1.) The depth of his misery, with allusion to the case of a man overcome in battle, or mortally wounded, and tumbling in the dust, or to a man dead and laid in the earth; as Ps. 22:15, 'Thou hast brought me to the dust of death.' Sure we are the expression importeth the extremity of distress and danger, either as a man dead, or near death. (2.) The greatness of his sorrow and humiliation; and so the allusion is taken from a man prostrate and grovelling on the ground, which was their posture of humbling themselves before the Lord, or when any great calamity befell them. As when Herod Agrippa died, they put on sackcloth, and lay upon the earth weeping (Joseph., lib. xix. cap. 7). The same allusion is Ps. 44:25, 'Our soul is bowed down unto the dust, our belly cleaveth to the earth.' Suitably to which allusion, the Septuagint renders it ἐκολλήθη τῷ ἐδάφει ἡ ψυχὴ μου—to the pavement.

And we read in Theodoret, that Theodosius the Emperor, when reproved by Ambrose for the slaughter at Thessalonica, he lay upon the ground, and humbly begged pardon, using these words, Adhæsit pavimento anima mea. The meaning is, that in his dejected condition he would lie prostrate at God's feet as a poor supplicant, and die there. The first point is—

That God's children may have such great afflictions brought upon them that their souls may even cleave to the dust.

These afflictions may respect their inward or outward condition.

1. Their inward condition; and so through grief and terrors of conscience they are ready to drop into the grave. That trouble of mind is a usual exercise of God's people, see Heman's complaint, Ps. 88, from ver. 3 to the end of ver. 7: 'My soul is full of troubles, and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength. Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deep. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah.' It was in his soul, and it was in his soul by reason of the wrath of God, and that in such a degree of vehemency that, in his own judgment and the judgment of others, he could not expect to be long a man of this world, little differing from the dead, yea, the damned. So David, Ps. 77:1, &c., 'I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice, and he gave ear unto me. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; my sore ran in the night and ceased not; my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled. I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak: I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient time,' &c. By the sense of God's wrath he was even wounded to death, and the sore running upon him would admit of no plaister; yea, the remembrance of God was a trouble to him: 'I remembered God, and was troubled.' What a heavy word was that! Soul troubles are the most pressing troubles; a child of God is as a lost man in such a condition.

2. In respect of the heavy weight of outward pressures. Thus David fasted, and lay all night upon the earth in his child's sickness: 2 Sam. 12:16, 17, 'David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. And the elders of his house arose, and went to him to raise him up from the earth;

but he would not: neither did he eat bread with them.' And when he was driven from his palace by Absalom, and was in danger of his life every moment (which some interpreters think to be the case intended in the text), when he went up the Mount of Olives barefoot, going and weeping: 2 Sam. 15:30, 'And David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered; and he went barefoot, and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went.'

Now the reasons of this are these—

1. To correct them for past sins. This was the cause of David's trouble, and this puts a sting into all miseries. God's children smart under their sins here in the world as well as others: Prov. 11:31, 'Behold the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth, much more the wicked and the sinner.' Recompensed in the earth, that is, punished for his sins. Compare with it 1 Peter 4:18, 'And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?' God punisheth here that he may spare for ever. He giveth some remembrance of the evil, and corrects his people, not to complete their justification, or to make more satisfaction for God's justice than Christ hath made, yet to promote their sanctification; that is, to make sin bitter to them, and to vindicate the glory of God, that he is not partial. For these reasons they are even brought to the dust by their own folly.

2. To humble them, and bring them low in the midst of their great enjoyments; therefore he casts them down even to the dust. Because we cannot keep our hearts low, therefore God maketh our condition low. This was Paul's case: 2 Cor. 1:7–9, 'And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation; for we would not, brethren, have you

ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life; but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead'—that is, not to build too securely on their own sufficiencies.

3. To try their graces, which are never tried to the life till we be near the point of death. The sincerity of our estate and the strength of faith is not discovered upon the throne so much as in the dust, if we can depend upon God in the hardest condition.

4. To awaken the spirit of prayer: 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord,' Ps. 130:1. Affliction puts an edge upon our desires. They that are flat and careless at other times are oftenest then with God.

5. To show the more of his glory, and the riches of his goodness in their recovery: Ps. 71:20, 21, 'Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.' By the greater humiliation, God prepareth us for the greater blessings. As there are multitudes of troubles to humble and try the saints, so his mercies do not come alone, but with great plenty.

Use 1. Let us bless God that we are not put to such great trials. How gentle is our exercise compared with David's case! We are weak, and God will not overburden us. There is a great deal of the wisdom and love of God seen in the measure of the cross, and in the nature and kind of it. We have no cause to say our belly cleaveth to the dust, or that we are pressed above measure. God giveth us only a gentle remembrance. If brought upon our knees, we are not brought upon our faces.

2. If this should be our case, do not count it strange. It is a usual exercise of God's people; let us therefore not be offended, but approve God's holy and wise dispensation. If there be great troubles, there have been great sins, or there will be great comforts, or for the present there are great graces. As such a dispensation is a correction, there is reason to approve it. If you be laid in the dust, have you not laid God's honour in the dust, and trampled his laws under foot? As it is a trial, you have cause to approve it; for it is but meet that when God hath planted grace in the heart, he should prove the strength of it. Therefore, if you be kept so long in your heavy condition that you seem dead, yet if you have faith to keep you alive, and patience be exercised, it is for your greater good: Rom. 5:3, 'And not only so, but we glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience;' and as affliction is an exercise for your benefit and spiritual improvement. The husbandman, when he teareth and rendeth the ground up with the plough, it is to make it more fruitful. The longer the metal is in the fire the more pure it cometh forth. Nay, sometimes you have your outward comforts with advantage after trouble: as Job 42:10–12, 'And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before; and the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.' Oh! when we are fitted to enjoy comforts we shall have them plenty enough.

Second point, That in such great and heavy troubles we should deal with God for help.

In the dust David calleth to God for quickening. The reasons of this, why in great troubles we should go to God for help, are—

1. From the inconvenience of any other course.



[1.] If the godly should smother their grief, and not go to God with it, their sorrow were able to choke them. It is no small ease that we have a God to go to, to whom we may freely open our minds. Prayer hath a pacative virtue; as Hannah, 1 Sam. 1:18, 'prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore;' and mark the event, 'The woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad,' &c. An oven stopped up is the hotter within, but vent and utterance giveth ease to the heart, if it be merely by way of complaint to a friend, without expectation of relief; much more to go to God, and lay open our case before him.

[2.] To seek our comfort elsewhere, from earthly things, it is a vain and evil course. (1.) It is vain; for God is the party with whom we have to do. In many troubles the creatures may be instruments of our woe; but the principal party is God. Strike in with him, and you stop the mischief at the head: Prov. 16:7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.' In other troubles God hath a more immediate hand, as sickness and terrors of conscience; our business then lieth not with the creatures; in sickness, not with physicians first, but with God. In troubles of spirit we are not to quench our thirst at the next ditch, but to run to the fountain of living water; not to take up with ordinary comforts; that is an attempt to break prison, and to get out of the troubles before God letteth us out. He is our party then, whoever be the instrument. (2.) It is evil that we refuse to come to God when he whippeth us into his presence, and beateth us to the throne of grace: Dan. 9:13, 'All this evil is come upon us, yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.' When men are ready to die, and will not so much as confer with the physician, they are either stupid or desperate. Afflictions summon us into his presence. God sendeth a tempest after us, as after Jonah. Now that trouble which chaseth us to God is so far a sanctified trouble.

2. The hope of relief from God, who alone can and will help us. 'He put his mouth in the dust; peradventure there is hope,' Lam. 3:29. Now this hope is from God's power and will.

[1.] His power. God can quicken us when we are as good as dead, because he is the well-spring of life and comfort. Other things give us life, but as water scaldeth when it is the instrument of heat; but God alone can help us. God is the great quickener: 'That I might trust in him that raiseth the dead;' and 'I am the resurrection and the life.'

[2.] His will. When we are humble and tractable in our afflictions—

(1.) It is some hope if we have nothing to bring before God but our grief and misery, for he is pitiful. A beggar will uncover his sore to move your bowels. So many times all the reason that a poor pitiful afflicted person can bring for himself is lamenting his case to God, how discouraged he is, and apt to faint, as David represents his case, 'My soul cleaveth to the dust;' and elsewhere, Ps. 69:29, 'But I am poor and sorrowful; let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high.' Justice seeketh a fit object, but mercy a fit occasion.

(2.) It is a greater ground of hope when we are humbled under God's hand, and have a due sense of our condition; that is, are convinced of our emptiness, weakness, nothingness, or emptied of self-conceit and carnal confidence: Deut. 32:36, 'For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left.' God's judgments are to break our carnal dependencies.

(3.) Still the hope increaseth when we acknowledge his justice and wisdom in all our troubles: Lev. 26:41, 'If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their

iniquity,' kiss the rod wherewith they are corrected, be glad it is no worse, and see that all this cometh from a just and wise God.

(4.) There is further hope when we can cast ourselves upon his faithfulness and omnipotency, in the face of all discouragements. Christ's question to the man long possessed was, Mark 9:23, 'If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.' God's power is exercised when glorified by faith and dependence.

(5.) When we submit to what may be most for his glory. Carnal prayers, though never so earnest, fail when we are too earnest upon our private end, and the means which we fancy: Ps. 115:1, 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake.'

Use. In deep calamities run to God, lay forth your case feelingly and with submission to the justice of his providence, trusting to his power, and submitting to his wisdom, without obtruding your model upon God, but leaving him to his own course; and this is the way to speed. Take heed—

1. Of a stupid carelessness under the rod. It is a time of seeking after God, a summons to the creature to come before him. Now, if we think to sport away our trouble without looking after God's comforts, it is a desperate security: Jer. 5:12, 'They have belied the Lord, and said, It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine.'

2. Take heed of despondency. The throne of grace is set up on purpose for such a time: Heb. 4:16, 'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need;' Ps. 50:15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will

deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' Open your case before the Lord.

3. Take heed of pitching too much upon outward things, either as to the time or way of deliverance. Lust is vehement; but the more you seek, the more comfortable will be the issue: Ps. 51:18, 'Do good in thy good pleasure unto Sion; build thou the walls of thy Jerusalem.'

Secondly, We come now to David's supplication or petition thereupon; where observe—

1. The request itself, quicken thou me.

2. The argument, according to thy word.

First, The request itself, 'Quicken thou me;' which noteth either the renewing of comfort or the actuation of graces, the restoring or putting life into his affairs.

1. The renewing of comfort; quicken me, revive me, or restore life to me again; and this either by outward deliverance—so quickening is used Ps. 71:20, 'Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth,' where deep trouble is compared to the grave, and deliverance a kind of resurrection or recovery from the dead—or by the letting in of inward comfort and spiritual reviving from the sense of God's love; so Ps. 80:18, 19, 'Quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts; cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.' The shining of God's face, or the sense of God's love, is the reviving of afflicted spirits.

2. The actuation of grace; there may be life where there is no vigour. Now when we are stirred up to be lively in God's service, we are said

to be quickened, as in the 19th verse of the psalm before quoted; and often it is thus used in this psalm, as ver. 37, 'Quicken thou me in thy way.' The point is this—

That God's children need often to go to God for quickening, because they often lie under deadness of heart, and therefore should desire God, who is the fountain of grace, to emit and send forth his influence.

They need this quickening—(1.) By reason of their constant weakness; (2.) Their frequent indispositions and distempers of soul.

1. Their constant weakness in this world.

[1.] By reason of their inclination to sin.

[2.] The imperfection of their motions towards that which is good.

[1.] By reason of their inclination to sin. Carnal concupiscence draweth us aside from God to sensual objects: James 1:14, 'A man is drawn away by his own lust.' There is a strong bias of corruption drawing us from Christ to present things: Heb. 12:1, 'Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.' There is a carnal affection or corrupt inclination which carrieth us out inordinately to things lawful, or too often to things unlawful; this hangeth as a weight, retarding us in all our heavenly flights and motions. The love and care of the world, which is apt to press down the soul, and doth twine about us, and insinuate with us; the apostle calleth it 'a law in his members,' Rom. 7:23, a warning to us how, when the flesh draweth us off so strongly one way, to implore the divine grace to draw us more strongly to the other.

[2.] Because of the imperfection of their motions to that which is good, though there be a purpose, bent of heart, and inclination that way. Our gyves are still about us; we feel the old maim. Grace is like a spark in wet wood, that needs continual blowing.

2. Their frequent indispositions and distempers of soul. Sometimes they feel a loathness in their souls and a shyness of God's presence; their hearts hang off; the spirit indeed is willing, but some fleshly thought or carnal excuse checketh the motion. It is God alone that can make the soul willing; he giveth both will and deed. God bendeth the unwilling will, as well as helpeth the fainting affections. Again, sometimes they find a great deadness; there is no vigour or liveliness in their affections, and they cannot follow after God with such zeal and earnestness: though there be not a formal deadness, such as usually is in the duties of hypocrites, yet there is not always the same strength and agility of grace in the children of God; their souls do not so earnestly reach after Christ. Now, what can help but divine quickening? Therefore go to God for it. We should rouse and stir up ourselves. God giveth out influences according to his will or pleasure, but we must still stir up ourselves.

But to answer a case of conscience, whether we are to do duty in case of deadness and indisposition, &c.?

1. The influence of grace is not the warrant of duty, but the help; it is the efficient assisting cause, not the ground or rule. We are to do all acts of obedience on account of God's command: Luke 5:5, 'Simon answering, said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.' God is sovereign, and we are bound to obey, whether disposed or indisposed. Should the husbandman never plough but when disposed to plough?

2. Our sinful indisposition cannot excuse us. In sins of commission, our weakness to resist temptation is no excuse. So also in sins of omission, we cannot be allowed to say, It was the Lord suffered me to sin. No more will this plea be allowed, The Lord did not quicken me to duty. Grace is as necessary to prevent sin as to perform duty. God's suspension was no excuse to Hezekiah: 2 Chron. 32:31; 'Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.' This complaint of weakness hath an ill aspect; complaining without labouring is rather a taxing of God. But—

3. Natural men are bound to pray and perform duties, therefore renewed men. That natural men are bound, see Acts 8:22, 'Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee;' and Ps. 14:2, 'The Lord looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did understand and seek God.' It is charged as a crime that they did not, but much more the renewed; for to whom more is given, of them more is required. It is another talent wherewith they are intrusted. Grace is not only donum, but talentum; grace is not given as a piece of money to a child to play withal, but as we give money to factors to trade withal for us. Now a renewed man should do more, being capable of more.

4. The outward act of a duty is commanded as well as the inward; though they come not up to the nature of a perfect duty, there is somewhat of the ordinance of Christ in them: Hosea 14:2, 'Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips.' Though I cannot do all, I must do as much as I can.

5. We are to wait humbly in the use of means for the power of his grace. When the door is shut, knocking is the only way to get it open. I will go and offer myself to God, and see what he will do for me; which is God's usual way, and to be used with the more caution and diligence, because God doth all: Phil. 2:12, 13, 'Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.' Seamen by tacking about get wind: so far as you use the means, you comply with God's end. A sad threatening there is to those that neglect the use of means, that shut the door upon themselves, or if God withdraws, are willing he should keep away.

6. Acting in spiritual duties fits us for them. *Iter ad pietatem est intra pietatem*—praying fits for praying, meditating for meditating. Frequent turning the key maketh the lock go more easy. Good dispositions make way for good dispositions, Ps. 27:14; Ps. 31:24, 'Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart.' Pluck up your spirits, strive to take courage, and then God will give you courage. To shake us out of laziness, God maketh the precept go before the promise. God biddeth us pray, though prayer be his own gift. Act as you would expect.

7. There is a supply cometh in ere we are aware: Cant. 6:12, 'Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib,' in the very work, A strange difference of temper is to be observed in David before the psalm be over: 1 Chron. 22:16, 'Arise, therefore, and be doing, and the Lord be with thee.' God will not help that man that hath legs to go, and will not.



8. We are to rouse up ourselves: Isa. 64:7, 'And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.' When we are willing to get the work over, and wrestle not for life and power in praying, we do not all we are able. The cock by clapping the wings addeth strength to the crowing. We should rouse up ourselves. We use not the bellows to a dead coal, &c.

Secondly, The next circumstance is the argument, 'According to thy word.' What word doth David mean? Either the general promises in the books of Moses or Job, which intimate deliverance to the faithful observers of God's law, or help to the miserable and distressed, or some particular promise given to him by Nathan or others. Chrysostom saith, Quicken me to live according to thy word: but it is not a word of command, but a word of promise. Mark here—

1. He doth not say, *Secundum meritum meum*, but *secundum verbum tuum*; the hope, or that help which we expect from God, is founded upon his word; there is our security, in his promises, not in our deservings—*Promittendo se fecit debitorem*, &c.

2. When there was so little scripture written, yet David could find out a word for his support. Alas! in our troubles and afflictions no promise occurreth to mind. As in outward things, many that have less live better than those that have abundance; so here. Now scripture is so large, we are less diligent, and therefore, though we have so many promises, we are apt to faint, we have not a word to bear us up.

3. This word did not help him till he had lain long under this heavy condition, so that he seemed dead. Many when they have a promise, think presently to enjoy the comfort of it. No; there is waiting and striving first necessary. We never relish the comfort of the promises

till the creatures have spent their allowance, and we have been exercised. God will keep his word, and yet we must expect to be tried.

4. In this his dead condition, faith in God's word kept him alive. When we have lost feeling, and there is nothing left us, the word will support us: Rom. 4:19, 20, 'And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb; he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.'

5. One good way to get comfort is to plead the promise to God in prayer. *Chirographa tua injiciebat tibi, Domine.* Show him his handwriting; God is tender of his word. These arguings in prayer are not to work upon God, but ourselves.

Use. Well, then, let us thus deal with God, looking to him in the sense of our own weakness, praying often to God for quickening, as David doth in the text. God keepeth grace in his own hands, and dispenseth it at his pleasure, that he may often hear from us, and that we may renew our dependence upon him. It is pleasing to him when we desire him to renew his work, and bring forth the actings of grace in their vigour and lustre. And let us acknowledge divine grace if there be strong actings of faith and love towards God. He is to be owned in his work.

## SERMON XXVII

**I have declared my ways, and thou  
heardest me; teach me thy statutes.—**

**VER. 26.**

IN this verse you have three things:—

1. David's open and free dealing with God, I have declared my ways.
2. God's gracious dealing with David, and thou heardest me.
3. A petition for continuance of the like favour, teach me thy statutes.

First, For the first, 'I have declared my ways;' that is, distinctly and without hypocrisy laid open the state of my heart and course of my affairs to thee, note—

Doct. They that would speed with God should learn this point of Christian ingenuity, unfeignedly to lay open their whole case to him; that is, to declare what they are about, the nature of their affairs, the state of their hearts, what of good or evil they find in themselves, their conflicts, supplies, distresses, hopes; that is declaring our ways; the good and evil we are conscious to. As a sick patient will tell the physician how it is with him, so should we deal with God if we would find mercy. This declaring his ways may be looked upon—

1. As an act of faith and dependence.
2. As an act of holy friendship.
3. As an act of spiritual contrition and brokenness of heart; for this declaring must be explained according to the sense of the object of what David means by this expression, 'My ways.'

First, His businesses or undertakings; I have still made them known to thee, committing them to the direction of thy providence; and so it is an act of faith and dependence, consulting with God, and acquainting him with all our desires. This is necessary—

1. That we may acknowledge the sovereignty of his providence and dominion over all events: Prov. 16:9, 'A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.' Man proposeth, but God disposeth, and carrieth on the event either further than we intended, or else contrary to what we intended.

2. We must declare our ways to God that we may take God along with us in all our actions, that we may ask his leave, counsel, blessing: Prov. 3:6, 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' There is a twofold direction, one of God's providence, the other of his counsel. The direction of his providence, that is understood: Prov. 16:9, 'A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.' But then there is the direction of his counsel, and the latter is promised here; if we acknowledge God and declare our ways to him, God will counsel us. And David did thus declare his way upon all occasions: 2 Sam. 2:1, 'David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?' It is a piece of religious manners to begin every business with God; to go to God, Lord, shall I do so, or shall I not? to desire him that is Lord of all to give us leave; who is the fountain of wisdom, to give us counsel; and the disposer of all events, to give us a blessing.

3. The declaring of our ways is necessary, that we may be sensible of God's eye that is upon us, and so act the more sincerely. Certainly it is a great advantage to make God conscious to every business we have in hand, when we dare undertake nothing but what we would acquaint him withal. There are some to whom the prophet pronounceth a woe: Isa. 29:15, 'Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?' For the opening of this place, surely none can seriously be so vain, and grow up to such sottish atheism, as to think to hide a thing from God; but they

are loath solemnly to draw it forth in the view of conscience, to revive a sense of God's omniscience upon themselves. We are said to deny that which many times we forget and will not think of. So that those which hide their counsels from God are those that will not take God along with them. In short, this declaration is not necessary for God, who 'knows our thoughts afar off,' Ps. 139:2; not only our words and works, but purposes, before we begin to lift up a thought that way. But this declaration is necessary for us, to increase the awe of God upon our heart, and that we may undertake nothing but what we will solemnly acquaint the Lord with. Well, then, this declaring our ways is an act of dependence.

Secondly, By his ways may be meant all his straits, sorrows, and dangers; and so this declaring it is an act of holy friendship, when a man comes as one friend to another, and acquaints God with his whole state, lays his condition before the Lord, in hope of pity and relief. We have liberty to do so, to tell God all our mind: Heb. 10:19, 'Let us come with boldness, by the blood of Jesus;' and Heb. 4:16. The word signifies, with liberty of speech, speaking all to God, your whole state and condition; if you have any sins to be pardoned, any miseries to be redressed; that where you are doubtful, you may be helped by God's counsel, where you are weak, you may be confirmed by his strength, where you are sinful, you may be pitied by his mercy, where you are miserable, you may be delivered by his power. This is holy friendship, to acquaint God with our doubts, wants, griefs, and fears; and we may do it with more confidence, because we go to him in Christ's name: John 16:23, 'Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, it shall be granted unto you.' It is no fiction or strain, but a real truth. Will Christ deceive us when he saith, Verily? And then whatsoever you ask? You have liberty to go to God for the removal of any fear, the granting any regular desire, or for satisfying any doubt: 'Whatsoever you ask the Father in my name.' Our prayers by this

means are Christ's request as well as ours. For instance, if you send a child or servant to a friend for anything in your name, the request is yours, and he that denies a child or servant denies you; so saith Christ, Go to the Father in my name. God cannot deny a request in Christ's name, no more than he can deny Christ himself; therefore you may use a holy boldness.

Thirdly, By ways is meant temptations and sins; and so this declaring is an act of spiritual contrition or brokenness of heart. Sins, they are properly our ways; as Ezek. 18:25, the Lord makes a distinction between my ways and your ways. God hath his ways, and we ours. Our ways are properly our sins. Now these, saith David, I will declare, that is, distinctly lay them open before God. This is a part of our duty, with brokenness of heart to declare our ways, to acquaint God fully how it is with us, without dissembling anything. It is a duty very displeasing to flesh and blood; natural pride and self-love will not let us take shame upon ourselves; and out of carnal ease and laziness we are loath to submit to such a troublesome course, and thus openly to declare our ways. Guilt is shy of God's presence, and sin works a strangeness. Adam hid himself when God came into the garden; and when he could shift no longer, he will not declare it, but transfers the fault upon Eve, and obliquely upon God himself; and ever since there are many tergiversations in man's heart; and therefore it is said, Job 31:33, 'If I have covered my sin as did Adam.' Junius renders it more hominum—after the manner of men; but Adam's name is used because we show ourselves to be right Adam's race, apt to cover our sins. The same expression we have Hosea 6:7, 'But they like men have transgressed the covenant.' In the Hebrew it is, like Adam; so, if I covered my sin as did Adam, this is the fashion of men. Now, David brought his heart to this resolution with much struggling: Ps. 32:5, 'I said, I will confess my sins;' he forced himself, and thrust his backward heart forward by a strong resolution; for we

are loath to deal thus openly, plainly, and truly with God, being shy of his presence, and would fain keep the devil's counsel, and come with our iniquity in our bosom. But though this is a troublesome displeasing exercise to flesh and blood, yet it is profitable and necessary for us thus to declare our ways.

1. Because it is made to be one of the conditions of pardon, and the act of repentance that is necessary to the pardon of sin: Prov. 28:13, 'He that hideth his sins shall not prosper; but he that confesseth and forsakes them, shall find mercy;' so it runs. And 1 John 1:9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.' God's justice is satisfied by Christ, but it must be glorified and owned by us. So Jer. 3:13, 'I am merciful, saith the Lord: only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God.' God hath mercy enough to pardon all, only he will have it sued out his own way, he will have his mercy asked upon our knees; and have the creature stoop and submit. And David, Ps. 51:3, 'I acknowledge my transgression.'

2. It is the only means to have our peace settled. If you would not have your trouble and anxious thoughts continued upon you, go open yourselves to God, declare your ways: Ps. 32:5, 'I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.' As soon as David did but take up a resolution, presently he felt the comfort of it. If David had confessed sooner, he had come to his ease sooner. Distress of conscience is continued upon us until this be done; and especially is this found by experience, when great trouble comes upon us by reason of sin. There is some sin at the bottom God will bring out; and until they come to clearness and openness with God, the Lord still continues the trouble; they are kept roaring, and do not come to their peace, Job 33:26, 27. When a man is under trouble, and the sense of sin doth not fasten on the

heart, he is not prepared for deliverance; but when it comes to this, 'I have sinned, and it profits me not,' then God sends 'an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness.'

3. It prevents Satan's accusations and God's judgments. It is no profit to cover our sins, for either Satan will declare them, or God find us out, and enter into judgment with us. It prevents Satan as an accuser and God as a judge.

[1.] It prevents Satan as an accuser. Let us not tarry till our adversary accuse. There is one that will accuse you if you do not accuse yourselves. He that is a tempter is also an accuser of the brethren. Now confession puts Satan out of office. When we have sued out our pardon, Satan is not an accuser so much as a slanderer: Rom. 8:33, 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?' The informer comes too late when the guilty person hath accused himself, and sued out his pardon. And—

[2.] It prevents God as a judge. It is all known to God: Ps. 69:5, 'O God! thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from thee.' It is a folly to conceal that which cannot be hid. God knows them. How? God may be said to know things two ways—either simply with respect to the perfection of his nature, and so he knows all things; or by virtue of his office, and so God knows things judicially as judge of the world; he takes knowledge of it so as to punish it, unless you confess it. But in this kind of knowledge he loves to be prevented; he will not know it as a judge if we confess it, when there is process against sin in our own consciences: 1 Cor. 11:31, 'If we judge ourselves we shall not be judged.' When we accuse and judge ourselves, then God's work is prevented. God is contented if we will accuse, arraign, judge, and condemn ourselves; then he will not take knowledge of our sins as a judge. The end of God's judging is



execution and punishment, but the end of our judging is that we may obtain pardon. Now, consider whether you will stand at the bar of Christ, not as a Saviour, but as a judge; or will judge yourselves in your own heart? Better sit as judge upon your own heart than God should sit as judge upon you; therefore deal plainly and openly with him.

Thus I have explained what it is to declare our ways; it is an act of dependence to take God's leave, blessing, counsel along with us; an act of friendship, as to lay open our case to God; and an act of brokenness of heart, as declaring our sins and temptations.

For the reasons why, if we would speed with God, we should unfeignedly lay open our case before him.

1. It argueth sincerity. A hypocrite will pray, but will not thus sincerely open his heart to God: Ps. 32:1. 'Blessed is he in whose spirit there is no guile.' No guile; it hath a limited sense with respect to the matter of confession, that doth not deal deceitfully with God, but plainly and openly declares his case. Many ways men may be guilty of guile of spirit in confession of sin; either when they content themselves with general or slight acknowledgments; as thus, We are all sinners; but they do not declare their ways. Generals are but notions; and as particular persons are lost in a crowd, so sins lie hid in common acknowledgments. Or else men take up the empty forms of others. You shall see in Numbers 19 the waters of purification wherewith a man had been cleansed, if another touched them, he became unclean. Confessions are like those waters whereby one hath cleansed himself. Now to take up others' confessions, and the forms of others, without the same affection, feeling, and brokenness of heart, doth but defile us the more, when the heart doth not prescribe to the tongue but the tongue to the heart. Or else men make some

acknowledgments to God, but do not uncover their privy sore; they are loath to draw forth the state of their hearts into the notice and view of conscience. This guile of spirit may be sometimes in God's children. Moses had a privy sore which he was loath to disclose; and therefore when God would have sent him into Egypt, he pleads other things, insufficiency, want of elocution, that he was a stammerer, that he had not utterance. Ay! but his carnal fear was the main; therefore see how God touches his privy sore: Exod. 4:19, 'Arise, Moses; go into Egypt: the men that sought thy life are dead.' Why, Moses never pleaded that; he mentions other things that were true, that he was a man of slow speech, and his brother Aaron was fitter; but he never pleads carnal fear: but the Lord knew what was at the bottom. So it is with Christians; many times we will confess this and that which is a truth, and we may humble ourselves for it. Ay! but there is a privy sore yet kept secret. Therefore this open dealing with God is very necessary to lay open before God whatever we know of our state and way, for then God will be nigh to us. Out of self-love men spare themselves, and will not judge and condemn themselves; therefore they deny, excuse, extenuate, or hypocritically confess, Oh, I am a sinner! and the like, but do not come openly.

2. It argueth somewhat of the spirit of adoption to put in the bill of our complaint to our heavenly father, to draw up an indictment against ourselves. To judge, that is irksome; but to put in a bill of complaint to a friend, or father, that savours of more ingenuity. To tell God all our mind notes freedom and familiarity; not such as is bold, rude, nor a dress of words; but such as is grave, serious, proceeding from an inward sense of God, and hope of his mercy: 1 John 3:21, 'If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God;' then we can deal with him as one friend with another, and acquaint him with all our griefs and wants. A man had need walk exactly that would maintain his freedom with God. There is a

freedom, as men may call it, such as is bold, rude, and reckless, in words only; but that which proceeds from confidence in God and his mercy, that is a fruit' of close walking; we cannot have it in our hearts without it.

3. It is the way to make us serious and affected with our condition. When we open our whole heart to God, then we shall be more earnest for a remedy; we content ourselves with some transient glances, and imperfect knowledge of our estate, and so are not affected as we should; a particular view of things most works with us. Look, as Christ, the more particularly he is set forth, the more taking is the object; when the lump of sweetness is dissolved, then it is tasted. The more particularly we pry into our estate, the more we are affected, and the more we shall see of the deceitfulness of our own hearts: 'When every one shall know his own sore and grief,' 2 Chron. 6:29.

4. It will be of great advantage in the spiritual life to declare often our whole estate to God; for the more men know themselves the more they mind God and their heavenly calling. Those men that make conscience of declaring themselves to God will ever find lusts to be mortified, doubts to be resolved, graces to be strengthened. A man that doth not look after his estate, it runs into decay insensibly before he is aware; so when men grow negligent of their hearts, and never think of giving an account to God, all runs to waste in the soul. Searching and self-examining Christians will be the most serious Christians; for as they have a more distinct affective sense of their condition, so they always find more work to do in the spiritual life. They come to know what are their sins, and assaults, and conflicts, and what further strength they may have in the way of holiness; and by this account they are engaged to walk more exactly, that they may not provide matter against themselves: 1 Peter 3:7, 'That their

prayers be not hindered;' that they may look God in the face with more confidence.

Use. 1. Let us clearly and openly declare our condition to the Lord, our griefs and sorrows, and so our sins.

1. Our griefs and sorrows. Two things will quicken you to this:—The inconvenience of any other way. What will you do? If you swallow your griefs, that will oppress the heart. The more we unbosom ourselves to a friend, the more we find ease; vent and utterance doth lessen our passion. An oven stopped up is hotter within. So the more close we are, the more we keep our own counsel, the greater is our burden. Look, as wind when it is imprisoned in the caverns of the earth causeth violent convulsions and earthquakes, but if it find vent all is quiet, so it is with the heart; when troubles are kept close, then they become the greater burden, they make the heart stormy, full of discontent; but when we open ourselves, as Hannah did her case to God, 1 Sam. 1:8, we are no more sad; or if we go to anything on this side God, our troubles increase. When a man hath sorrow upon his heart, it is not the next ditch will yield him refreshing and comfort, but he must go to the fountain of living water. If we be afraid of an enemy without, our business is to strike in with God: Prov. 16:7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.' God hath the command of all things; he is first to be treated with, then there is hope and relief in God. When we are humble and tractable in our affliction, when we come and represent our case to him, the very thing gives us some hope; for the Lord doth all out of mercy. Therefore the very representing our misery, as David: Ps. 69:29, 'But I am poor and sorrowful;' that we are in a miserable forlorn condition; if you have nothing else to plead, this is that which moves God, and works upon his bowels. Look, as beggars to move pity will uncover their sores, that as it were by a silent

oratory they may extort and draw forth relief from you; so go to the Lord and acquaint him with your condition; some hope will arise hence. Lord, I am weak and poor, deliver me; that is all the argument.

2. As to sins, let me tell you, go to God with clearness and openness; reveal your whole state, tell him what are your temptations and conflicts, and how your heart works. Though he knows it already by his own omniscency, yet let him know it by your own acknowledgments. Let him not know it as a judge, take notice of it so as to punish you; but go deal plainly, and confess your sins. To this end—

[1.] There will be need of light, that you may be able to judge of things: Heb. 5:14, 'They have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.' When a man hath not only a speculative knowledge, but hath his senses exercised, able to judge of the workings of his own heart, he can discern what is of flesh and what is of spirit, and so can give an account to God. When we have not only some naked theory, we shall be able to see what is a temptation, where our help, and where our weakness lies.

[2.] There needs observation of the workings of our own hearts. A man that would give an account to God need to observe himself narrowly, and keep his heart above all keepings. David, that saith here, I declared my ways, saith elsewhere, I considered my ways. It is but a formal account we can give without serious consideration; we must therefore 'keep our hearts with all diligence,' Prov. 4:23.

[3.] There needs in many cases a serious search. For instance, in deep desertion, when God withdraws the light of his countenance, and men have not those wonted influences of grace, those glimpses of favour, and quickenings of spirit, and enlargings of heart: Ps. 77:6,

'I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search.' When under any despair of soul, trace it to its original cause: Wherein have I grieved the Spirit of God? So Lam. 3:40, 'Let us search and try our ways.' There needs a very distinct and serious inquiry into the state of our souls, that we may deal ingenuously with God, and lay open ourselves before him.

Secondly, The second clause, and the Lord heard me.

Doct. After an ingenuous and open declaration of ourselves to God, we find audience with him.

So did David, and so do all the saints. He was never yet wanting to his people that deals sincerely with him in prayer. How doth God manifest his audience? Either inwardly by the Spirit, or outwardly by providence.

First, Inwardly by his Spirit, when he begets a persuasion of their acceptance with God, leaves an impression of confidence upon their hearts, and a quietness in looking for the thing they had asked. Before they have an answer of providence, they have a persuasion of heart that their prayer hath been accepted. There is a great deal of difference between accepting a prayer and granting a prayer. God's acceptance is as soon as we pray, but the thing we beg for is another thing and distinct: 1 John 5:14, 15, 'This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.' God's hearing of us, his audience, is a distinct thing from the answer of his providence; and therefore when he begets a confidence that we are heard, and the soul begins to be quieted in God and look up for mercy, it is a sign of his accepting our prayer, though the benefit be not actually

bestowed. David found a change in his heart many times, as if one had come and told him the posture of his affairs was altered. It is otherwise with you than it was when you began to pray; therefore you have him in the beginning of a psalm come in with bitter complaints and groaning; his eyes were ready to drop out with grief, and presently he breaks out with thanksgiving, as Ps. 6:8, 9, 'Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies.' Presently, 'Depart from me all ye workers of iniquity, for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.' So Hannah, she had commended her request to God, and was no more sad, 1 Sam. 1:16. That is one way of answer; when we have declared ourselves to the Lord, the heart looks out to see what will come of its prayers; it begins to rest, and is quiet in God, and looks for some answer of the mercy.

The second consideration, that the outward mercy in his providence is either in kind or in value. God doth not always answer us in kind, by giving us the thing asked; but doth give us something that is as good or better, which contents the heart, by denying the thing desired, and giving something equivalent. Many times we ask temporal mercies, defence, victory, deliverance, and God gives spiritual; we ask deliverance and God gives patience, 2 Cor. 12:8, 9. Paul asked thrice that the thorn in the flesh might depart from him; but God gives him sufficient grace. God doth not answer us always according to our will, but certainly according to our weal and profit. Many times he will give the blessing in kind, but at other times he gives the value of it, which is better. God may give temporal comfort in kind, in anger; but the value, the blessing, he never gives in anger, but always in love. When they asked meat for their lusts, God gave it in kind, in anger, Ps. 78: 'And I gave them a king in my wrath,' Hosea 13:11. When we are passionate and eager upon a temporal request,

God doth answer in wrath; the mercy is more when he gives us that which is better.

Thirdly, God delays many times when he doth not deny, for our exercise.

1. To exercise our faith, to see if we can believe in him when we see nothing, have no sensible proof of his good-will to us. The woman of Canaan she comes to Christ, and first gets not a word from him—Christ 'answered her nothing;' afterwards Christ breaks off his silence, and begins to speak, and his speech was more discouraging than his silence. She meets with a rough answer: 'It is not meet to give the children's bread unto dogs.' Then the woman turns this rebuke into an encouragement, 'Lord, the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table.' Then Christ could hold no longer: 'O woman! great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt,' Mat. 15. So many times we come to God and meet with a silent oracle, cannot get an answer; but if we get an answer, it may be we begin to think God puts us off, as none of the sheep he is to look after. Oh! but when we wrestle through all these discouragements and temptations, then 'great is thy faith.' In short, we pray for a blessing; and sometimes, though God love the suppliant, yet he doth not seem to take notice of his desires, that he may humble him to the dust, and may have a sense of his unworthiness, and pick an answer out of God's silence, and grant out of his denial, and faith out of these discouragements.

2. To exercise our patience: Heb. 6:12, 'Be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' Our times are always present with us, but God's time is not yet come. A hungry stomach would have meat before it is roasted or sod. Impatient longings must have green fruit, and will not stay till it be matured



and ripened. Now God will work us out of this impatience. The troubles of the world are necessary for patience as well as faith.

3. To try our love. Though we be not feasted with felt comforts and present benefits, yet God will try the deportment of his children, if indeed he be the delight of their hearts: Isa. 26:8, 'Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee.' When we love God, not only when our affections are bribed by some sensible experience or comfort, but when we can love God in the way of his judgments. A child of God is a strange creature; he can love God for his judgments, and fear him for his mercies. When our heart is like lime, the more water you sprinkle upon it, the more it burns; our desires glow the more, the more disappointments we seem to meet with. We love his benefits more than we love God, when we delight in him only when he doth us good. But when we can delight in him even when our desires are delayed, and nothing appears but tokens of God's displeasure, this is delight indeed.

4. To enlarge our desires, that we may have a greater income of his mercy, as a sack that is stretched out holds the more. God will have the soul more stretched out when he means to fill it up with grace. Delays increase importunities: 'Ask, seek, knock,' Mat. 7. If God will not come at the first asking, we must seek; if seeking will not bring him, we must knock, be importunate, have no Nay: Luke 11:8, 'For his importunity sake he will arise.' The man is impudent; he stands knocking, and will not be gone.

Fourthly, God may seem sometimes to deny a request, yet the end of the request is accomplished. For instance, God's children they have an end in their requests; we pray for the means with respect to an end. Now many times God gives the end when he will deny the means. Paul had grace sufficient, though the thorn in his flesh were

not removed, 2 Cor. 12:9. A Christian prays for the light of God's countenance, for sensible feeling of God's love. Why? To strengthen him in his way. Now God denies him comfort, because he will do it by the word of promise, it shall not be by sensible comfort. We pray for victory over such a lust, the mortification of such a sin. Why? That we may serve God more cheerfully. God denies such a degree of grace, because he will mortify a greater sin, which is pride in the heart. And thus we miss the particular that we desire, yet still we have the end of the request. We pray for giving success to such an enterprise. Why? That we may serve God safely. God will bring it about another way.

Fifthly, If God do not give us the blessings themselves we ask, yet he gives us many experiences by the by in the manner of asking; one way or other something comes into the soul by praying to God; as those in Ps. 84, their end was to go to Jerusalem, but in passing through the valley of Baca, they met with a well by the way. So we meet with something by the way, some light, or some sweet refreshing, some new consideration to set us a-work in the spiritual life. By praying to God, unawares, unthought of by you, there are many principles of faith drawn forth in the view of conscience not noted before, some truth or other presented to the heart, or some spiritual benefit that comes in with fresh light and power, that was never aimed at by us.

Use 1. If God be so ready to hear his people, let us not throw away our prayers as children shoot away their arrows; but let us observe God's answer, what comes in upon every prayer. In every address you make to God, put the soul in a posture of expectation: Ps. 5:3, 'I will pray and look up;' and Ps. 85:8, 'I will hear what God the Lord will speak; for he will speak peace unto his people.' see what God speaks when you have been praying and calling upon him. It argues a

slight formal spirit when you do not observe what comes in upon your addresses. To quicken you to this, know—

1. If you observe not his answer, God loseth a great deal of honour and praise; for it is said, Ps. 50:15, 'Call upon me in time of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' Every answer of prayer makes for the glory of God; and Col. 4:2, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.' You are not only to see how your hearts are carried out in prayer, but watch for God's answer, that you may gather matter of praise. We should not be so barren in gratulation as usually we are, if we were as ready to observe our experiences as to lay forth our necessities.

2. You lose many an argument of trust and confidence. Answer of prayer are an argument against atheism, which is so natural to us, and inbred in our hearts; it persuades us that there is a gracious being: Ps. 65:2, 'O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' We have called upon him, and found that there is a God, and against the natural unbelief which doubts of his truth in his promises: Ps. 18:30, 'The word of the Lord is a tried word; he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.' Well, saith the soul, I will build upon it another time; there is more than letters and syllables in it; there is something that speaks God's heart. So Ps. 116:2, 'The Lord hath heard my voice and my supplications: because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.' Promises shall not lie by as a dead stock; I will be pleading them.

3. It increaseth our love to God. When we see how mindful he is of us, and kind to us in our necessities, it is a very taking thing. Visits maintain friendship; so when God is mindful of us, it maintains an intercourse between God and us: Ps. 116:1, 'I love the Lord, because he hath heard my supplications.' Therefore observe what comes in

upon your prayers, especially when your hearts are earnestly carried out by the impulses of his grace.

Use 2. To admire the goodness of God to poor creatures, that he should be at leisure to attend our requests: 'I declared my ways, and he heard me.' When a poor soul, that is of no regard among men, shall come with conflicts and temptations, and the Lord presently hear him, it renders his grace truly admirable: Ps. 34:6, 'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.' He doth not say, this eminent prophet or this great king, but this poor man. Oh, that such contemptible persons as we should have such audience! For great ones here in the world to let a poor man tell his tale at large, that would be counted great patience, much more if he finds relief in the case. But beyond all this, observe the goodness of God. The more we declare our ways, the sooner doth he hear us; he doth not turn away from us when we tell him plainly we cannot believe in him, or trust in him. Come to a man and tell him, You have made me great promises, but I cannot believe you speak truth—this will provoke him; but when you come to the Lord and say, Lord, thou hast made a great many promises; though we cannot trust as we should, yet we have declared our sins, conflicts, temptations, yet, Lord, pity our weakness.

Thirdly, Here is his petition, 'Teach me thy statutes.'

First, I observe, David having been once heard of God expects to be heard in the like manner again. Here, 'Thou hast heard me;' and then comes with a new request, 'Teach me thy statutes.'

Doct. 1. Those that have sped with God in one address, they will be dealing with God for more mercy; for so doth David. The reason is—

1. Because God is where he was at first; he is not weary by giving, nor doth waste by giving; but what he hath done that he can do, and will do still. I AM is God's name; not I was, or will be; for ever remaining in the same constant tenor of goodness and power. His providence is still new and fresh every morning. God is but one, always like himself. He hath not so spent himself but he can work again. Creatures have soon spent their allowance, but God cannot be exhausted. There is no decay of love or power in him, no wrinkle in the brow of eternity. There was, is, and will be a God.

2. Experience breeds confidence. The apostle teacheth us so, Rom. 5:4. When we have had former experience of God's readiness to hear us, it is an argument that breeds confidence of the like audience for the future. 'He that delivered me out of the mouth of the lion,' &c. God, that hath been gracious, surely will be gracious still, for then promises are sensibly confirmed, and then former mercies are pledges of future. By giving, God becomes a debtor: Mat. 6:25, 'Is not life more than meat, and the body than raiment?' Our Saviour's argument was this, If God give life, he will give food; if a body, he will give raiment. If he hath given grace, the earnest of the Spirit, he will give glory. If he hath given us Christ, he will give us other things together with him. If he hath begun with us, he will end with us, Phil. 1:6. One mercy is the pledge of another.

3. We are endeared to God not only by acts of duty, but by every act of mercy. What is the argument he urgeth for Sion: Zech. 3:2, 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? The Lord rebuke thee, Satan.' Have not I delivered Sion, and shall I suffer that to be destroyed which I have delivered? The Lord urgeth his own mercy and his former kindness.

Use. To quicken us not to grow weary of dealing with God. Let us go often to God. Men think it an uncivil importunity to be required to do more when they have done already; Solomon gives us that advice, Prov. 25:17, 'Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house, lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.' Men waste by giving, but God doth not; when you have been with him, and he hath done liberally for you, yet he upbraids you not. God, that hath vouchsafed grace, you may desire the continuance of his grace, and to crown his own grace.

Secondly, Observe, the mercy which he asks is God's help in a course of holiness, namely, to walk worthy of the mercy.

Doct. 2. They that upon declaring their ways have found mercy with God, their care should be to walk worthy of the mercy.

The Lord hath heard me. What then? 'Teach me thy statutes.' So Ps. 85:8, 'The Lord will speak peace to his people, but let them no more return unto folly.' Mark, when God hath spoken peace, when they have an answer of peace, after you have prayed to God, take heed of turning to folly; do not lose the favour you have got; walk more holily and more worthy of such a mercy: Mat. 6:12, 'Forgive us our sins.' What then? 'Lead us not into temptation.' Upon supposition the Lord hath forgiven us our sins, oh! let us not sin again. Many would invite God to favour their ways when they have no respect to his ways, which is in effect to make God a servant to our lust; but if you would have mercy from the Lord, beg that you might walk worthy of the mercy. The children of God should do so upon a double ground—in point of prudence and thankfulness. In point of prudence, as they have smarted under their former folly; and in point of thankfulness, as they have tasted the Lord's grace in his answer.

1. When you have declared your way with brokenness and bitterness of heart, you have experience of the evil of sin; and when you know how bitter it is by sound remorse, it is folly to return to it again: Josh. 22:17, mark the reason, 'Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed unto this day?' Our former sense of the evil of sin when declaring it should be a restraint to us, else your cure is in vain. A man that is recovered out of a deep disease is willing to escape the like again; or, as Christ said to the man that had an infirmity thirty-eight years, 'Go thy way, sin no more, lest a worse thing happen unto thee.' When a man hath had the bitter sense of the fruit of sin, this will make him more cautious for the future. They are foolish children that remember beating no longer than it smarts, when they are scarce yet whole of the old wound. Though God hath taken out the sting of the sin, and granted us comfort, yet remember your former smart, that you may not fall into it again.

2. Out of thankfulness for God's gracious answer. Every answer of grace leaves an obligation upon the sinner that he may not offend God again. See what a holy argument is used, Ezra 9:13, 'Should we after such a deliverance as this break thy commandment?' Will you again relapse? So Luke 7:47, 'For her sins are forgiven her, therefore she loved much.' Grace melts the heart. When a man hath received much mercy from God, his heart is wrought out into thankfulness; and the more they have been in sin, the more will they be in godliness when once they have tasted the sweetness of pardon, and had an answer of grace from God.

Thirdly, Note, they that would steer their course according to God's holy will had need of the conduct and assistance of his Holy Spirit; for he goes to God, 'Lord, teach me thy statutes,' Ps. 25:4; 'Show me thy ways, O Lord, teach me thy paths;' and Ps. 27:11, 'Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies;'

and Ps. 86:11, 'Teach me thy way, O Lord, I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.' These places show that he addressed himself to God that he might not follow any sinful course in the time of trouble and temptation, that he might not dishonour God.

## SERMON XXVIII

### **Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.—VER. 27.**

IN the former verses the man of God layeth forth his calamitous condition, and beggeth comfort and audience, not merely to prosper his affairs, but to better his heart. Many will invite God to favour their ways when they have no respect to his ways, which in effect is to make him a servant to their lusts. But David's chiefest care was about duty rather than success; therefore he desireth God to direct him how to walk in the way of his precepts; his heart was much upon that.

In the close of the former verse he had said, 'Teach me thy statutes;' and here again, 'Make me to understand the way of thy precepts,' &c.

In the words there is—(1.) A request; (2.) An argument. Wherein is intimated—(1st.) The fruit of divine illumination; he should thereby see his wondrous works. (2d.) His duty thereupon; then will I talk of them. The word signifieth also to meditate. Sept.—I will exercise myself. It should be his delight to think and speak of the admirable goodness of God, and the divine excellencies of his word, and the pleasures that result from the practice of it. (3d.) He intimateth the



sincerity of his desire, propounding this as his end, That I may talk; that I may be useful and edifying in my converse with others.

The first thing that I shall observe is, that David doth so often beg again and again for understanding.

Doct. That a sound and saving knowledge of the truths of the gospel is such a blessing as the children and people of God think they can never enough ask of him.

We have abundant proof of it in so much of this psalm as we have already gone over.

First, What is a sound saving knowledge?

1. Such as doth establish the heart against all delusions, and keepeth us on truth's side. Many have some scraps of knowledge, loose and uncertain motions, but they are not settled and grounded in the truth, and therefore the unlearned and unstable are joined together: 2 Peter 3:16, 'Which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction.' Unskilful and unsettled Christians lie open to every fancy; they have not such a stock of truth as may keep them savoury and sound in the faith. To be able to prattle a little in religion is not sound knowledge, but we must be 'grounded and settled in the faith,' Col. 1:23; that is, have not only some floating opinion, but well-grounded persuasion of the truth, so as we know we are upon firm ground, and dare venture our souls upon it, and may build surely and safely upon such principles. He calleth it elsewhere, Col. 2:2, 'The riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.' When men rest contented with obvious truths, or a slight knowledge of the common and easy principles of Christianity, there is not such an awe upon their practice, nor any

establishment of their judgments, but, like light chaff, they are soon carried with the blasts of temptation, and the winds of error. And therefore we need to ask again and again, 'Give me an understanding of the way of thy precepts.'

2. A sound saving knowledge is such as causeth the soul to lie under the dominion, life, and power of the truth, and aweth and commandeth the heart into obedience: John 8:32, 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free;' when our knowledge freeth us from the slavery of sin. In others, that content themselves with a naked knowledge, truth is held captive, and cannot break out with any sovereignty in their conversations: Rom. 1:18, 'Holding the truth in unrighteousness.' Lust beareth sway, but truth lieth under fetters and restraint; it may talk its fill, like a man in bonds, but it can do nothing.

3. When it giveth us prudence how to practise. This is that which David beggeth of God, to understand the way of his precepts; that is, to be taught how to walk in each duty and point of conversation, after what sort he may live and direct his life. It is not sufficient to know the meaning of the word in general, to have a notional understanding of it; but to reduce it to practice, where, and when, and how we ought to perform each action. Some have a naked model of truth, are wise in generals, but fail in the application of the rule, and are to seek in the ordering of their steps, and all particular cases: 1 Peter 3:7, 'Husbands, dwell with your wives as men of knowledge.' Then is a man a man of knowledge when he knoweth how to order the passages of his life in every relation according to the will of God. The narrow way of obedience is hardly found, hardly kept, and easily mistaken, especially where prejudices, lusts, and interests, are apt to pervert us. Therefore prudence to apply the rule is necessary: Ps. 119:33, 'Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, that I may keep it

to the end;' not only in the general points of faith and godliness, but that it may season all our actions, that we may be made partakers of the sweet refreshments that flow from it; such a knowledge as endeth in a taste: 1 Peter 3:2, 3, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby, if so be ye have tasted,' &c. So Ps. 19:8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;' when we do so approve and follow the Lord's directions that we experience the sweetness, and are acquainted with the peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; such an understanding as begets judgment and feeling, or maketh us to find power and comfort in the word.

Secondly, The children of God think this can never be enough asked of God. Why?

1. Because of the excellency of knowledge: 'Light is comfortable, and it is a pleasant thing to behold the sun,' much more the light of the gospel shining in upon our minds. Oh, what a pleasant thing is that, when all clouds vanish, and the truths of God are fully cleared up to the soul! None knoweth the sweetness of it but he that hath experienced it: Prov. 24:13, 14, 'My son, eat thou honey because it is good, and the honeycomb which is sweet to thy taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul, when thou hast found it.' The more perfect the operation of any faculty of the soul is, the greater the contentment. The conscience in the feeling of God's love, the heart when it findeth liberty in the ways of God, and the understanding upon the sight of the truth, cause all doubts and scruples to vanish. Therefore certainly they that know anything of God will be pressing to know more of his nature and will; one degree draweth on another. Moses desireth God, 'Tell me thy name,' Exod. 3:13, 14. Then 'Show me thy glory,' Exod. 33:18. 'And he said, I beseech thee show me thy glory.' And Hosea 6:3, 'Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.' They are not cloyed, but

desire more. The more men know the things of God, the more they admire them; the more they admire them, the more they love them; and the more they love them, the more they desire to know of them. And therefore do they insist so much upon this request, 'Make me to understand the way of thy precepts.'

2. Because of the vastness and latitude of it. Knowledge is a growing thing; religion cannot be taken up all at once. We receive a little now, and a little anon; as narrow-mouthed vessels take in things drop by drop. We read of Jesus Christ, that he grew in knowledge: we do not read that he grew in grace: Luke 2:52, 'He increased in wisdom and stature;' as his body increased in stature, so his soul in wisdom. And still Christians are growing in knowledge, and understand more of the mysteries of the gospel. Though speculative knowledge may be at a stand, and a man may see round about the compass of revealed truths, yet practical knowledge is never at a stand. Directive, affective, operative knowledge is never at a stand, but increaseth daily. And therefore the apostle saith, 'He that thinketh he knoweth anything, knoweth nothing as he ought to know,' 1 Cor. 8:2. Many think they know as much as can be taught them; surely they have no experience.

3. Natural blindness is an obstinate disease, and hardly cured; therefore again and again we had need to pray, Open mine eys, teach me thy statutes, make me to understand the way of thy precepts. Our ignorance is great when it is cured in part. The clouds of temptation and carnal affection cause it to return upon us, so that we know not what we know. Therefore 'open my eyes, cause me to understand.' Yea, the more we know, the more is our ignorance discovered to us: Prov. 30:2, 3, 'Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man: I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy;' Job 42:5, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing

of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee.' Alas! a poor little hearsay knowledge availeth not. They abhor themselves when they have more intimate acquaintance; none so confident as a young professor that knoweth a few truths, but in a weak and imperfect manner. The more we know indeed, the more sensible we are of our ignorance, how liable to this mistake and that, that we dare not trust ourselves for an hour.

4. Because of the profit that cometh by knowledge. All grace from first to last cometh in by the understanding. God in the work of grace followeth the order which he hath established in nature. Reason and judgment are to go before the will; and therefore, when the work of grace is first begun in us, it beginneth in the understanding: 'Renewed in knowledge,' Col. 3:10. So the increase of grace: 2 Peter 1:12, 'Grace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord.' As the beginning is by light, so is all the gradual progress of the spiritual life; strength to bear afflictions, strength in conflicts, is by powerful reasons; yea, the perfect change that is made in us in glory is by the vision of God: 'We shall see him as he is, and shall be like him.' If we had more knowledge of God and his ways, we should trust him more, fear him more, love him more. Trust him, Ps. 9:10, 'And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.' If God were more known he would be better trusted: 2 Tim. 1:12, 'I know whom I have believed;' I dare trust him with my soul. More feared: 3 John 11, 'Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doth good is of God, he that doth evil hath not seen God.' Right thoughts of God would not let us sin so freely; one truth or other would fall upon us, and give check to the temptation: as feared, so loved more. The more explicit thoughts we have of his excellency, the more are our hearts drawn out to him: John 4:10, 'If

thou knewest the gift,' &c. Christ would not lie by as a neglected thing if he were more known in all his worth and excellency.

Use. The first use is to press you to get knowledge, and look upon it as a singular grace if the Lord will give you to understand and apply the comfort and direction of his holy word: John 15:15, 'Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.' To be taught the mind of God is a greater act of friendship than if God should give a man all the treasures of the world; to make himself known so as you may love him, fear him, trust him. When we can apply this for our comfort, oh! then, 'cry for knowledge, lift up thy voice for understanding; seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures,' Prov. 2:3, 4. Go to God, and be earnest with him, 'Lord, make me to understand the way of thy precepts.' We can walk in the ways of sin without a teacher, but we cannot walk in the ways of God. And cry, lift up thy voice. We are earnest for quickening and enlargement; but be earnest also for understanding. Now a large prayer without endeavours is nothing worth. Dig in the mines of knowledge, search into the scripture, do not gather up a few scattered notions, but look into the bowels. Silver doth not lie on the surface of the earth, but deep in the bottom of it, and will cost much labour and digging to come at. If we would have any good stock of knowledge, which will prevent vain thoughts, carnal discourse, abundance of heart-perplexing scruples and doubts, and much darkness and uncomfortableness of spirit, it will cost us some labour and pains. The more knowledge we have, the more are we established against error: 2 Peter 3:17, 'Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.' The more you have of this divine saving knowledge, the greater check upon sin: Ps. 119:11, 'I have hid thy word in my

heart, that I might not sin against thee.' One truth or another will rise up in defiance of the temptation. The greater the impulsion to duty, the more of the law of God, the more it urgeth the conscience, Prov. 6:22. It maketh us more useful in all our relations:—Husbands, 1 Peter 3:7, 'Dwell with them according to knowledge,' &c. Parents, Eph. 6:4, 'Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' Friends, Rom. 15:14, 'And I myself also am persuaded of you my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.' Magistrates, that they may discern Christ's interest, Ps. 2:10, 'Be wise now, therefore, O kings, be instructed, ye judges of the earth.' When Solomon asked wisdom, the thing pleased the Lord. And lastly, more comfortable in ourselves; that they may comfort and build up one another whenever they meet together.

Use 2. To press you to grow in knowledge. None have such confidence and rejoicing in God as those that have a clear sight and understanding of his will revealed in his word. Let your knowledge—(1.) Be more comprehensive. At first our thoughts run in a narrow channel. There are certain general truths absolutely necessary to salvation, as concerning our misery by sin, and the sufficiency of Christ to help us; but if we might rest in these, why hath God given us so copious a rule? The general sort of Christians content themselves to see with others' eyes, get the knowledge of a few truths, and look no further. Why, then, hath God given so large a rule? Fundamentals are few; believe them, live well, and you shall be saved. This is the religion of most. This is as if a man in building should only be careful to lay a good foundation, no matter for roof, windows, walls. If a man should untile your house, and tell you the foundation standeth, the main buttresses are safe, you would not like of it. A man is bound, according to his capacity and opportunity, to know all scripture, the consequences of every truth. God may and

doth accept of our imperfect knowledge, but not when men are negligent and do not use the means. To be willingly ignorant of the lesser ways of God is a sin. We should labour to know all that God hath revealed. (2.) More distinct. Why? Truths are best known in their frame and dependence; as God's works of creation, when viewed singly and apart, every day's work was good, but when viewed altogether in their correspondence and mutual proportion to each other, were very good, Gen. 1:31. So all truths of God, take them singly, are good; but when you have them in their frame, and see how one suits with the other, and what a sweet harmony there is between all the parts of religion, then they are very good. (3.) More experimental, that you may taste the sweetness and power of the truths that you know: Phil. 3:10, 'That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.' When we feel what we know, that is a mighty confirmation. The senses give the best demonstration. It is a disparagement to know Christ and be never the better for him; to have a knowledge of all the excellency of Christ, and how suitable he is to the soul; yet to feel nothing of comfort and quickening in our consciences. (4.) More practical: 1 John 2:3, 4, 'And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments: he that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.' Otherwise it is but a talking by rote, a man savingly knoweth no more than he practiseth. He that doth but speak after others, it is a rehearsal rather than a knowledge. What is practical light? It is directive and persuasive. (1st.) It is directive. A man grows more prudent, and more able to guide his course according to the rules of religion; faith is opposed not only to ignorance but to folly: 'O ye fools, and slow of heart to believe.' A man may be a knowing man, yet a very fool in spirituals, if he hath not a knowledge how to guide him to trust in God, fear God, love God, and serve God, Hosea 14:7. (2d.) That is practical knowledge



when it is persuasive, when it hath a lively force and efficacy upon the heart.

Second point, Those whom God maketh to understand the way of his precepts see wondrous things therein.

Ps. 119:18. 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.' Wonders are such things as do transcend our capacity; so all things about God are above the sphere of men, as the things of men are above the capacity of beasts. Now, the more understanding and insight we have in these things the more we wonder. Wonder usually is the fruit of ignorance; how then can knowledge breed wonder? The word discovers the ὅτι, that it is so; but the manner how it is, and the wisdom of the contrivance, is that which begets reverence and admiration in a gracious soul; as Nazianzen saith of the eternal generation of Christ, Let the eternal generation of God be adored in silence. It is a marvellous thing to know that there are three in one, the Son from eternity, begotten before all the world, &c. So when we look into these things, our knowledge doth only show that they are; but what they are, and how great they are, that exceeds our capacity, and therefore we wonder.

1. The doctrines of the scripture are wonderful concerning God and his works. The nature of God is a depth which we cannot fathom, no more than a nutshell can empty the ocean: Ps. 139:6, 'Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it.' It is above our capacity; for a finite thing cannot comprehend an infinite.

The creation of all things out of nothing, we believe it upon the testimony of the word, but it is too wonderful for us to search it to the bottom; yea, the framing of the body in the womb, so many different things out of the same seed, as flesh, and bones, and

muscles, and in such an order and proportion: Ps. 139:14, 'I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.' If the commonness did not abate our observation, we would wonder at it. So his providence in governing every creature to their proper ends, especially his care over us, and conduct of us. 'Many, O Lord, are thy wondrous works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to usward. They cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered,' Ps. 40:5. But especially the redemption of mankind is wonderful: 1 Tim. 3:16, 'And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.' The mysteries of the gospel, every time we think of them, should strike admiration into our hearts. It could not sink into the head of any creature how to satisfy justice, and to make up the breach between God and us. That a virgin should conceive; the word be made flesh; that justice and mercy should so sweetly be brought together, and conspire in the salvation of a lost sinner, all these are wonders; and when we come to believe them indeed, to draw forth comfort from them, these are wonderful to us!

The law of God is wonderful. Look to the precept or the sanction. Look to the precept. A wonderful purity there: 'I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy law is exceeding broad,' ver. 96 of this psalm. When a child of God sees how the law reacheth every thought, every motion, every operation of his soul, what wonderful purity is here! So a marvellous equity: 'The law is holy, just, and good;' and 'the commandment is good,' Rom. 7:4. God hath given us such a law, if a man were free, yet, to ennoble his nature and live happily, he would choose such a rule. Then to see such wise precepts so ordered that in ten words God should comprise the whole duty of man: Deut. 4:6,

'Keep, therefore, and do them; for this is your wisdom, and your understanding in the sight of the nations.' First, God hath provided in his law respects to himself. First the law provides for God, then for the creature. In the first commandment, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me;' there is the object of worship. In the second, 'Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven image,' &c., the means of worship. Then the manner of worship in the third, 'Thou shalt not take the name of God in vain.' Then the time of worship in the fourth, 'Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.' See how the Lord hath built up his law. Then as to men, see first God provides for those viceroys that do represent the great God, as our parents natural and civil, 'Honour thy father and thy mother,' &c.; then our ordinary neighbour; and there first for his life, and then for his relations, 'Thou shalt not kill, shalt not commit adultery;' then for his goods, 'Thou shalt not steal;' then for his good name. When a man sees the law of God in all its explications, when he considers the harmony and correspondence that is between all the parts of the law, then he will cry out, O wonderful! Come to the sanction by which the law is established and confirmed, by promises and rewards, such a 'far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;' that a clod of earth should shine above the stars, and God provide such a happiness for us that we should be like the angels! Then threatenings, that God hath appointed such a punishment to hold the world in awe, as 'a worm that never dies, and the fire that never goes out;' the worm of conscience that shall vex us with the remembrance of our past folly, and the wrath of God that shall punish us for disobedience, and torment us for evermore. Still, O wonderful! So for the gospel, every article of faith is a mystery to be wondered at—Quot articuli, tot miracula. The disciples wondered when they saw the structure of the temple. Oh, how may we wonder when we see the spiritual temple, that is Jesus Christ in the fulness of his godhead! God dwelt symbolically by outward representations in the temple, but here he

dwells bodily. When David had provided such a mass of money, 1 Chron. 29:7–9, they fell a wondering. Oh, but when the soul comes to view the unsearchable riches of grace in Christ Jesus, then it may cry out, O wonderful! When we see some rare plot, all things suit harmoniously, we cry out, O wonderful! This great mystery of godliness, the more we look into it, the more will we wonder at the wisdom of God discovered in and through Christ Jesus. For external providences, to see how God answers prayers, how he brings about our mercies according to our wants in a way we know not: Ps. 17:7, 'Show thy marvellous loving-kindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee.' In the very common favours that God vouchsafeth to us, there is something may be observed that may make us wonder, either for the time, manner, or measure. Also, in the internal effects of his grace upon the heart, when a man is convinced, and his own heart is ripped up to him by the power of the word, 1 Cor. 15:25; Heb. 4:12; and John 4:29. As when Christ had convinced the woman of Samaria, and ripped up her life, she says, 'Come, see a man that hath told me all that ever I did.' When God comes in with such convictive evidence, and rips up our privy thoughts, O wonderful. But especially in changing and renewing the heart; when a lion shall be turned into a lamb, a dunghill become a bed of spices, a swine become a saint, a persecutor an apostle, we, that had such bolts and restraints of sin upon us, when we get out; when we that were so wedded to sensual delights and worldly vanities are brought to delight in God, this is truly admirable! 2 Peter 1:9, 'He hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.' And then the comfort we have by the word of God, and the marvellous sweetness the practice of it diffuseth through the soul, it is unspeakable and glorious, 1 Peter 1:8. So Phil. 4:7, 'The peace of God that passes understanding shall guard your hearts,' &c. When a man hath settling and composure of spirit in the midst of tempests and storms, the heart is guarded against all fears and sorrows. When we

consider what God hath done for our souls, every grace is a wonder: to depend upon what we see not; to be safe in the midst of a storm; to die, yet live; to be poor, yet make many rich; to have nothing, yet possess all things; these operations of grace are all wonders.

Use 1. It informeth us that a man must be carried above his own sense, reason, and light, to understand such wonderful things. It is the apostle's argument: 1 Cor. 2:9, 10, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.' All things are seen by a suitable light, spiritual things are spiritually discerned, divine things by a divine light—Non loquendum de Deo sine lumine. If beasts would judge of human affairs, they must have the reason of men; if men of divine things, they must have divine illumination. There is a cognation between the faculty and the object.

2. It informeth us what reason we have to respect the word of God. Many curious wits despise it as a mean knowledge in comparison of Aristotle, Plato, &c. All the doctrines of it are a continued mystery; there is nothing vulgar and of small moment there. If there be some rudiments, something common with other writings, there are greater things than these, even the deep things of God. Never was there such a revelation made to the world as this. You despise that which angels wonder at: Eph. 3:10, 'And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things in Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.' And 1 Peter 1:12, 'Which things the angels desire to look into.' David saith, 'Thy testimonies are wonderful, therefore doth my soul keep them.' Oh,

let this book of God be more dear to us! Oh, what trifles are all worldly riches to the unsearchable riches of the Lord's grace! Oh, how stupid are they that are not taken with such great things as these!

3. Examine your profiting. It is one degree of profit to see so much in the word of God as to admire at it. Admire God's transcendent goodness in the pardon of sins. God giveth us such admirable precepts, assisting us in the performance of them, accepting our imperfect obedience; this giveth wonderful comfort in all our afflictions.

Thirdly, Observe, he that is sensible of the wondrous things that are in God's word will be talking of them.

1. It will be so.

2. It should be so.

1. It will be so. When the heart is deeply affected, the tongue cannot hold, but will run out in expressions of it; for 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' When cheered and revived in their afflictions, they are transported with the thought, with the excellency of God: Ps. 66:15, 'Come, and I will tell you what God hath done for my soul.' The woman, when she had found the lost groat, calleth her neighbours to rejoice with her. He that hath but a cold knowledge, will not be so full of good discourse.

2. It should be so, in a threefold respect—for the honour of God, the edification of others, and for our own profit.

[1.] For the honour of God, to whom we are so much indebted, to bring him into request with those about us. Experience deserveth

praise; when you have found the Messiah, call one another to him: John 1:41–45, 'Andrew calleth Peter, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias; and Philip calleth Nathanael and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph.'

[2.] For the edification of others: Luke 22:32, 'And thou being converted, strengthen thy brethren.' True grace is communicative as fire, &c.

[3.] For our own profit. He that useth his knowledge shall have more; whereas, on the contrary, full breasts, if not sucked, become dry. In the dividing, the loaves increased. All gifts, but much more spiritual, which are the best, are improved by exercise.

Well, then, get a sense and experience of God's truth, and then speak of it to others. That which we have seen we are best able to report of. God giveth us experiences to this end, that we may be able to speak of it to others. None can speak with such confidence as those that have felt what they speak. Christ saith those that come to him shall not only have a spring of comfort themselves, but flow forth to others: John 7:38, 'He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.'

Fourth point, In our desires of knowledge it is meet to propound a good end; as David here beggeth understanding, that he might see and discover to others what he had found in God's law. To know that we may know is foolish curiosity; to know that we may be known is vanity and ostentation; to see that we may sell our knowledge is baseness and covetousness. To edify others, this is charity; to be edified ourselves, this is wisdom. Good things must be sought to a good end: 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts,' James 4:3. All things must be sought for to holy

ends, to glorify God; much more spiritual gifts. The only good end is God's glory: 'Open thou my lips, that I may show forth thy praise,' Ps. 51:15. We are to desire knowledge, that we may the more enjoy God, and the more glorify him.

There is a natural desire of knowledge, even of divine knowledge; but we must look to our ends, that we may grow in grace, 1 Peter 2:3; that we may be more useful for God; not merely to store the head with notions, or to vaunt it over others, as having attained more than they. No; it should be only to do good to our own souls, and to save others: Rom. 15:14, 'I am persuaded that ye are filled with all knowledge, and able to admonish one another.' But now, to make a market of our knowledge, or to use it for our vile ends, that is naught. Not for boasting, ostentation, curiosity, and vain speculation, but for practice, should be our end. When we improve our stock well, we please God, and shall have eternal profit ourselves.

## **SERMON XXIX**

### **My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according to thy word.—VER. 28.**

A CHRISTIAN should neither be humbled to the degree of dejection, nor confident to the degree of security; and therefore he is to have a double eye, upon God and upon himself, upon his own necessities and upon God's all-sufficiency. You have both represented in this verse (as often in this psalm), his case and his petition.

1. His case is represented, my soul melteth for heaviness.



2. His petition and request to God, strengthen thou me according to thy word.

First, His case, 'My soul melteth for heaviness.' In the original the word signifies 'droppeth away.' The Septuagint hath it thus, 'My soul fell asleep through weariness.' Probably by a fault of the transcribers, one word for another. My soul droppeth. It may relate—(1.) To the plenty of his tears, as the word is used in scripture: Job 16:20, 'My friends scorn me; but mine eye poureth out tears unto God,' or droppeth to God, the same word; so it notes his deep sorrow and sense of his condition. The like allusion is in Josh. 7:5, 'The heart of the people melted, and became as water.' Or, (2.) It relates to his languishing under the extremity of his sorrow; as an unctuous thing wasteth by dropping, so was his soul even dropping away. Such a like expression is used in Ps. 107:26, 'Their soul is melted because of trouble;' and of Jesus Christ, whose strength was exhausted by the greatness of his sorrows, it is said, Ps. 22:14, 'I am poured out like water; all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels.' Be the allusion either to the one or to the other, either to the dropping of tears or to the melting and wasting away of what is fat and unctuous, it notes a vehement sorrow and brokenness of heart, that is clear: his soul was even melting away; and unless God did help him, he could hold out no longer.

Doct. That God's children oftentimes lie under the exercise of such deep and pressing sorrow as is not incident to other men.

David expresseth himself here as in a languishing condition which is not ordinary, 'My soul droppeth or melteth away for heaviness.'

The reasons of the point are three:—

1. Their burdens are greater.

2. They have a greater sense than others.

3. Their exercise is greater, because their reward and comfort is so great.

1. Their burdens are greater than others, as temptation, desertion, trouble for sin. The good and evil of the spiritual life is greater than the good and evil of any other life whatsoever. As their joys are unspeakable and glorious, so their sorrows are sometimes above expression: 'A wounded spirit who can bear?' Prov. 18:14. Common natural courage will carry a man through other afflictions, oh! but when the arrows of the Almighty stick in their heart, Job. 6:3, that is an insupportable burden. According to the excellency of any life, so are the annoyances and the benefits of that life. Man, that hath a higher life than the beasts, is more capable of delights and sorrows than beasts are of pain and pleasure; and so a Christian that lives the life of faith is more capable of a higher burden. Consider, they that live a spiritual life have immediately to do with the infinite and eternal God; and therefore when he creates joy in the heart, oh, what a joy is that! And when God doth but lay his hand upon them, how great is their trouble! Sin is a heavier burden than affliction, and the wrath of God than the displeasure of man—*Cœlestis ira quos premit miseros facit, humana nullos*. Evils of an eternal influence are more than temporal, therefore must needs be greater and more burdensome.

2. They have a greater sense than others, their hearts being entended by religion. None have so quick a feeling as the children of God. Why? Because they have a clearer understanding, and more tender and delicate affections.

[1.] Because they have a clearer understanding, and see more into the nature of things than those that are drowned in present delights and

contentments. The loss of God's favour carnal men know not how to value, but the saints prefer it above life: 'The favour of God is better than life,' Ps. 63:3. Therefore, if the Lord do but suspend the wonted manifestations of his grace and favour, how are their hearts troubled! 'Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled,' Ps. 30:7. A child of God, that lives by his favour, cannot brook his absence; therefore, when they lose the sweet sense of his favour and reconciliation with him, oh, what a trouble is this to their souls! Other men make no reckoning of it at all. And so for sin, common spirits value it only by the damage it doth to their worldly interests; when it costs them dear, they may hang the head: Jer. 2:9, 'Now know what an evil and bitter thing it is to forsake the Lord.' A worldly man may know something of the evil of sin in the effects of it, but a child of God seeth into the nature of it; they value it by the wrong, by the offence that is done to God, and so are humbled more for the evil in sin, than for the evil after sin. So for the wrath of God; carnal men have gross thoughts of it, and may howl upon their beds when their pleasant things are taken from them; but God's children are humbled because their father is angry; they observe more the displeasure of God in afflicting providences than others do; and one spark of God's wrath lighting into their consciences, oh, what sad effects doth it work! more than all other straits whatsoever. Thus they have a clearer understanding, they see more into the dreadfulness of God's wrath, into the evil of sin, and they know how to prize and value his favour more than others.

[2.] They have delicate and tender affections. Grace, that gives us a new heart, doth also give us a soft heart: Ezek. 36:26, 'I will put a new heart into them.' What kind of heart? 'A heart of flesh,' as the old heart that is taken out is a heart of stone. A new soft heart doth sooner receive the impression of divine terror than another heart doth. A stamp is more easily left upon wax, or a soft thing, than upon

a stone. Or thus, a slave hath a thicker skin than one nobly born, tenderly brought up; therefore he is not so sensible of stripes. A wicked man hath more cause to be troubled than a godly man; but he is not a man of sense; he hath a heart of stone, and therefore is not so affected either with God's dealings with him, or his dealings with God. Look, as the weight of the blows must not only be considered, but the delicateness of the constitution, so, because their hearts are of a softer and more tender constitution, being hearts of flesh, and receptive of a deeper impression, therefore their sorrows exceed the sorrows of other men.

3. The good that they expect is exceeding great, and their exercise is accordingly; for after the rate of our comforts so are our afflictions. Wicked men, that have nothing to expect in the world to come but horrors and pains, they wallow now in ease and plenty: Luke 16:25, 'Son, in thy lifetime thou receivedst thy good things.' God will be behindhand with none of his creatures; those that do him common service have common blessings in a larger measure than his own people have; they have their good things, that is, such as their hearts choose and affect. But now good men, that expect another happiness, they must be content to be harassed and exercised, that they may be fitted and prepared for the enjoyment of this happiness. As the stones that were to be set in the temple were to be hewn and squared, so are they to be hewn, squared, and exercised with bitter and sharp things, that they may be prepared for the more glory.

Use 1. Then carnal men are not fit to judge of the saints when they report their experiences, if it be with them above the rate of other men. When afflicted consciences speak of their wounds, or revived hearts of their comforts, their joys are supernatural, and so are their sorrows; and therefore a natural man thinks all to be but fancy, all those joys of the Spirit, that they are but fanatic delusions; and he

doth not understand the weight of their sorrows. When a man is well to see to, and hath health, strength, and wealth, they marvel what should make such a man heavy; all their care is to eat, drink, and be merry; and therefore because they are not acquainted with the exercises of a feeling conscience, they think all this trouble is but a little mopishness and melancholy. Poor contrite sinners, who are ready to weep out their hearts at their eyes, can only understand such expressions as these, 'My soul melteth away for heaviness.' There is another manner of thing in trouble of conscience than the carnal world doth imagine; and many that have all well about them, great estates, much befriended and esteemed in the world, yea, for the best things, yet when God hides his face, poor souls, how are they troubled! If he do but let a spark of his wrath into their conscience, and hide his face from them, it is a greater burden to them than all the miseries of the world.

David was a man valiant, that had 'a heart as the heart of a Son,' 2 Sam. 17:10. He was a man cheerful, called 'the sweet singer of Israel,' 2 Sam. 23:1; of a ruddy sanguine complexion, and a great master of music. He was no fool, but a man wise as the angel of God; and yet you see what a bitter sense he had of his spiritual condition. And when a man so stout and valiant, so cheerful, so wise, complains so heavily, will you count this mopishness and foolish melancholy? But alas! men that never knew the weight of sin cannot otherwise conceive of it; they were never acquainted with the infiniteness of God, nor power of his anger, and have not a due sense of eternity; therefore they think so slightly of these matters of the spiritual life.

Use 2. Be not too secure of spiritual joys. We warn you often of security, or falling asleep in temporal comforts, and we must warn you of this kind of security also in spiritual. All things change. You may find David in this psalm in a different posture of spirit;

sometimes rejoicing in the word of God above all riches, and at other times his soul melteth away for very heaviness. God's own people are liable to great trouble of spirit; therefore you should not be secure as to these spiritual enjoyments, which come and go according to God's pleasure. Men that build too much upon spiritual suavities or sensible consolations occasion a snare to their own souls; partly as they are less watchful for the present (like mariners which have been at sea, when they get into the haven, take down their tackling, and make merry, and think never to see storm more), and so lose that which they are so confident of keeping; by their negligence and carelessness their spiritual comfort is gone. And there is another mischief—the loss is more heavy, because it was never thought of. And therefore in preparation of heart we should be ready to lose our inward comforts, as well as estates and outward conveniences. In heaven alone we have continual day without cloudings or night; but here there will be changes.

Use 3. Let us not judge of our condition if this should be our case, that is, if we should lie under pressing troubles, such as do even break our spirits. This was the case of the Son of God; his soul was troubled, and he knew not what to say: John 12:27, 'My soul is troubled; what shall I say?' And many of his choicest servants have been sorely exercised—Heman, an heir of heaven, and yet compassed about with the pains of hell; Job not only spoiled of all his goods, but for a time shut out from the comforts of God's Spirit. Our business in such a case is not to examine and judge, but to trust. Neither to determine of our condition one side or other, but to stay our hearts upon God, and so to make use of offers and inviting promises, when we cannot make use of conditional and assuring promises. So Isa. 50:10, 'He that walketh in darkness, and seeth no light,' is directed, 'let him trust in the name of the Lord.' That is our business in such a

case of deep distress, to make a new title rather than dispute the old one; and stay our hearts on God's mercy.

Thus much concerning David's case; which because it often comes under consideration in this Psalm, I would pass over more briefly.

Secondly, I come from David's case to his petition or request to God, 'Strengthen thou me according to thy word.' Where you have—

1. The request itself.
2. An argument to enforce it.

First, The request itself, 'Strengthen me;' that is the benefit asked.

Doct. 1. Observe this in the general, he doth but now and then drop out a request for temporal safety, but all along his main desire is for grace and for support rather than deliverance.

The children of God, the main thing that their hearts run upon is sustentation and spiritual support rather than outward deliverance: Ps. 138:3, 'I called upon the Lord, and he heard me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul.' Mark, David judgeth that to be an audience, to be a hearing of prayer; though he had not deliverance, yet he had experience of inward comfort, that was it which supported him. The children of God value themselves by the inward man, rather than the outward. What David here prays for himself, Paul prays for others: Eph. 3:16, 'That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.' Yea, they are contented with the decays of the outward man, so that the inward man may increase in strength: 2 Cor. 4:16, 'Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' The outward man in Paul's

dialect is the body, with the conveniences and all the appurtenances thereof, as health, beauty, strength, wealth; all this is the outward man. Now this is not a Christian's desire, to increase in the world, or to make a fair show in the flesh; no, but his heart is set upon this, to grow stronger in the spirit, that the soul, as furnished with the graces of the Spirit, may thrive; this is the inner man. To insist upon this a little.

1. It is the inward man that is esteemed with God, and therefore that is it the saints mainly look after. God doth not look upon men according to their outward condition, pomp, and appearances in the world, but according to the inward endowments of the heart: 1 Sam. 16:7, 'Man's eye is upon the outward appearance, but God regards the heart;' and 'the hidden man of the heart,' that is said to be 'an ornament of great price with God,' 1 Peter 3:4. Intellectual beauty is that which is esteemed in heaven, and spiritual wealth is only current in the other world. Poor creatures, that are led by sense, they esteem one another by these outward things; but God esteems men by grace, by the soul, how that is cherished, and strengthened; and though we are otherwise never so well accomplished, we are hated if we have not his image stamped upon us.

2. The everlasting welfare of the whole person depends upon the flourishing of the inward man. When we come to put off the upper garment of the flesh, the poor soul will be destitute, naked, and harbourless, if we have made no provision for it, 2 Cor. 5:3, and then both body and soul are undone for ever. When the soul is to be thrown out of doors, whither will it go, if it hath not an eternal building in heaven to receive it? The soul is the man; the body follows the state of the soul, but the soul doth not follow the state of the body. The life of God, which he doth begin in the soul, does in time renew and perfect the body too. The apostle saith, Rom. 6:11,



'The Spirit that now dwelleth in us will raise up our mortal bodies.' But now those that seek to preserve the outward man with the neglect of the inner, in time ruin both body and soul. Well, then, here is their care.

3. The loss of the outward man may be recompensed and made up by the strength of grace that is put into the inner man, but the loss of the inner man cannot be made up by the perfections of the outward man. A man that is afflicted in his outward estate, God makes it up in grace; if he makes him rich in faith, in the experiences of his favour, the loss is made up and supplied more abundantly; and the children of God can comfort themselves in this, that their inward man is strengthened and renewed day by day, 2 Cor. 4:16; so that a man may be happy notwithstanding breaches made upon the outward man. But when there is a wounded spirit, and God breaks into the inward man, then what good will riches, estate, and all these things do? They are as unsavoury things as the white of an egg.

4. The outward man may fit us for converse with men, but the inward man with God. We need bodies, and Organs of speech, and reason. and present supplies, which fit us to converse with men; but we converse with God by thoughts and by grace, and by the perfections of the inward man; this fits us for communion with him.

5. The life and strength of the inward man is a more noble thing than the strength of the outward man or the bodily life, for it draws nearer to the life of God, as the life and strength of the body draws nearer to the life, pleasure, and happiness of a beast. By the bodily life we eat, drink, labour, sleep, and so do the beasts; yea, many of the beasts excel us in the perfection of that kind of life. Lions excel in strength, roes in swiftness, eagles in long age; none of their pleasures are

soured with remorse of conscience. But the inward spiritual life is called the life of God, Eph. 4:18.

6. The inward life is the beginning of our life in heaven. A glorified saint and a saint militant upon earth both live the life of God; and the life of grace is the same life for kind, though not for degree; and one that is glorified and one here upon earth differ but as a child and a man. But now the life of sense and the life of grace differ as a toad and a man, not only in degree, but also in kind.

7. Yet further, this is that great thing which God hath been at such great expense about, to raise the being of the new creature: John 6:51, 'This is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world.' The supports, the strength of the inward man cost dearer than all other comforts whatsoever: it must have nobler supports, it must have the blood of Christ, daily supplies from heaven. But the other life is called the life of our hands, Isa. 57:10. We patch up to ourselves some conveniences for the sensible life by labour and service here in the world. Well, then, this is that which the children of God do mostly look after, that the inward life may be kept free from annoyance, and fit for the purposes of grace.

Use. The use of this is to check our carnal and preposterous care for the outward man, to the neglect of the inward. How much are we for the outward man, that it may be well fed and well clothed, well at ease for the present life! There is all our care; but not so careful to get the soul furnished with grace, and strengthened and renewed by continued influences from Christ. Certainly if men did look after soul-strength, they would be more careful to wait upon God for his blessing. You may know the disproportion of your care for outward things and for the inward man by these questions.

1. How much do you prize God's day, the means of grace, opportunities of worship, that are for the inward man? The Sabbath-day is a feast-day for souls. Now, when men are weary of it, it is the most burdensome day of all the week round: Amos 8:5, 'When will the Sabbath be gone, that we may set forth wheat?' It is a sign they are carnal, when men count that day the only lost day: as Seneca saith of the Jews, they lost the full seventh of their lives, speaking of the Sabbath-day. So carnal men think it is a lost day to them, they look upon the Sabbath as a melancholy interruption of their affairs and business. The apostle James saith of those that are begotten by God, chap. 1:9, that they are 'swift to hear.' Certainly they that have an inward man to maintain, another life than an outward and animal life, must have the supply and will look after the comforts of it.

2. Consider how differently we are concerned with bodily and soul concerns. If the body be but a little diseased, if we want an appetite to a meal, or a little sleep in the night, we complain of it presently; we inquire what is the cause, and look for a remedy. But what a wonderful disproportion is there as to the soul! It is a strange expression that, 3 John 2, 'I wish that thy body prosper as thy soul prospers.' Alas! I we may say of the most, Oh, that their souls did prosper as their bodies, as they flourish in the conveniencies of the outward man!

3. What care have you for the inward man, to adorn the soul, to beautify it with grace, that it may be of price and esteem with God, or to fortify it with grace? Now, when all our strength and travail is laid out for that which doth not conduce to the inward life, Isaiah 55:2, and we lay out our money for that which is not bread, it is a sign we are wholly carnal. We read in ecclesiastical story of one that wept when he saw a wanton woman decking herself with a great deal of

care to please her lovers; saith he, Have I been so careful to deck my soul for Christ Jesus?

4. Do you take in spiritual refreshments, even when afflictions abound? 2 Cor. 1:5, 'As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ;' then you are affected as the children of God, whose heart and care runs out mainly for the inward man. This in general.

Doct. 2. Secondly, more especially observe he goes to God for strength. Let me show—

1. What is this spiritual strength.

2. How it is given out.

3. How God is concerned in it. David goes to God, 'Lord, strengthen me.'

First, What spiritual strength is. It is God's perfecting of his work. Strength supposeth life, therefore in general it is God's renewed influence; when he hath planted habits of grace, he comes and strengthens. There is *gratia præveniens*, *operans*, et *co-operans*—there is preventing grace, working grace, and co-working grace. Preventing grace is when God converts us, when the Lord turns us to himself, and doth plant grace in the soul at first. Working grace is when God strengthens the habit. Co-working grace, when God stirs up the act, and helps us in the exercise of the grace we have. First he plants grace into the heart, then there is a constant influence, as the two olive-trees in Zechariah were always dropping into the lamps; and then by excitation and co-operation he stirs it up. Saith Austin, Unless God gives us the faculties, and unless he gives us the will, we can do nothing; and unless he concurs with the exercise of these

faculties, still we cannot work in the spiritual life as we ought to do; and therefore first God infuseth grace, and then strengthens grace; first he worketh in us, then by us. First we are objects of his work, then instruments, to show wherein the strength of the soul lies.

1. There are planted in the soul habits of grace. There are not only high operations of grace, but permanent and fixed habits, the seed of God that remaineth within us, 1 John 3:9, which cannot be the indwelling of the Spirit; for this seed of God is some created thing: Ps. 51:10, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God;' and it is something that grows: 2 Peter 3:6, 'Grow in grace.' And therefore it is evident there are habits of grace planted in the soul, a good stock that we have from God at first, called 'the good treasure of the heart,' Mat. 12. These habits of grace are called 'armour of God,' 'the shield of faith,' 'the helmet of salvation.' This is the strength of the soul.

2. But besides this, there is a continuance and an increase of these graces, when the Lord confirms his work, and perfects what he hath begun, Phil. 1:16. The apostle most notably sets it forth: 1 Peter 5:10, 'The God of all grace make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.' All these words concern the habit, or the seed of grace in the soul; and to show God's concurrence towards our preservation in the spiritual state, he useth these words, 'Make you perfect;' that notes the addition of degrees that are yet wanting; 'stablish you,' that notes defending that grace which is already planted in the heart from temptation and dangers; and 'strengthen you,' that is, give you power for action or ability for working; and 'settle you,' that is to fasten the root more and more. All may be represented in a tree. Look, as a tree grown downward in the root is defended from the nipping of the weather, and stablished and strengthened against injuries from beasts, and being filled with sap, springs forth, and becomes fruitful; so the Lord settle you, &c.

3. There is a concurrence of God to the act. Grace in habit is not enough, but it must be actuated and directed. About the act there are two things: The Holy Spirit actuates the grace that is implanted, draws it forth into exercise; so it is said, Phil. 2:13, 'It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do,' that is, he does apply that grace in our heart, set it a-work; and then there is a directing or regulation of the soul to action: 2 Thes. 3:5, 'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God,' &c. Thus God plants grace in the heart by preventing us with his mercy and loving-kindness, taking us into favour; then he doth stablish us, and perfect it, root it in the soul more and more. Then as to the act, he doth excite and strengthen us.

Secondly, The uses for which we have this strength from God. It serves for three uses—for doing, for suffering, and for conflicting, to bear us out in conflict; as our necessities are many, so must our strength be.

1. Strength to perform duties. Weariness and uncomfortableness will soon fall upon our hearts, and we shall hang off from God, if the Lord doth not put forth a new force, and a new quickening upon our hearts; therefore the spouse saith, Cant. 1:4, 'Draw me, and we will run after thee. And here in this psalm, 'When the Lord shall enlarge my heart, I will run the ways of his commandments.' If we would be carried on with any fervour and motion towards God, we must go forth in the strength of God. The soul is a tender thing, and soon discomposed. When we think to go forth and shake ourselves as at other times, as Samson, we shall find fetters and restraints upon our soul. Therefore God's work must ever be done in God's strength.

2. Strength for bearing of burdens with patience, that we may not faint under them: Col. 1:11, 'Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with

joyfulness.' That we may not faint under our affliction: Prov. 24:10, 'If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.' God's children, before they go to heaven, will have their trials, they will have many burdens upon them: Heb. 6:12, 'Be ye followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' There needs not only faith, but patience. There will be trouble. Now a heavy burden need have good shoulders. We pray for strength, that we may break through difficulties and afflictions that we meet in our passage to heaven.

3. Strength for conflicts, that we may break through temptations. A Christian is not only to use the trowel but the sword. We cannot think to discharge duties or bear afflictions without a battle and conflict; therefore we need the strength of the Lord's grace to carry us through. Satan is the great enemy with whom we conflict, he is the manager of the temptation. This is the course of it; the world is the bait; the flesh is the traitor that works within men, which gives advantage to Satan; the devil lieth hidden, and by worldly things seeks to draw off our hearts from God. Now we are assaulted on every side, sometimes by the pleasures of the world, sometimes by the frowns and crosses of it; so that a Christian needs to be fit for all conditions: Phil. 4:13, 'I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me;' for every way will the devil be enticing us to sin. Now these conflicts are either solicitations to sin, or tend to weaken our comfort; and in both respects we must have strength from God. Satan's first temptation is to draw us to sin; if he cannot weaken grace, then to disturb our comfort; if not to deny God, yet that we may suspect our own estate; and therefore he follows us with blasphemies and other temptations, until he hath made our lives wearisome, till we call our condition into question; and therefore, as grace is strengthened, so is comfort: Neh. 8:10, 'The joy of the Lord is your strength.'

Thus I have showed what is this spiritual strength, and what we beg of God when we say, 'Strengthen me;' and how this is given out, in what manner God conveyeth this strength to the soul, how suitable to our nature, to our temper, to our employment.

Thirdly, How God is concerned in it. David goes to God for this benefit, 'Lord, strengthen me.' From first to last he doth all. We do not stand by the stability of our own resolutions, nor stand by the stability of gracious habits in ourselves, unless the Lord supply new strength. Not by the stability of our own resolutions, for these will soon fail; for David was under a resolution to keep close to God; yet he saith, 'My feet had well-nigh slipped.' What upheld him? 'Thy right hand upheld me.' I was mightily shaken, all purposes of holding on of godliness were even gone; but I am continually with thee. Neither is it the stability of gracious habits in themselves, for of themselves they are poor vanishing things; faith, love, and fear of God of themselves will soon vanish: Rev. 3:2, 'Be watchful, strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die. These are ready to die, therefore are only maintained by a renewed strength from God. It is the power of God that is engaged in our preservation. I might show in what order we have this from God; we are not only kept in general 'by the power of God through faith unto salvation,' 1 Peter 1:5, but all the persons work. The Father, his act is judicial: Eph. 3:14, 'I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant you to be strengthened with might in the inner man.' He issueth the grant, that such souls coming in Christ's name, and petitioning relief, should obtain it. And God the Son hath bought this strength for us, and he intercedes for constant supply; and therefore it is said, Phil. 4:13, 'I can do all things through Christ.' Christ puts in strength, that is, he observes all our temptations, our conflicts, how weak we are; and he intercedes with God night and day; he stands at God's right hand, to get out this strength; and the



Holy Ghost applies it to our heart in the ordinances; for so it is said, Eph. 3:16, 'To be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.'

Use. To press us to be dealing with God for this strength. What shall we do?

1. Be weak in your own sense and feeling. The way to be strong is to be weak: 2 Cor. 12:10, 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' The bucket, if we would have it filled with the ocean, must first be empty. Saith Austin, *Nemo erit a Deo firmus, nisi qui seipsum sentit infirmum*—God strengtheneth those that are weak in their own feeling and sense of their own nothingness: Heb. 11:34, 'Out of weakness they were made strong;' out of weakness felt and apprehended.

2. There must be a full reliance upon God's strength alone: Ps. 71:16, 'I will go forth in the strength of the Lord God;' and Eph. 6:10, 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might;' and 2 Tim. 2:1, 'Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.' Whatever is in God and in Christ is for our use; it is forthcoming for our encouragement and help. We have firm grounds for this reliance—the infinite power of God, and the merit of Christ, which is of infinite value. What cannot the power of God do? The strength of God is engaged for our relief and succour.

3. Use the power that you have, and then it will be increased upon you. The right arm is bigger than the left. Why? Because of exercise, it is fuller of spirits and strength: 'To him that hath shall be given,' Mat. 13:12, 'and he shall have abundance.' The more we exercise grace the more we shall have of it: Prov. 10:29, 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright.' The more we walk with God the more strength.

4. Use the means, for 'they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength,' Isa. 40:31. Because God doth all, oh! it is the greatest engagement that can be to wait upon God in the use of means, that we may draw out treasures of grace in God's way: Phil. 2:12, 'Work out your salvation, for it is God that worketh in you,' &c. See that you keep not off from God. Why? For he doth all.

5. Avoid sin; that lets out your strength, as bleeding lets out the spirits of the body. When you grieve the Spirit of Christ which is to strengthen you, you cast away your strength from you. Let us then wait upon God for help, for when all things fail, God faileth not.

Secondly, I now come to the argument, 'Strengthen me according to thy word.' God's word binds him to relieve his people in distress. There are two promises; one is, 1 Cor. 10:13, 'God will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.' A good man would not overburden his beast; certainly the gracious God will not suffer temptations to lie upon us above measure. Another promise is in Isa. 57:15–17, 'To revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' He hath promised comfort and relief to poor broken-hearted sinners; you are called by name in the promise, it is spoken to people in your case. Again, upon such a word and promise of God is David's prayer grounded. A prayer grounded upon a promise is like to prevail; you may put a humble challenge upon God, plead his word to him. It is strange fire else you put in the censer, when you beg that which God never undertook to grant. David often saith 'according to thy word.' Again, the word of God is the only cure and relief for a fainting soul. When David was languishing away under deep sorrow, then, Lord, thy word did bring strength. (1.) This is the proper cure. Natural means cannot be a remedy to a spiritual distemper, no more than a fine suit of apparel to a sick man, or a posy of flowers to a condemned man. Natural comforts carry no

proportion with a spiritual disease; nothing but grace, pardon, strength, and acceptance from God can remove it. They that seek to quench their sorrows in excess and merry company take a brutish remedy for soul diseases. O foolish creatures! that think to sport away or drink down their troubles! it is as foolish a course as to think that to sew up a rent in the garment will cure a wound in their body. And (2.) it is a universal cure; we have from the word life, comfort, strength. It is the word that must guide us and keep us from fainting, quicken us and keep us from dying. This is a full remedy in conjunction with the power of God, and makes the sore joyful in the midst of outward troubles: Ps. 56:10, 'I will rejoice in God because of his word.'

Lastly, This word must be applied to the conscience by God himself, 'Strengthen thou me according to thy word.' He goes to God that he would apply his word, that it might be for his strength; for we can neither apprehend nor apply it further than we receive grace from God. The word is God's instrument, and worketh not without the principal agent.

## **SERMON XXX**

## **Remove from me the way of lying; and grant me thy law graciously.—VER. 29.**

THERE are two parts of Christianity—destructive and adstructive. The destructive part consists in a removing of sin; the adstructive part makes way for the plantation of grace; there is eschewing evil, and doing good. We are carried on in a forward earnestness in the way of sin, but there is a great backwardness and restraint upon our hearts as to that which is good. The one is necessary to the other; we must come out of the ways of sin before we can walk in the ways of God. In this prayer David respects both. (1.) In the first he instanceth in one sin, 'the way of lying;' not only lying, but 'the way of lying,' as being conscious to himself of his too often sinning in this kind. Now, he would not have this settled into a course or way; therefore he beggeth, Remove it, the guilt, the fault of it. (2.) As to the adstructive part, for the regulation of his conversation, he begs the favour and grant of the law, and that upon terms of grace. David had ever the book of the law, for every king of Israel was to have it always by him, and, the rabbis say, written with his own hand. But 'grant me thy law graciously;' that is, he desires he might have it not only written by him, but upon him, to have it imprinted upon his heart, that he might have a heart to observe and keep it. That is the blessing he begs for, the law; and this is begged graciously, or upon terms of grace, merely according to thine own favour and good pleasure. Here is—

1. The sin deprecated, remove from me the way of lying.
2. The good supplicated and asked, grant me thy law graciously.

In the first clause you have his malady: David had been enticed to a course of lying. In the second we have his remedy, and that is the law of God.

First, Let me speak of the evil deprecated; here observe—

1. The object, the way of lying.
2. God's act about it, remove from me, &c.

First for the object, 'The way of lying.' It is by some taken generally, by others more particularly.

1. For those that expound it more generally, they are not all of a mind. Some think by the way of lying is meant corruption of doctrine; others of worship; others apply it to disorders of conversation; some take it for error of doctrine, false opinions concerning God and his worship, which are called lying, and so opposed to the way of truth spoken of in the next verse, 'I have chosen the way of truth.' Heresy and false doctrine is called a lie, Ezek. 13:22, 'Their diviners speak lies;' so 1 John 2:21, 'A lie is not of the truth;' and the word used, 'The way of lying' is elsewhere rendered a 'false way,' ver. 104, and ver. 128 there is the same expression. Now, this he desires to be removed from him, because it sticks as close to us as our skin. Error is very natural to us, and man doth exceedingly please himself with the figments of his own brain. All practical errors in the world are but man's natural thoughts cried up into a voluble opinion, because backed with defences of wit, and parts, and secular interests, and other advantages; they are but our secret and privy thoughts which have gotten the reputation of an opinion in the world; for we 'speak lies from the womb;' even in this sense we suck in erroneous principles with our milk. Nature carrieth us to wrong thoughts of God, and the ways of God, and out of levity

and inconstancy of spirit we are apt to be 'carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men.' Now, to this sense the latter clause will well agree, 'Keep me from a way of lying,' that is, keep me from falling into error and mistakes about religion; for he begs that the law may be granted to him, or a certain stated rule, without which all things are liable to deceit and imposture. And according to this sense Austin beggeth that he may neither be deceived in the scriptures, nor deceive out of them; *Nec fallar in iis, nec fallam, ex iis*—let me never be mistaken myself, nor cause others to mistake. Again, by a way of lying some understand false worship, for an idol is a lie: Isa. 44:20, 'Is there not a lie in his right hand?' meaning an idol. By others, a course of sinning, for a way of sinning is a way of lying, for it deceives us with a conceit of happiness which we shall never enjoy; therefore, Eph. 4:22, 'Put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.' Lusts are called deceitful, because they promise what they never perform; they flatter us not only with hopes of impunity, but much imaginary comfort and satisfaction; oh, but it is a lie! Satan deceived our first parents, pretending to show them a way of immortality, whereas that brought death to the world. Most go this way, Remove from me the way of lying, that is, the way of sin; and the rather because the Septuagint translation reads it thus, Remove from me the way of iniquity; and Chrysostom in his gloss. He means, every evil deed should be removed from him, or it proves a lie in regard of all those flatterings and blandishments by which it enticeth the soul. Nay, there is a parallel place seems to make good this sense, Prov. 30:8, when Agur prays against sin, 'Remove from me vanity and lies,' meaning a course of sin. Thus it is taken more generally.

2. Those that take it more particularly for the sin of lying, or speaking falsely in commerce, they again differ. Some take it passively, keep me from frauds or deceits of other men; because it seems to be a

hard thing to ascribe a way of lying to a child of God, therefore they rather take it passively. But this is to fear where no fear is. But David begs that he might be kept from a way of lying, that it might not settle into a way, that is his meaning. Therefore I rather take it actively, that he might not run into a false and fallacious course of dealing with others.

Now why would David have this way of lying removed from him? Three reasons:—

1. Because of the inclination of his corrupt nature. We had most need pray to be kept from gross sins: as Ps. 19:13, 'Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins.' We need not only pray against lesser sins or spiritual wickedness, but from gross sins carried on presumptuously against the light of conscience. So Col. 3:5, 'Mortify your earthly members,' &c. What members doth he speak of? Not worldliness and unbelief only; but he speaks of adultery, uncleanness, inordinate affections, and the like; and the children of God, if they do not deal with God for grace against their gross sins, they will soon know to their costs. Jesus Christ warned his own disciples, those that were trained up in his school, those that were to go abroad and deliver his gospel to the world: Luke 21:34, 'Take heed lest your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness,' &c. A candle newly blown out easily sucks light and flame again; and we that are newly taken out of the dominion of sin into a state of grace, may suck light and flame again; therefore we had need pray against gross sins.

2. Because he had been tripping and guilty in this kind. In the story of David you may trace too much of this way and vein of lying; as his feigning to Ahimelech the priest, 1 Sam. 21:8; and to Achish, 1 Sam. 27:8, compared with ver. 10; his persuading Jonathan to tell his

father he was gone about such a business. Now, this we may learn, when we are foiled by any sin, we should take heed lest we settle into a way and course of sin; for in every sin, as there is culpa, the fault, or the transgression of the law, and reatus, the guilt, or obligation of punishment, so there is macula, the blot, an inclination to sin again, in like manner as a brand once on fire is more apt to take fire again. By every act of sin the law of God is lessened, our carnal inclination is increased; therefore we had need be earnest with God, Lord, keep me from a way of lying.

3. Man is strongly inclined to lying; it sticks close to our nature, so that God must remove it from us; as more fully afterwards. Thus for the object, a way of lying.

Secondly, God's act about it, 'Remove from me.' Sin is removed either in a way of justification, when the guilt of it is done away; this David might intend. But rather in a way of sanctification, when the fault or blot is done away. This is mainly intended, as appears by the antithesis or opposite request, 'and grant me thy law graciously;' that is, let it be impressed upon my heart, that such a temptation may be prevented for the future. Let me observe—

Doct. That lying, especially a way or course of lying, should be far from God's people.

David begs the removal of it, as most inconsistent with the temper and sincerity of a child of God. Examine—

1. What is lying?

2. Upon what grounds this should be far from a child of God?



First, What is lying? Ans. Lying is when men wittingly and willingly, and with purpose to deceive, signify that which is false by gestures or actions, but especially by words. The matter of a lie is a falsehood; but the formality of it is with an intention to deceive; therefore a falsehood is one thing, a lie another. Then we lie when we not only do or speak falsely, but knowingly, and with purpose to deceive. Now this may be done by gestures, as when a scorner counterfeiteth the posture of one that is praying, or as when David feigned himself to be distracted, scrabbling upon the doors of the gate, spitting upon his beard, 1 Kings 21:1; and in the pagan story Junius Brutus was taxed for feigning himself a fool to save himself from Tarquin. Aquinas saith gestures are a sign by which we discover our minds. But because these are but imperfect signs, and speech is the usual instrument of commerce, therefore in words do we usually vent this sin. Now in our words we are said to lie two ways—assertorily or promissorily.

1. Assertorily, in a matter past or present, when one speaketh that as false which he knoweth to be true, and that as true which he knoweth to be false, which is called speaking with a double heart in scripture: Ps. 12:2. 'With a heart and a heart;' that is, when we have one heart to furnish the tongue with what is false, and another heart to conceive of the matter as it is. An instance of this falsehood in our assertions, or untrue relating of things done, is Ananias and Sapphira, who brought part of the money for which he sold his possession, instead of the whole; therefore, Acts 5:3, 'Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost, in keeping back part of the price?' It was a lie, because there was a false assertion in saying that it was the whole; and it was a lie to the Holy Ghost, partly as being pretended to be done by his motion when they were acted by Satan, counterfeiting spiritual actions; or a lie against the Holy Ghost, because the Holy Ghost, being last in order of the persons, is

fitly represented as conscious to our ways and the workings of our hearts: it is in condescension to us, because it is most conceivable to us to reflect upon him as knowing our hearts, and all the workings of our souls: Rom. 9:1, 'I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost;' and when the psalmist speaks of hiding himself from God, he saith, 'Whither shall I flee from thy Spirit?' Ps. 139:7. Or else a lie to the Holy Ghost, because of his presidency and superintendency over church affairs: Acts 13:2, 'The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them;' and Acts 20:28, 'Take heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.' Now, because this was an ecclesiastical or church case, therefore they are said to lie to the Holy Ghost, as one that is to supply Christ's place. It was not the sin against the Holy Ghost, but a lie against the Holy Ghost.

2. Promissorily we lie when we promise things we mean not to perform. This is a great sin. Paul spent the great part of a chapter to excuse himself, because he was necessitated by providence to break promise of coming to Corinth, 2 Cor. 1:16–18. It was grievous to him that he should seem to use lightness, and not make good his word, though he were hindered by the providence of God. Vain and empty promises, wherein we make a great show of kindness to others, without any intent to perform, is a great sin: Prov. 19:22, 'The desire of a man is his kindness; and a poor man is better than a liar.' What is the meaning? Some read it, that which is desired of a man is kindness: you come to a man in power and great place, and beg his favour in such a business and request, and they are too apt to promise you. Ay! but a poor man is better than a liar; you shall find among these great men very little faith. The desire of a man is his kindness, or that which a man should do in a great and high condition is to show you kindness. But now many that covet the

praise and reputation of it, are very forward in promises, but fail in performance; therefore a poor man that loves you, and is an honest neighbour, and will do his best, is a surer friend and a thousand times better than such lying great men, that only give you good words, and sprinkle you with court holy water. Now there is a lying to men, and a lying to God.

[1.] A lying to God, which is the worst sort, because it argues unbelief and atheism, low thoughts of God, as if he were not omniscient, did not know the heart, and try the reins. How do we lie to God? Partly when we put him off with a false appearance, and make a show of what is not in the heart, as if he would he be deceived with outsides and vain pretences. So Hosea 11:12, it is said, 'Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Judah with deceit.' God can see through and through all fair shows, and will not be mocked. We are said to lie to God when we perform not those professions and promises which we made in a time of trouble. Oh, when chastenings are upon us, then the vows of God are upon us! Men think they mean as they speak, but they are not conscious of the secrecy of their hearts: Ps. 78:36, 'They flattered me with their mouth, and they lied unto me with their tongue.' Their hearts were not sincerely set against sin, whatever professions of repentance they made. When there is a restraint upon our corruptions, then we think ourselves hearty and serious, because moved a little towards God. Moral integrity is when we intend not to deceive, but there was no supernatural sincerity to perform, as the event showed. They were only the fruit of the present pang, therefore it was said they lied unto him with their tongue. So Ezek. 24:12, 'She hath wearied herself with lies, and her scum went not forth out of her,' speaking of her promises; when the pot was over the fire there seemed to be offers to throw off the scum, but she hath wearied herself with lies. And in this sense it is said, Hosea 7:16, 'They return, but not to the Most High;

they are like a deceitful bow;' that is, they did not seriously intend when they did promise. As a man that shoots, if he do not level right, and take care to direct the arrow to the mark, it will never hit; so they shoot, that is, they cast out promises to flatter God till they get out of trouble, but they do not seriously set their hearts to accomplish it.

[2.] As to men, there are three sorts of lies—*Mendacium jocosum*, *officiosum*, et *perniciosum*: there is the sporting lie, tending to our recreation and delight; there is the officious lie, tending to our own and others' profit; and there is the pernicious and hurtful lie, tending to our neighbour's prejudice.

(1.) The sporting lie, when an untruth is devised for merriment. We have no instance of this in scripture; but it is a sin to speak untruth, and we must not make a jest of sin: Prov. 26:19, 'As a madman that casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?' Have we nothing wherewith to refresh our neighbour but with the breach of God's law? If a Christian 'will be merry, let him sing psalms,' James 5:13; let him give thanks, Eph. 5:4, 'Not filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; but rather giving of thanks;' that is, let him remember the sweet loves of God in Jesus Christ, and that is spiritual refreshment to a gracious heart. Let him not speak things against the sense of his own mind; let him use honest recreation. Certainly we that are to give an account for every idle word should not allow the sporting lie. Now to this sporting lie a fable or parable is not to be reduced, for that is only an artificial way of representing the truth with the more advantage, and putting of it into sensible terms which most are apt to apprehend; as Jotham brings in the trees that went forth to anoint a king over them, Judges 9:8. Neither such sharp and piercing ironies as we find used by holy men in scripture, 1 Kings 18:27; as Elijah 'mocked them, and said, Cry aloud;

for he is a God: either he is talking,' &c.; for this is a notable way to make truth strike upon the heart with some force; and therefore this must not be reduced to this sporting lie.

(2.) The officious lie, for the help and relief of others. Many instances of this we have in scripture. Thus Rebekah teacheth Jacob to lie that he might gain the blessing, Gen. 27; and the Egyptian midwives saved the male children of the Israelites by feigning they were delivered before they came to them, Exod. 1:21; yet it is said they feared God, and it is rewarded by God. *Non remunerata est fallacia sed benevolentia*—not their lie, but their mercy is rewarded: their mercy is commended as proceeding from the fear of God, and their infirmities are pardoned. So Rahab spared the lives of the spies, by telling the men of her city that they were gone, when she had hid them under the stalks of flax, Josh. 2:4–6. Thus Michal, to save David from the fury of her father, feigned him sick, 1 Sam. 19:14; and David advised Jonathan to an officious lie, 1 Sam. 20:6, 7; so vers. 26, 28, 29. Thus Hushai, by temporising with Absalom, preserved David, 2 Sam. 16:17–19, to divide his counsels pretendeth hearty affection to him.

(3.) There is a pernicious lie, that is to the hurt and prejudice of another. Of this nature was the first lie, by which all mankind was ruined—the devil's lie to our first parents, 'Ye shall be as gods,' Gen. 3:4, 5. And of this nature was the patriarchs' lie concerning Joseph, when they spake to his father, Gen. 37:31, 32, 'This have we found, and know not whether it be thy son's coat or no,' yet they knew well enough; and that of the Jewish elders that said, Mat. 28:12, 13, 'Say ye, his disciples came and stole him away while we slept.' All these are severely forbidden, but especially in point of witnessing in courts of judicature: Exod. 23:1, 'Put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness;' and ver. 7, 'Keep thee far from a false

matter,' &c. Now some question whether all these lies be sin or no, sporting or officious lies. All these sorts of lies are sins; for—

1. The scripture condemns all without restriction: Eph. 4:25, 'Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour;' Rev. 21:8, all liars are shut out of the New Jerusalem, 'And all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone;' and Rev. 22:15, 'Whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.'

2. They all violate the natural order and conformity which God hath appointed between the heart and the tongue; and though officious lies are not for the hurt, but the good of others, yet it is to the hurt and prejudice of truth. A man is not to lie for the glory of God, therefore certainly not for the good of another man; you hurt your own soul more by sin than you can do him good. Augustine, treating of officious lies, he tells of one Firmus, who was Firmus nomine, et firmior voluntate—Firm by name, but more firm and fixed by will and resolved purpose; therefore, when one was pursued for casual homicide, he concealed him; and being asked for him, answered, *Nec mentiri se posse nec hominem prodere*—he could neither lie nor betray him. So much for the first thing, namely, what is a lie and lying.

Secondly, For the reasons why the children of God should be far from it.

1. In regard of outward commerce. That which is contrary to human society should be odious to the children of God, who, as they are in a peculiar sense members one of another, so are also of the same political body, and therefore should 'speak truth one to another,' Eph. 4:25. Human society is mostly upheld by truth. Where there is no truth, there can be no trust; where there is no trust, there can be no commerce; it makes men unfit to be trusted. When a man hath

much counterfeit money offered to him in payment, though there may be some true gold and silver, yet he casts it away, and suspecteth it all. Men that are given to lying can have no credit nor faith with man, so they are unfit for human commerce; therefore it should be far from men; nay, it is the right of our neighbour that we should speak truth, for speech is a kind of traffic and commerce, and therefore it is a kind of theft to defraud your neighbour of his right, if you give him false words for true. Now, because it is the band and foundation of human society, therefore it should be far from the children of God.

2. It is a perversion of the order of nature. The tongue is the interpreter of the mind, and therefore if the interpreter of another man speak contrary to what he pronounceth, there were a manifest wrong and disorder; so when the tongue speaks otherwise than the man thinks, there is a great disturbance and deordination.

3. We resemble Satan in nothing so much as in lying, and we resemble God in nothing so much as in truth. Falsehood is the devil's character: John 8:44, 'He was a liar from the beginning;' that is, the first inventor of lies, as Jubal was the father of them that played upon the harp, the first inventor; and herein we most resemble Satan. On the contrary, there is nothing wherein a man resembleth God so much as in truth. Truth is no small part of the image of God, for he is called 'the God of truth;' and it is said of him, Titus. 1:2, that he 'cannot lie;' it is contrary to the perfection of his nature; nor command us to lie. God hath commanded many other things which otherwise were sinful; as to kill another man, as Abraham to slay his son; to take away the goods of others, as lord of all, as when the Israelites spoiled the Egyptians of their jewels; but God cannot lie, it is against his nature: Eph. 4:24, 25, 'Put off the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts; and put on the new man,

which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.' Then presently, 'Wherefore put away lying; speak every man truth with his neighbour.' Wherefore—that is, from your regeneration, when the image of God is planted in you. So the same: Col. 3:9, 'Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.' There may be sin in the children of God, but there should be no guile in them. Habituated guile is the old man that is deceitful; the new man is framed to truth, and according to the will of God.

4. This is a consideration, that God never dispensed with this precept. He hath upon special occasion dispensed with other commands, but never with the ninth. With the seventh commandment in the polygamy of the patriarchs, and with the second in Hezekiah's passover; but a man must not lie for God, Job 13:7–9, because this commandment hath, more in it of the justice and immutable perfection of God than others.

5. By the light of nature nothing is more odious. We love a just and true man, one that is without guile; we acknowledge it as a moral perfection. But a lie is counted the greatest disgrace; we revenge the charge of it. It is counted a base thing to lie. Why? Because it comes from fear, and it tends to deceit, both which argue baseness of spirit, and are contrary to the gallantry of a man; therefore it is shameful in the eyes of nature, and those that are most guilty of it cannot endure to be charged with it. When the prophet Micaiah told Zedekiah of his lying spirit, he 'smote him on the cheek,' 1 Kings 20:23. So men take it ill to be charged with a lie. We count it a shameful sin among men. The old Persians had such a great respect to truth, that he that was three times taken with a lie was never more to speak in public, upon penalty of death.



6. It is a sin that is most hateful to God; therefore it should be far from the children of God. We hate that most which is contrary to our nature, so it is contrary to God's nature. There are six things God hates, and a lying tongue is one of them; twice it is mentioned, Prov. 6:17, 19, and Prov. 12:22, 'Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord; but they that deal truly are his delight.' Now certainly because God hates it, therefore we should hate it. To will and nill the same thing, that is true friendship. God hates it, therefore a righteous man hates it: Prov. 13:5, 'A righteous man hateth lying; but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame.'

7. It is a sin which God hath expressly threatened to punish in this life and in the life to come. In this life: Ps. 5:6, 'Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing;' and Prov. 19:5, 'He that speaketh lies shall not escape.' God will cut them off as not being fit for human society. The first remarkable instance we have in the New Testament of God's vengeance was for a lie, Acts 5:5; yea, it is one of the sins that draws down public and national judgments; and therefore it is said, Hosea 4:2, 'By swearing and lying, therefore, doth the land mourn.' And when God gives advice to his people how they should prevent his judgments, Zech. 8:16, 17, 'These are the things that ye shall do, speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour: execute the judgment of truth; love no false oath: for all these are the things that I hate, saith the Lord.' When men have no care of their speeches, when a people bind themselves by oaths to do that which they mind not to perform, or wilfully do not perform, they are ripe for a judgment. And so in the life to come: Rev. 21:27, 'And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie;' and Rev. 21:8, 'All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone;' and Rev. 22:15, 'For without are dogs and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.'

Use. Oh, then, let us beware of all lying and dissimulation with respect to God and men! Let our words consent with our minds, and our minds agree with the thing itself. A lie is most odious to God, 'a proud look, and a lying tongue;' and therefore a Christian that loves God, shall he do that which God so expressly hates? Will you rush upon the pikes, kick against the pricks, and run against the judgments of God? A lying tongue shall not escape. Nay, God reckons upon his children: Isa. 63:8, 'Surely they are my people, children that will not lie.' Disappointment, that is the worst vexation. God reckons upon it, surely you will make conscience of truth, not only in your oaths (certainly that is a barbarous thing to break the most sacred engagements that are among mankind, therefore you will be careful to perform what you have sworn to the Lord with your hands lift up to the Most High God), but also in your promises and ordinary speeches. Good men have been foiled by it (David begs, 'Keep me from a way of lying'), and it is a sin more common than we imagine; it is very natural to us, Isa. 59:3. As soon as we are born we speak lies; before we could go we went astray, and before we were able to speak we spake lies; the seed of it was in our nature. It is a sin most natural, for it was the occasion of the first sin, and therefore we had need be cautioned against it.

Consider, there is a lying to God in public and private worship. In public worship, how often do you compass him about with lies! We show love with our mouths when our heart is at a great distance from God. Oh, how odious should we be to ourselves if our heart were turned inside outward in the best duty, and all our thoughts were turned into words! for in our worship many times we draw near to God with our mouths, when our heart is at a great distance. As when their bodies were in the wilderness, their hearts were in Egypt; so we prattle words without sense and spiritual affection. Nay, in our private worship, we confess sin without shame; we pray as if we

cared not to be heard. Conscience tells us what we should pray for, but our hearts do not go out in the matter, and we throw away our prayers as children shoot away their arrows, which is a sign we are not so hearty as we should be. We give thanks, but without meltings of heart. Custom and natural light tell us something must be done in this kind, but how hard a matter it is to draw near God with truth of heart?

Again, would we not be accounted better than we are? Who would be thought as ill as he hath cause to think of himself? We storm if others but speak of us half of what we speak of ourselves to God; therefore all had need look to it to be kept from a way of lying. And for gross lying, how far are we from being willing that should be accomplished which the Lord speaks of, Zeph. 3:13, 'The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth.' Rather we may take up David's complaint, Ps. 12:1, 2, 'The godly man ceaseth; the faithful fail from among the children of men: they speak vanity every one with his neighbour; with flattering lips, and with a double heart do they speak.' Promises, oaths, covenants all broken; and therefore so many jealousies, because so much lying; all trust is lost among us. This lying is always ill, but especially in magistrates, men of public place: Prov. 17:7, 'Lying lips become not a prince.' So ministers: Rom. 9:1, 'I say the truth in Christ, I lie not;' 2 Cor. 11:31, 'The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ knoweth that I lie not.' Among private Christians, are we not too rash in our suspicions, and speak worse of others than they deserve? do we not take up and vent reports without search? it may be out of envy at the brightness of their profession. Do not unwary expressions drop from us? Much talk cannot be justified. Are there not rash promises we make no conscience to mind and look after? Many ways may we trace ourselves in this sin of lying;

therefore look to the prevention of it. What remedies are there against it?

1. Hate it; do not think it to be a venial matter: Ps. 119:163, 'I hate and abhor lying;' not only hate it, nor simply I abhor it, but hate and abhor, to strengthen and increase the sense, and make it more vehement. Where the enmity is not great against the sin, the matter may be compounded and taken up. Oh, but I hate and abhor it, and hate it with a deadly hatred! Slight hatred of a sinful course is not sufficient to guard us against it.

2. Love to the law of God; if that be dear to you, you will not break it upon any light occasion. In the text, 'Grant me thy law graciously.' If a man prize the laws of God, and would fain have them printed in the heart, he will not so easily break them.

3. Remember your spiritual conflict; you never give Satan so great an advantage as by falsehood and guile of spirit. The devil assaults by wiles, but your strength lieth in downright honesty: Eph. 6:11, 'That ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.' Satan's strength lies in wiles, but you must beat him down in sincerity. The first piece of the spiritual armour is the girdle of truth—that is, the grace of sincerity, whereby a man is to God and men what he gives out himself to be, or seems to be. This is that which will give you strength and courage in sore trials. Oh! when Satan shall accuse and challenge you for your base hypocrisy, then how will you hold up your heads in the day of spiritual conflict, if you have not the girdle of truth? But now uprightness gives us courage, strength, and stands by us in the very agonies of death.

4. Heedfulness, and a watch upon the tongue: Ps. 39:1, 'I said I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue.' Let us speak of

what we think, and think of what we speak, that the mind may conform itself with the nature of truth.

5. Avoid the causes of lying. There are three of them—(1.) Boasting, or speaking too much of ourselves. When men are given to boasting, whatever thing of weight is done, they were privy to it; their hand was in the work, in contriving and prosecuting the business, their counsel was for it. Nothing can be acted without their knowledge and approbation. This spirit of vainglory is the mother of vain talking, therefore of a lying tongue: Ps. 12:3, 'Flattering lips,' and 'the tongue that speaketh proud things,' are joined together. (2.) Flattery, or desiring of ingratiating themselves with those that are great and mighty in the world, when they have men's persons in admiration: Ps. 12:2, 'With flattering lips, and with a double heart do they speak.' So Hosea 7:3, 'They make the king glad with their lies.' To please their rulers, they soothe them up with flattering applause and fawning upon them. (3.) Carnal fear and distrust. This was that which put David to his shifts in his dangers; he was apt to fail, and deal a little deceitfully in time of temptation and danger. We had need to pray to God to be kept from all ways and counsels that are contrary to God's word. The scripture speaks, Deut. 33:29, of counterfeit submissions to higher powers: 'Thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, thou shalt tread upon their high places;' the meaning is, shall be subdued by thee. So Ps. 18:44, 'Strangers shall submit themselves to me;' Ps. 66:3, 81:15, and many other places. The word implieth feigned submission.

Object. But are we openly to profess our mind in all things in time of danger? I answer—Prudent concealment may be without fault, but a professed subjection should be sincere, for open and free dealing doth best become God's children. It is true we are not bound to speak all the truth at all times to every person. In some cases we may

conceal something: Luke 9:21, our Saviour 'straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell nobody that he was the Christ,' 1 Sam. 16:2, when the Lord sent Samuel to anoint David, Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord;' that was a truth, but not the whole truth.

Object. But you will say, Will not this justify mental reservation and Jesuitical equivocation? I answer—There are two sorts of reservations; I may reserve part of the truth in my mind. But the mental reservations the Jesuits plead for is this—when that which is spoken is a lie, if abstracted from that which is in the mind; for instance, if a magistrate say, Art thou a priest? No; meaning not after the order of Baal. So that which is spoken is a lie. But if it be spoken with truth, we may reserve part of it. That in Samuel was not an untruth, but concealing some part of the truth not fit to be discovered. So Jer. 38:24–27, 'Then said Zedekiah unto Jeremiah, Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die. But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they shall come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; also what the king said unto thee: then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there. Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him; and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded: so they left off speaking with him, for the matter was not perceived.'

Secondly, We now come to the blessing asked, 'Grant me thy law graciously.' Where first the benefit itself, grant me thy law; secondly, the terms upon which it is asked, implied in the word graciously.

The benefit asked, 'Grant me thy law.' David had the book of the law already; every king was to have a copy of it written before him; but he understandeth it not of the law written in a book. But of the law written upon his heart; which is a privilege of the covenant of grace: Heb. 8:10, 'For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel in those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and write them in their hearts,' &c.

Doct. 1. Then is the law granted to us when it is written upon our minds and hearts; that is, when we understand it, and our hearts are framed to the love and obedience of it; otherwise it is only granted to the church in general, but it is not granted to us in particular. We may have some common privilege of being trained up in the knowledge of God's will, but we have not the personal and particular benefits of the covenant of grace till we find it imprinted upon our hearts. Well, then—

1. Press God about this, not only to grant his word unto the church, but to grant it unto you, unto your persons: 'To reveal his Son in me,' Gal. 1:16. There is a general benefit, 'He hath showed his word unto Jacob, and his statutes unto Israel,' Ps. 147:19. And there is a particular benefit, 'Grant me thy law graciously.' The whole church may be under a covenant of grace, and some particular members of it may be all that while under a covenant of works, if they have only an external law without to show them what is good, but not a law within to urge and enable them to do it—*Lex jubet, gratia juvat*. Literal instruction belongeth only to the first covenant; but when the word is made ours, that is a privilege of the second covenant, 'The ingrafted word that is able to save our souls,' James 1:21, 'when it is received in our hearts, and doth prosper there, and fructify unto holiness, when it is written over again by the finger of the Spirit.

2. See if this effect be accomplished, if the law be granted to you. It is so—(1.) When you have a sense and conscience of it, and you own it as your rule for the governing of your own heart and life: Ps. 37:31, 'The law of God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.' It is not in his book only, but in his heart, to guide all his actions. (2.) It is so when you have some ability and strength to perform it. Their hearts carry them to it: as Ps. 60:8, 'I delight to do thy will, O God; yea, thy law is in my heart.' They have not only a sense and conscience of their rule, but a ready spirit to perform it, and set about this work cheerfully and heartily. A ready and cheerful obedience to God's will is the surest note that the law is given to us; when the study and practice of it is the great employment and pleasure of our lives.

Doct. 2. (1.) The law that is odious to the flesh is acceptable to a gracious heart. What others count a restraint, they count a great benefit and favour: Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' They shun all means of searching and knowing themselves, wishing such things were not sins, or not desiring to know them to be so; therefore hate the law, and will not come to the light, John 3:20, 'For every one that doth evil hateth the light; neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.' As a man that hath light ware is loath to come to the balance, or counterfeit coin to the touchstone, or as a bankrupt is loath to cast up his estate. They hate the directions and injunctions of the word as contrary to their lusts: 1 Kings 22:8, 'He doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil,' said wicked Ahab; and therefore would not hear him, and yet he was the prophet of the Lord. They are loath to understand their duty, are willingly ignorant: 2 Peter 3:5, 'For this they are willingly ignorant of,' &c. But now a gracious heart desireth nothing more than the knowledge of God's will; how contrary soever to their lusts, they approve it: Rom. 7:12, 'Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just



and good.' The law and commandment, that which wrought such tragical effects in his heart. Therefore they desire the knowledge of it above all things: Ps. 119:72, 'The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver,' more than all earthly riches whatsoever; it is the best thing they can enjoy, to have a full direction in obedience. (2.) The practice is welcome to their souls: 1 John 5:4, 'His commandments are not grievous.' They are to others, not to them, because of the suitableness of their hearts: to a galled shoulder, the least burden is irksome, but to a sound back it is nothing; love sweetens all.

Use. Do you count the law an enemy or a friend? The law is an enemy to them that count it an enemy, and a friend to them that count it a friend. It is a rule of life to them that delight in it, and count it a great mercy to know it, and be subdued to the practice of it; but it is a covenant of works to them that withdraw the shoulder, count it a heavy burden not to be borne. Well, then, which do you complain of, the law or your corruptions? What are you troubled with, light or lusts? A gracious heart groaneth not under the strictness of the law, but under the body of death; not because God hath required so much, but because they can do no more.

Doct. 3. That the law is granted to us or written upon our hearts out of God's mere grace. Grant it graciously, saith David. I will do it, saith God; and God will do it upon his own reasons. The conditions of the covenant are conditions in the covenant, and the articles that bind us are also promises wherein God is bound to bestow so great a benefit upon poor creatures; which doth encourage us to wait for this work with the more confidence. We are sensible we have not the law so intimately, so closely applied as we should have. Lord, grant it graciously. It is his work to give us a greater sense and care of it.

## SERMON XXXI

### **I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.—VER. 30.**

DAVID asserts his sincerity here in two things:—

1. In the rightness of his choice, I have chosen the way of thy truth.
2. In the accurateness of his prosecution, thy judgments have I laid before me.

First, For his choice, 'I have chosen the way of thy truth.' God having granted him his law, he did reject all false ways of religion, and continued in the profession of the truth of God, and the strict observance thereof. There are many controversies and doubtful thoughts among the sons of men about religion, all being varnished with specious pretences, so that a man knows not which way to choose, till by the Spirit he be enabled to take the direction of the word; that resolveth all his scruples, and makes him sit down in the way which God hath pointed for him. Thus David, as an effect of God's grace, avoucheth his own choosing the way of truth.

By the way of truth is meant true religion; as 2 Peter 2:2, 'By whom the way of truth is evil spoken of.' It is elsewhere called 'the good way wherein we should walk,' 1 Kings 8:36; and 'the way of God,' Ps. 27:11; and 'the way of understanding,' Prov. 9:6; and 'the way of holiness,' Isa. 35:8; and 'the way of righteousness,' 2 Peter 2:21, 'Better they had not known the way of righteousness,' that is, never to have known the gospel, which is called the way of righteousness. It

is called also 'the way of life,' Prov. 6:23, 'And reproofs of instruction are the way of life;' and 'the way of salvation,' as Acts 16:17, the Pythoness gave this testimony to the apostles, 'These are the servants of God, which show unto us the way of salvation.' Now all these expressions have their use and significancy; for the way of truth, or the true way to happiness, is a good way, showed us by God, who can only discover it; and therefore called 'the way of the Lord,' or 'the way of God,' in the place before quoted; and Acts 28:25, 26, it is manifested by God, and leadeth us to God. The Christian doctrine was that way of truth revealed by him who is prima veritas, the first truth. The ways wherein God cometh to us are his mercy and truth; and the way wherein we come to God is the way of true religion prescribed by him; it is the way of understanding, because it maketh us wise as to the great affairs of our souls, and unto the end of our lives and beings; and the way of holiness and righteousness, as directing us in all duties to God and man; and the way of life and salvation, because it brings us to everlasting happiness. This way David chose by the direction of God's word and Spirit.

Secondly, There follows the evidence of his sincerity, the accurate prosecution of his choice, 'Thy judgments have I laid before me.' The Septuagint reads it, 'I have not forgotten thy judgments.' By judgments is meant God's word, according to the sentence of which every man shall receive his doom. He that walketh in a way condemned by the word shall not prosper; for God's word is judgment, and execution shall surely follow; and by this word David got his direction how to choose this way of truth, and this he laid before him as his line. His desire was to follow what was right and true, not only as to his general course and way of profession, but in all his actions; and so it noteth his fixed purpose to live according to this blessed rule which God hath given him. To have a holy rule and an unholy life is unconsonant, inconsistent. A Christian should be a

lively transcript of that religion he doth profess. If the way be a way of truth, he must always set it before him, and walk exactly.

The points are two:—

1. That there being many crooked paths in the world, it concerns us to choose the way of truth.

2. That when we have chosen the way of truth, or taken up the profession of the true religion, the rules and institutions of it should ever be before us.

There are two great faults of men—one in point of choice, the other in point of pursuit. Either they do not choose right, or they do not live up to the rules of their profession. Both are prevented by these points.

Doct. 1. That there being many crooked paths in the world, it concerns us to choose the way of truth.

I shall give you the sense of it in these eight propositions or considerations.

Prop. 1. The Lord in his holy providence hath so permitted it that there ever have been, and are, and, for aught we can see, will be, controversies about the way of truth and right worship. There was such a disease introduced into the world by the fall, that most of the remedies which men choose do but show the strength and malignity of the disease. They choose out false ways of coming to God and returning to him: Micah 4:5, 'All people will walk every one in the name of his god; and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.' Mark, there is his God, and our God, and then all people, noting their common agreement in error; all people will,

every man, noting their diversity as to the particular false way of religion and worship which they take up to themselves. When they turn their back upon the true God, and the knowledge of him, then they are endless in seeking out false gods: Jonah 1:5, 'They cried every man to his god.' Among pagans, even in one ship, there were many false gods worshipped.

The controversy about religion mainly lay at first between the Jews and the pagans. The pagans had their gods, and the Jews had the Lord God of Israel, the only true God. Yea, among the pagans themselves there was a great diversity—'every man will walk'—and sometimes a hot contention; and many times there were hot contests, which was the better god, the leek or the garlic. When religion, which restrains our passions, is made the fuel of them, and instead of a judge becomes a party, men give themselves up headlong to all manner of bitter zeal and strife; and persuasion of truth and right, which doth calm men in other differences, are here inflamed by that bitter zeal every one hath for his god, his service and party; and the difference is greater especially between the two dissenting parties that come nearest to one another.

We read afterward, when this difference lay more closely between the Jews and the Samaritans, and Christ decides, that salvation was of the Jews. The Jews were certainly the better party: John 4:20, 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship'—Mount Sion, or Mount Gerizim, which was the temple of the true God, one or the other? Then we read afterward among the Jews themselves in their private sects, who were very keen against each other, Pharisees and Sadducees; and Paul, though an enemy to them both, and was looked upon as a common adversary, yet they had rather join with him than among themselves, Acts 23:8, 9. Afterward you find the scene of

contention lay between the Jews and Christians: Acts 14:4, 'But the multitude of the city was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.' There it grew into an open contest and quarrel.

And then between the Christians and the pagans, which was the occasion of that uproar at Ephesus, Acts 19. Ay! and after religion had gotten ground, and the way of truth had prevailed in the world, then the difference lay betwixt Christians themselves; yea, while religion was but getting up, between the followers of the apostles and the school and sect of Simon Magus, those impure libertines and Gnostics who went out of them because they were not of them, 1 John 2:19. And afterward in the church story we read of the contentions between the Catholics and the Arians, the Catholics and the Pelagians, the Catholics and the Donatists, and other sects.

And now, last of all in the dregs of time, between the Protestants and the Papists, that settled party with whom the church of God is now in suit. As the rod of Aaron did devour the rods of the enchanters, so the word of God, which is the rod of his strength, doth and will in time eat up and consume all untruths whatsoever; but for a great while the contests may be very hot and sharp. Yea, among those that profess a reformed Christianity, there are the Lutherans and the Calvinists.

And nearer to us, I will not so much as mention those invidious names and flags of defiance which are set up, under which different parties do encamp at home. Thus there ever have been, and will be, contests about religion and disputes about the way of truth; yea, different opinions in the church, and among Christians themselves, about divine truths revealed in the scripture.

The Lord permits this in his holy and righteous providence, that the godly may be stirred up more to embrace truth upon evidence with more affection, that they may more encourage and strengthen themselves and resolve for God; for when all people will walk every one in the name of his god, 'we will walk in the name of our God for ever,' Micah 4:5. And the Lord doth it that he may manifest the sincere, that when Christ calls, Who is on my side? who are willing to stick to him whatever hazards and losses they may incur: 1 Cor. 11:19, 'There must be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.' Ay! and that there may be a ready plague of strong delusion and lies for them that receive not the truth in the love of it, 2 Thes. 2:11, 12; for damnable errors are the dungeons in which God holds carnal souls that play the wanton, and trifle with his truth, and never admit the love and power of it to come into their hearts.

Prop. 2. True religion is but one, and all other ways false, noxious, and pestilent: Eph. 4:5, 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism.' There are many ways in the world, but there is but one good and certain way that leads to salvation. So much the apostle intimates when he saith, 'He will have all men to be saved.' How would he have them saved? 1 Tim. 2:4, 'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;' which text implies that salvation is by the knowledge of the truth, or knowledge of the true way; others tend to destruction. And so God promiseth, Jer. 32:39, that he will give all the elect 'one heart and one way.' Though there be differences even in the church of God about lesser truths, yet there is but one true religion in the essence and substance of it; I mean, as to those truths which are absolutely necessary to salvation. To make many doors to heaven is to set wide open the gates of hell. Many men think that men of all religions shall be saved, provided they be of a good life, and walk according to their light.

In these later times divers unsober questionists are grown weary of the Christian religion, and by an excess of charity would betray their faith; and while they plead for the salvation of Turks and heathens, scarce show themselves good Christians. The Christian religion is not only the most compendious way to true happiness, but it is the only way: John 17:3, 'This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' There is the sum of what is necessary to life eternal; that there is one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to be known, loved, obeyed, worshipped, and enjoyed; and the Lord Jesus Christ to be owned as our Redeemer and Saviour, to bring us home to God, and to procure for us the gifts of pardon and life; and this life to be begun here by the Spirit, and to be perfected in heaven. This is the sum of all that can be said that is necessary to salvation. Certainly none can be saved without Christ; 'for there is no other name under heaven whereby we can be saved but by Jesus Christ,' Acts 4:12, and none can be saved by Christ but they that know him and believe in him.

If God hath extraordinary ways to reveal Christ to men, we know not. This is our rule; no adults, no grown persons can be saved but they that know him and believe in him. And now Christ hath been so long owned in the world, and his knowledge so far propagated, why should we dream of any other way of salvation? To us there is but one God and one faith. The good-fellow gods of the heathen could brook company and partnership, but the true God will be alone acknowledged. As the sun drowns the light of all the stars, so God will shine alone. No man can be saved without these two things—without a fixed intention of God as his last end, and a choice of Jesus Christ as the only way and means of attaining thereunto.

These things are set down in scripture as of infallible necessity to salvation; and therefore, though there be several apprehensions and



contentions about ways of salvation and righteousness, yet there is but one true religion, and all other ways are false.

Prop. 3. As soon as any begin to be serious, they begin to have a conscience about the finding out this one only true way wherein they may be saved. Alas! before men take up that religion which the chance of their education offers, without examination or any serious reason of their choice, they walk, in the language of the prophet, 'according to the trade of Israel;' they live as they are born and bred, and take up truth and error as their faction leads them; or else pass from one religion to another, as a man changeth his room or bed, and make a slight thing of opinions, and float up and down like light chaff, in a various uncertainty, according as their company or the posture of their interest is changed. But a serious and awakened conscience will be careful to lay the groundwork of religion sure; they build for eternity, therefore the foundation needs to be well laid. The woman of Samaria, as soon as she was touched at heart and began to have a conscience, she began also to have doubtful thoughts about her estate and religion. Christ had convinced her of living in adultery, by that means to bring her to God; but now she would fain know the true way of worship: John 4:20, 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.' They that have a sense of eternity upon them will be diligent to know the right way. The same errand brought Nicodemus to Christ: John 3:2, 'Master, we know that thou art a teacher come from God.' He would fain know how he might come to God. So the young nobleman in the gospel: Mat. 19:16, 'Good master, what good thing shall I do that I might have eternal life?' Though he disliked the bargain afterwards, yet he cheapens it, and asks what way he must take. For a great while persons have only a memorative knowledge, some apprehension which doth furnish their talk about religion; and after their memory is planted with notions, then they

are without judgment and conscience; but when they begin to have a judgment and a conscience, then it is their business to make religion sure, and to be upon stable terms with God.

Prop. 4. When we begin to have a conscience about the true way, we must inquire into the grounds and reasons of it, that we may resolve upon evidence, not take it up because it is commonly believed, but because it is certainly true; not take it up by chance, but by choice; not because we know no other, but because we know no better. It is not enough to stumble upon truth blindly, but we must receive it knowingly, and upon solid conviction of the excellency of it, comparing doctrine with doctrine, and thing with thing, and the weak grounds the adversaries of the truth have to build upon. The precepts of the word are direct and plain for this: 1 Thes. 5:21, 'Prove all things, hold fast that which is good; and 1 John 4:1, 'Try the spirits whether they are of God.' There must be trying and searching, and not taking up our religion merely by the dictates of another. The papists are against this, which argueth a distrust of their own doctrine; they will not come to the waters of jealousy, lest their belly should swell and their thigh rot. They dare not admit people to trial and choice, and give them liberty to search the scriptures; whereas truth is not afraid of contradiction: they first put out the light, then would have men shut their eyes. But what do they allege, since we are bidden to prove all things, and to try the spirits? That these places belong to the doctors of the church, and not to the people. But that exception is frivolous, because the apostolical epistles were directed to the body of the people; and they who are advised to prove all things are such as are charged to respect 'those that are over them in the Lord,' ver. 12, and not to 'despise prophecies,' ver. 20, and then 'prove all things,' ver. 21; and in another place, those that he calls, *παιδία*, 'little children,' them he adviseth to try the spirits; all that have a care of their salvation should thus do. Eusebius doth mention

it as one of the errors of Apelles, that what he had taught them they should not pry into and examine, but take it and swallow it. And Mahomet forbids his followers to inquire into their religion.

Object. But is every private Christian bound to study controversy, so as to be able to answer all the adversaries of the truth?

I answer—No; it is a special gift, bestowed and required of some that have leisure and abilities, and it is a duty required of ministers and church guides to convince gainsayers and stop their mouths. Ministers must be able to hold fast the truth. The word is, Titus. 1:9, ἀντεχόμενον, 'holding fast the faithful word;' it signifies, holding fast a thing which another would wrest from us. We should be good at holding and drawing, to preserve the truth when others would take it out of our hands; otherwise he tells us, Rom. 14:1, 'Him that is weak in faith receive, but not to doubtful disputations.' Yet every true Christian is so far to be settled in the true religion, and study the grounds of it, that he may be fully persuaded in his own mind, Rom. 14:5, and may not be like chaff, but may be at a certainty in the way of truth. Surely the business is worthy our serious care. Eternal life and death are not trifles; therefore be not rash in this, but go upon sure evidence.

1. The providence of God doth necessitate us to such a course. Because there are different ways propounded to man, therefore he must follow all, or take up one upon evidence. Not only in point of practice, as life and death is set before us, Deut. 30:15, and the broad way and the narrow, Mat. 7:13, 14; not only to counterwork the rebellions of the flesh, and the way of wisdom and folly, Prov. 9. No; but in matters of opinion and controversy about religion there will meet us several ways, Jer. 6:16, and all pretending to God.

Therefore what should we do but search, pray, resolve to be thus with God, and take the way God will direct us? As the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, or at the head of the ways, to make divination, Ezek. 21:21, so you meet with partings of ways that you need deliberate to make a wise choice; therefore the providence of God doth put you upon trial. Think, there are false teachers; ay, and the most holy and upright men are but in part enlightened, and they may lead you into a crooked path and a byway; they may mislead us; therefore we ought to see with our own eyes.

2. Consider the sad consequence of erring. There are damnable errors and heresies, 2 Peter 2:1. Vice is not only destructive and damnable to the soul, but error. Now eternal damnation and salvation are no small matters. A man cannot please God in a false belief, how laudable so ever his life be; and they cannot put the fault upon others, that they are misled by them; for 'if the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch;' not only the blind guide, but the blind follower.

3. If we light upon a good way without search and choice, it is but a happy mistake when we have not sufficient evidence. You may have the advantage ground, by chance may light upon a better way, and it is God's providence you are born there where it may be so. A Turk hath the same ground for his respect to Mahomet that many have for their owning of Christ; it is that religion he was born and bred in. This will not be counted faith, but simple credulity: 'The simple believeth every word.' It is almost as dangerous to love a truth ignorantly as to broach an error knowingly. *Temere creditur, &c.*, saith Tertullian—that is believed in vain which is believed without the grounds whereupon it is propounded. The faith of Christians should not be conjectural or traditional. If a man should not have reasons to sway his choice, he will never be able to check temptations

even in practical things. If men have not received religion upon true grounds, and, as Cyprian saith, when they do not look into the reason of these things, and when the Christian religion is represented to them without evidence and certainty, they have but a probable faith, that is always weak against temptation, either against lusts within or errors and seductions without; therefore we had need look to the grounds of these things.

4. The profit is exceeding great, for truth will have a greater force upon the heart when we see the grounds and reasons of it. We are exposed here in this lower world to great difficulties and temptations. Now, when we do not lay up the supreme truths of religion with certainty and assurance, alas! these temptations will prevail over us and carry us away. Atheism lies at the root; therefore are there such doubtings in the heart in point of comfort, such defects in the life and conversation, because truth was never soundly laid in the soul, it was not chosen. If we were soundly settled in the belief of the unity of the divine essence, and the verity of salvation by Christ, and the divine authority of the scriptures, and the certainty of the promises therein, certainly we would be more firmly engaged to God; comfort would sooner follow us, and we would have better success in the heavenly life. If the fire were well kindled, it would of itself break out into a flame. If we did believe, indeed, that Jesus the Son of God hath done so much for us, and had this firmly settled in our hearts, this would be a real ground of comfort and constancy: 2 Peter 3:17, 'Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.' It is put in opposition to one that stands by the steadfastness of another; he might be carried away by the error of the wicked. No; but he must have somewhat to say to engage his own heart, otherwise he is led thereby with every fond suggestion and simple credulity, and easily abused. But when men have chosen and are well fixed, they are not easily shaken.

When men take up religion upon trust, without a satisfying argument, they are like light chaff, carried through the whole compass of the winds; as mariners dispose of several winds which blow in the corners of the world into a circle and compass (the apostle's word alludes to that), 'We are carried all round the points of the compass,' Eph. 4:14. When the chain of consent is broken, they are in continual danger to be seduced; and the greatest adversaries of truth are able to use such reasons as have in them great probability to captivate the affections of a weak understanding, by their sophistical arguments and insinuating persuasions.

Prop. 5. After this inquiry into the grounds and reasons of the way of truth, then we must resolve and choose it, 'I have chosen the way of truth,' as the way wherein we are to walk: Jer. 6:16, 'Ask where is the good way, and walk therein, and then ye shall find rest for your souls.' You must not only so understand and form your opinions aright, not only see what is the good way, but walk therein; keep that way which you find to be the way of truth, renouncing all others. We should not lie under a floating uncertainty or sceptical irresolution, as those that keep themselves in a wary reservation, that are 'ever learning, but never come to the knowledge of the truth,' 2 Tim. 3:7—*ἐπιγνώσιν ἀληθείας*, the word is, they do not come to 'the acknowledgment of the truth;' always examining, but never resolve. You are to 'prove all things,' but not in order to unsettlement, but settlement, 1 Thes. 5:21. Consider, inquire, where is God's presence most? where is the Son like to be glorified, and souls better to be satisfied, and built up in the faith of Jesus Christ? and resolve and stick there.

Prop. 6. That no religion will be found fit to be chosen upon sound evidence but the Christian. How shall I be persuaded of this? Why, that religion which God hath revealed, that religion which suits with

the ends of a religion, that is, with the inward necessities of mankind, and most commodiously provides for man, that is true religion. Surely the necessities of mankind are to be relieved thereby. The great ends of a religion are God's glory and our happiness. God is glorified by a return of the obedience of the creature, and man is made happy by the enjoyment of God. All these ends are advanced by this way of truth.

First, That is the only religion which is revealed by God, for certainly so must a religion be if it be true; for that which pleaseth him must be according to his will; and who can know his will but by his own revelation, by some sign whereby God hath discovered it to us? Alas! if men were to sit brooding a religion themselves, what a strange business would they hatch and bring forth! If they were to carve out the worship of God, they might please themselves, but could never please God. Vain men indeed are ready to frame God like themselves, and foolishly imagine what pleaseth them pleaseth him also; they still conceive of God according to their own fancy. And this was the reason why the wisest heathens, having no revelation, no sense of God's will but what offered itself by the light of nature, they would employ their wits to devise a religion. But what a monstrous chimera and strange fancy did they bring forth! 'Professing themselves wise, they became fools,' Rom. 1:22. Though they knew there was a great and eternal being by the light of nature, yet the apostle saith they became vain, ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς, in their imaginations, how this infinite being should be worshipped; therefore what they carved out was not an honour, but a disgrace; they devised gods and goddesses that were patrons of murder, theft, and all manner of filthiness, and brought out Bacchus, the god of riot and good-fellowship, or the patron of boon companions, and Venus, the patroness of love and wantonness. But now God hath showed us his will, 'He hath showed us what is good, and what he doth require of us,' Micah 6:8. Now

that the gospel is a revelation from God, appears by the matter, which is so suitable to the nature of God; it hath such an impress of God's wisdom, goodness, power upon it, that plainly it hath passed God; it is like such an infinite and eternal being as God is, in the worship and duties prescribed; it is far above the wisdom of mere man, though very agreeable to those relics of wisdom which are left in us. So that this is that true religion which surely will please God, because it came from him at first, and could come from no other. And also besides the evidence it carrieth with it, and the impress and stamp of God upon it, we have the word of those that brought this doctrine to us; and if we had nothing else, if they say, 'Thus saith the Lord,' &c., we are bound to believe them, they being persons of a valuable credit, that sought not themselves, but the glory of him that sent them. When the first messengers of it were men of such an unquestionable credit, that had no ends of their own, but ran all the extreme hazards and displeasures, surely it cannot incline us to think they did seek God's glory by a lie. Yea, they did evidence their mission from God by miracles that God sent them. Surely this doctrine is from heaven. Ay, and still God in his providence shows it from heaven, both in his internal government of the world;—he blesseth it to the comfort of the conscience or to the terrifying of the conscience, for it works both ways. Wicked men are afraid of the light, lest their deeds should be made manifest, John 3:20;—and also to the comforting and settling the conscience, that we may have great joy by believing in Christ. This for his internal government. And then his external government, by answering of prayers, fulfilling promises, accomplishing prophecies: Ps. 18:30, 'As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all that trust in him.' Put God to the trial by a regular confidence in a humble walking, and he will make good his promises; ay, and make good his threatenings. When people are ripe for judgment, God will fulfil the threatenings of his word, and will accomplish what is spoken by the



prophets and apostles; and God will reveal his wrath from heaven 'against all unrighteousness of men,' Rom. 1:18. So that here are plain signs that this is a doctrine revealed from God, and God can best tell us how he is to be worshipped and pleased.

Secondly, Besides God's revelation, it notably performs all that which a man would expect in a religion, and so suits the necessities of man as well as the honour of God. Why?

1. That is the true religion, which doth most draw off the minds of men from things temporal and earthly to things celestial and eternal, that we may think of them and prosecute them. The sense of another world, an estate to come, is the great foundation upon which all religion is grounded. All its precepts and promises, which are like to gain upon the heart of man, they receive their force from the promise of an unseen glory, and eternal punishments which are provided for the wicked and contemners of the gospel. The whole design of this religion is to take us off from the pleasures of the flesh and the baits of this world, that we may see things to come. It is the excellency of the Christian faith that it reveals the doctrines of eternal life clearly, which all other religions in the world only could guess at. There were some guesses, but still great uncertainty, but obscure thoughts and apprehensions of such an estate. But here 'life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel,' 2 Tim. 1:10. Alas! there is a mist upon it in all other representations; they seem to see it, yet see it not. But this is brought to light in the gospel; it makes a free offer of it, upon condition of faith in Christ, John 3:16. It quickens us to look after it; all its design is to breed in man this noble spirit, by 'looking upon things that are above, and not upon things on earth,' Col. 3:1, 2; and it endeavours, with great power and persuasiveness, that we may make it our scope, that we may neglect all present advantages rather than miss this; and make it our great design that we may 'look not to

the things which are seen, but to the things unseen,' 2 Cor. 4:17, 18. This is the way of truth, because we believe it will make the worshippers of it everlastingly happy, which all men by nature have inquired about. Now it is but reason that a man's work be ended before he receive his wages, and if God will reward the virtuous, that it should be in the other world; for our work is not ended until we die; and we have a presagency of another world: there is another world which the soul of man thinks of. Now this is that which Christianity drives at, that we may look after our reward with God, and escape that tribulation, wrath, and anguish, which shall come upon every soul that doeth evil.

2. That doctrine which establisheth purity of heart and life, as the only means to attain this blessedness, certainly that is the way of truth: Ps. 24:3, 4, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lift up his soul unto vanity.' There is no true holiness, no subjection of heart to God, but by the Christian doctrine: John 17:17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.' Hereby we know the word of God is truth, because it is so powerful to sanctification: Ps. 119:140, 'Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.' All religions endeavour some kind of excellency; but now the holiness that is recommended in other religions is a mere outside holiness in comparison of what Christianity calls for. We have a strict rule, high patterns, blessed encouragement; it promiseth a powerful Spirit, even the Spirit of the holy God, to work our heart to this holiness that is required. The aim of that religion is to remedy the disease introduced by the fall. All other religions do but make up a part of the disease, and the gospel is the only remedy and cure; therefore this is the way of truth you should choose.

3. That doctrine which provideth for peace of conscience, and freedom from perplexing fears, which are wont to haunt us by reason of God's justice and wrath for our former misdeeds, that doctrine hath the true effect of a religion. Man easily apprehends himself as God's creature; and being God's creature, he is his subject, bound to obey him; and having exceedingly failed in his obedience (as experience shows), he is much haunted with fears and doubts. Now that is the religion that, in a kindly manner, doth dispossess us of these dreads and fears, and comes in upon the soul to deliver us from our bondage, and those guilty fears which are so natural to us by reason of sin. And therefore in a consultation about religion, if I were to choose, and had not by the grace of God been baptized into the Christian faith, and had the advantage to look abroad and consider, then I would bethink myself, Where shall I find rest for my soul, and from those fears which lie at the bottom of conscience, and are easily stirred in us, and sometimes are very raging? There is a fire smothering within, and many times it is blown up into a flame; where shall I get remedy for these fears? I rather pitch upon this, because the Holy Ghost doth, Jer. 6:16, &c., as if he had said, If you will know what is the good way, take that way where you may find rest for your souls; not a false rest that is easily disturbed, not a carnal security, but where you may find true solid peace; that when you are most serious, and mind your great errand and business, you may comfort yourselves, and rejoice in the God that made you. In a false way of religion there is no establishment of heart and sound peace: Heb. 9:9, 'They could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience.' That certainly is the true religion which makes the worshipper perfect as to the conscience, which gives him a well-tempered peace in his soul; not a sinful security, but a holy solid peace, that when he hath a great sense of his duty upon him, yet he can comfortably wait upon God. And you know our Lord himself useth this very motive to invite men: Mat.

11:29, 'Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest;' that is, take the Christian religion, that easy yoke upon you, and you shall find rest for your souls. The Lord Jesus is our peace, and the ground of our peace; but we never find rest until we come under his yoke. Christians, search where you will, there is no serious answer to that grand question, which is the great scruple of the fallen creature, Micah 6:7, how to appease angry justice. And we are told of those locusts who are seducing spirits, which come out of the bottomless pit, Rev. 9; they had stings in their tails; their doctrine is not soundly comfortable to the conscience. Among others, this is designed by those locusts, that half Christianity which is taken up by the light-skirted people, which reflect upon privileges only; therefore there are such scruples and intricate debates. But some advantage there is, and some progress they may make in the spiritual life, that cry up them without duties; but they never have found peace upon their souls unless the Lord pardon their mistakes, and doth sanctify their reflections upon those spiritual and unseen privileges, so as to check their opposite desires and inclinations. It is best to be settled in God's way, by justification and sanctification. There is a wound wherein no plaster will serve for the cure, but the way the gospel doth take. Consider altogether Christ's renewing and reconciling grace, the whole evangelical truth, this gospel which was founded in the blood of Christ, his new covenant, and sealed with God's authority, and doth so fitly state duties and privileges, and lead a man by the one to the other. This is that which will appease the Lord. There is no settling of the conscience without it; and therefore, whatever you would expect in a religion, here you find it in that blessed religion which is recommended to us in the gospel or new covenant; there is such holiness and true sense of the other world, which breeds an excellency and choiceness of spirit in men.

Prop. 7. Of all sects and sorts among Christians, the Protestant reformed religion will be found to be the way of truth. Why? Because there is the greatest suitableness to the great ends, the greatest agreement and harmony with God's revelation, which they profess to be their only rule. I say, as to God's worship, there is most simplicity, without that theatrical pomp which makes the worship of God a dead thing, and so most suitable to a spiritual being, and conducive to spiritual ends, to God who is a Spirit, and who will be worshipped in spirit and truth; for there God is our reward, and to be served by faith, love, obedience, trust, prayers, praises, and a holy administration of the word and seals; more suitable to the genius of the scripture, without the pageantry of numerous idle ceremonies, like flourishes about a great letter, which do rather hide religion than any way discover it; yea, betray it to contempt and scorn to a considering man. Besides, the great design of this religion is to draw men from earth to heaven, by calling them to a serious profession of saving truth. Popery is nothing but Christianity abused, and is a doctrine suited to policy and temporal ends; and it is supported by worldly greatness. And then as to holiness, which is the genuine product of a religion, the true genuine holiness is to be found, or should be found according to their principles, among Protestants and reformed; not external mortification, but in purging the heart. And here is the true peace of conscience, while men are directed to look to Christ's reconciling and renewing grace, and not to seek their acceptance in the merit of their own works, and voluntary penance and satisfactions, and many other doctrines which put the conscience upon the rack. And then all this is submitted to be tried by the scriptures, which apparently are acknowledged by them to be the word, without running to unwritten traditions and the authority of men. Again, all this is recommended with the special presence of God as to gifts and graces, blessing these churches continually more and more. Therefore, if ever a man will find rest for his soul, and be

soundly quiet within himself, here he must fix and choose, and take up the way of truth. Popery is but heathenism disguised with a Christian name: their penal satisfactions are like the gashing and lancing of Baal's priests; their mediators of intercession are like the doctrines of demons among the Gentiles, for they had their middle powers, glorified heroes; their holy water suits with the heathen lustrations; their costly offerings to their images answer to the sacrifices and oblations to appease their gods, which the idolaters would give for the sin of their souls; adoring their relics is like the respects the heathens had to their departed heroes; and as they had their tutelar gods for every city, so these their saints for every city and nation; their St Sebastian for the pestilence, their Apollonia for the toothache, and the like. It is easy to rake in this dirt. It was not for the devil's interest, when the ensign of the gospel was lifted up, to draw men to downright heathenism; therefore he did more secretly mingle the customs and superstitions of the Gentiles with the food of life, like poison conveyed in perfume, that the souls of men might be more infected, alienated, and drawn from God. Popery doth not only add to the true religion, but destroys it, and is contrary to it. Let any considering man, that is not prejudiced, compare the face of the Roman synagogue with the beauty of the reformed churches, and they will see where Christianity lies. There you will find another sacrifice for expiation of sin than the death of Christ; the communion of the cup, so expressly commanded in the word of God, taken away from the people; reading the scriptures forbidden to laics, as if the word of God were a dangerous book; prayers in an unknown language; images set up, and so they are guilty, if not of primitive idolatry (which all the water in the sea cannot wash them clear of), yet certainly of secondary idolatry, which is the setting up an idol in God's worship contrary to the second commandment, the image of the invisible God represented by stones and pictures; invocation of saints and angels allowed; the doctrine of transubstantiation,

contrary to the end of the sacrament; works of supererogation; popes' pardons; purgatory for faults already committed, as if Christ had not already satisfied; papal infallibility, not only contrary to faith, but sense and reason; their ridiculous mass and ceremonies; and many such human inventions, besides the word and against it. But the Protestants are contented with the simplicity of the scriptures, the word of God, and the true sacraments of Christ. Therefore you see what is the way of truth we should stick to.

Prop. 8. That in the private differences among the professors of the reformed Protestant religion, a man is to choose the best way, but to hold charity towards dissenters. In the true church, in matters of lesser moment, there may be sundry differences; for until men have the same degree of light, it cannot be expected they should be all of a mind. Babes will think one thing, grown persons will have other apprehensions; sick persons will have their frenzies and doubtings, which the sound cannot like. The apostle's rule is, Phil. 3:15, 16, 'Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you,' &c. There are two parts of that rule. The perfect must be thus minded; they that are fully instructed in the mind of God, they must practise as they believe. Strings in tune must not be brought down to those that are out of tune. But if others tainted with error do not give a thorough assent to all divine truth, yet let us walk together, saith the apostle, so far as we are agreed. God, that hath begun to enlighten them in other things, will in time discover their mistakes. Thus far the true Christian charity takes place. This should be our rule. Here we are agreed in the Christian reformed religion, and in all the points of it; let us walk together so far, and in lesser differences let us bear with and forbear one another in love. I speak now of Christian toleration; for the magistrate's toleration and forbearance, how far he is to interpose, that is another case: Eph. 4:2, 'With all

lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering forbearing one another in love.' What is bearing with one another? Not conniving at their sin, or neglecting ways to reclaim them; or forbear our profession when God calls us to it—they are great cases how far profession may be suspended, and how far it may be carried on—but to restore them with meekness; to own them in those things wherein they are owned by God; not to practise that antichristian humour which is now gotten into Protestantism, of unchurching, unministering, unchristianising one another, but to own one another in all those things wherein we are agreed, without imposing or censuring; not rending into factions, not endeavouring to destroy all, that we may promote the particular interest of one party to the prejudice of the whole; but walking under one common rule. And if others shall prove peevish, and if angry brethren shall call us bastards, and disclaim us as not belonging to the same father, we ought not to reject them, but still call them brethren; if they will not join with us we cannot help it, yet they are brethren notwithstanding that disclaim; and how pettishly and frowardly soever they carry themselves in their differences, a good Christian should take up this resolution (their tongue is not Christ's fan to purge his floor), though they may condemn things which Christ will own, to bear their reproofs, and love them still; for the iniquity of their carriage doth not take away our obligation to them. As in the relation of inferiors, we are bound to be obedient to the froward as well as to the gentle parents and masters; so in the duties that are to pass between equals, we are to bear with the froward and to overcome their inclinations. For though we have corruptions that are apt to alienate us, and will put us upon furious passions, uncomely heats and divisions, yet God forbid we should omit any part of our duty to them, for uncharitable brethren are brethren still.



## SERMON XXXII

### **I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.—VER. 30.**

I come now to answer an objection which may be made.

Object. But if you be so earnest to maintain unity among your own sects, why do you separate from the Papists, who are Christians as well as you, and own many things of Christianity wherein you may agree with them?

I answer—In the general, certainly the separation of one Christian from another is a great evil, which should be carefully avoided; and if walls of separation be set up by others, yet we must do what in us lies to demolish them. They do no service to Christ that make separations needlessly, when as much as is possible there should be a union and coalition between Christians. Now, what shall we say to this separation from Rome, who were in the possession of a Christianity? I tell you, this bugbear needs not fright us out of the good way, if we can but clear three things to you.

1. That as to the rise, it was neither unjust nor unnecessary.
2. As to the manner of it, it was not made rashly and lightly, but as became them that had a serious sense of the interest of Christ and of his church in the world.
3. As to the continuance of this separation, that if it were made upon good grounds, and the same grounds still continue, certainly we have

no cause to revert and return back; the Roman synagogue not being grown better, but much worse, since the first breach.

If all these can be proved, there is no reason to complain of our separation.

First, That this separation was neither unjust nor unnecessary. It is unjust if it be made without a cause: it is unnecessary if it be made without a sufficient cause, or such a cause as may warrant so great a breach in the Christian world. Certain it is that the schism lieth not in the separation, but the cause; and so is not chargeable on those that make the separation, but on those that give the cause. So that if we would examine whether the separation be good, I think we must examine the causes of it; therefore let us a little consider this very thing. Certainly the cause was not unjust; there was a cause (I shall show that by and by); and that it was not unnecessary, without a sufficient cause, and so no way culpable.

The business is, whether the controversies be of such moment as that there should be such a breach among Christians that we and they should keep such a distance (I speak only to the sufficiency of the cause, the justness we shall see by and by). Of what moment soever the controversies were, if the things that are taken to be errors be imposed as a condition of communion, a Christian cannot join himself with them. Certainly it is no sin to abstain from the communion of any church on earth, where the conditions of its communion are apparently unlawful and against conscience, though it may be the matters in debate be not of great moment. I only speak provisionally, be they or be they not of moment, yet if these be propounded as conditions of its communion; for no man is necessitated to sin. In some cases it is lawful to withdraw out of a place for fear of danger and infection; as if a house or town be

infected with the pestilence, it is but a necessary caution to look to ourselves betimes, and withdraw out of that house or town.

But now when no men are permitted to tarry but those that are infected with the disease, the case is out of dispute; the sound must be gone, and withdraw from them by all the means they can. Now, such are the corruptions of Popery, and the danger of seducement so manifest, that 'little children are by all means to keep themselves from idols,' 1 John 5:21. We should be very cautious and wary of that communion wherein there is so much hazard of salvation, if possible; we should keep ourselves untainted. But when we are bound to the belief, practice, profession of those errors, there needs no more debate; a Christian must be gone, else he will sin against conscience. Now this is the case clearly between them and us. Suppose the corruptions were not great, nor the errors damnable, yet when the profession of them is required, and the belief of them as certain truths is imposed, we are to endure all manner of extremity rather than yield to them. Therefore much more when it is easy to be proved that they are manifest and momentous corruptions. Therefore certainly to leave the communion of the popish faction is but to return to our union and communion with Christ; it can be no fault to leave them that left Christ, and the ancient faith and church. The innocent husband that leaves the adulterous wife is not to be blamed, for she had first broken the bonds, and violated the rights of the conjugal relation. Or, a good citizen and soldier are not to be blamed in forsaking their governor and captain, who first revolted from his allegiance to his prince, ay, and when he would engage them in the same rebellion too.

Secondly, As to the management of it, or the manner how it was carried on. It was not made rashly and lightly, without trying all good means, and offering to have their complaints debated in a free

council; in the meantime continuing in their station, and managing the cause of Christ with meek but yet zealous defences, until they were driven thence by antichristian fury for blowing the trumpet, and warning the church of her danger from that corrupt party; until persecuted by censures not only ecclesiastical but civil; cast out of the church, put to death, some for witnessing against, others merely for not owning and practising, these corruptions; and hunted out from their corners, where they were willing to hide, and worship God in secret, with all rigour and tyranny; driven first out of the church, then out of the world by fire and sword, unless they would communicate with them in their sin: thus were they used. So that the Romanists cannot charge the Protestants with schism for leaving their communion, any more than a man that thrusteth another out of doors can be offended at his departure. Yea, when the reformed did set up other churches, it was after all hopes of reformation were lost and defeated; and the princes, magistrates, pastors, and people were grown into a multitude, and did in great numbers run to the banner which God had displayed because of his truth, and so could not in conscience and spiritual safety live without the means of grace and the benefit of ordinances and church-societies, lest they should be scattered as sheep without a shepherd, and become a ready prey to Satan.

And then this separation, which was so necessary, was carried on with love and pity, and with great distinction between the corruptions from which they separated, and the persons from whom they separated; and they had the same affection to them, and carried it all along just as those that are freed from Turkish slavery, and have broke prison, and invited the other Christian captives to second them. It may be they have not the heart and courage to venture with them; though they leave them fast in their enemies' chains, and will not return to their company, they cease not to love and pity them,

though it were long, of their fear they did not enjoy the like liberty themselves.

Thirdly, As to the continuance of this separation. It was made upon good grounds, and it is still to be continued upon the same grounds. The Roman Church is not grown better, but worse; and that which was before but mere practice and custom is since established by law and canon, and they have ratified and owned their errors in the Council of Trent. And now Antichrist is more discovered, and God hath multiplied and reformed the churches, and blessed them with his gifts and graces, and the conversion of many souls, surely we should not now grow weary of our profession, as if novelty only led us to make this opposition. If we shall think so slightly of all the truths of God and blood of the martyrs, and all this ado to bring things to this pass, that Christ may gain ground, and we should tamely give up our cause at last, as some have done implicitly, and others shrink, and let the Papists carry it quietly, it is such wickedness as will be the brand and eternal infamy of this generation. If Hagar the bondwoman, that hath been cast out, should return again, and vaunt it over Sarah the lawful wife, the mischiefs that would follow are unspeakable. God permitted it to be so for a while in Queen Mary's days; and what precious blood was shed during that time we all know; and shall we again return to the garlic and onions of Egypt, as being weary of the distractions of the wilderness, and expose the interest of Christ, merely for our temporal good, which we cannot be secured of either? Therefore, since this separation was not unjust, without cause, nor unnecessary, without sufficient cause, and since it was carried on with so much meekness and Christian lenity, and since Rome is not grown better, but worse rather, surely we have no reason to be stumbled at for our departure from that apostatical church.

In short, this separation was not culpable; it came not from error of mind: 'They went out from us, but they were not of us,' 1 John 2:19. Not from corruption in manners: 'These are those that separate themselves, sensual, not having the Spirit,' Jude 19. Not from strife and contention, like those separations at Corinth, where 'one was of Paul, another of Apollos,' &c., 1 Cor. 1:12; not from pride and censoriousness, like those that said, 'Stand farther off; I am holier than thou,' Isa. 65:5. Not from coldness and tergiversation, as those that 'forsook the assembling of themselves together,' because they were in danger of this kind of Christianity, Heb. 10:25. But from conscience; and this not so much from the Christians, as from the errors of Christians; from the corruptions, rather than the corrupted. There is no reason we should be frightened with this suggestion.

But now, because that separation is good or evil according to the causes of it, let us a little consider the state of Rome when God first summoned his people to come out of this spiritual Babylon; and if it be the same still, there is no cause to retract the change.

The state of it may be considered either as to its government, doctrine, or worship; the tyranny of their discipline and government, the heresy of their doctrine, and the idolatry of their worship. And if our fathers could not, and if we cannot, have communion with them without partaking of their sin, it is certain the separation was and is still justifiable.

First, As to their government Three things are matter of just offence to the reformed churches:—

1. The universality or vast extent and largeness of that dominion and empire which they arrogate.
2. The supremacy and absolute authority which they challenge.

### 3. The infallibility which they pretend unto.

And if there were nothing else but a requiring a submission to these things, so false, so contrary to the tenor and interest of Christianity, this were ground enough of separation.

1. The universality of headship over all other churches, this the people of God neither could nor ought to endure.

Suppose the Roman Church were sound in faith, in manners, in discipline; yet, being but a particular church, that it should challenge such a right to itself, in giving laws to all other churches at its own pleasure, and that every particular society which doth not depend upon her beck in all things should be excluded from hope of salvation, or not counted a fellow-church in the communion of the Christian faith, this is a thing that cannot be endured.

That the Pope, as to the extent of his government and administration, should be universal bishop, whose empire should reach far and near throughout the world, as far as the church of Christ reacheth; this, as to matter of fact is impossible; as to matter of right, is sacrilegious. As to matter of fact it is impossible, because of the variety of governments and different interests under covert of which the particular churches of Christ find shelter and protection in all the places of their dispersion; and therefore to establish such an empire, that shall be so pernicious to the churches of Christ which are harboured abroad, is very grievous; and partly by reason of the multitude and diversity of those things that belong to governments, which is a power too great for any created understanding to wield. As to matter of right, it is sacrilegious; for Christ never instituted any such universal vicar as necessary to the unity of his church. But here was one Lord Jesus, and one God, and one faith, but never in union under one pope. And therefore we see, in temporal government, God

hath distributed it into many hands, because he would not subject the whole world unto one, as neither able to manage the affairs thereof, nor brook the majesty of so large an empire with that meekness and moderation as becomes a creature. It is too much for mere man to bear. Now religious concernments are more difficult than civil, by reason of the imperfection of light about them; and it would easily degenerate into superstition and idolatry; therefore certainly none but a God is able to be head of the church.

2. The authority of making laws. Consider it either as to matter or form, the matter about which it is exercised, or the authority itself; their intolerable boldness and proud ambition is discovered in either. As to the matter about which this power is exercised, for temporal things, God hath committed them to the care of the magistrate; and it is an intrusion of his right for the Pope to take upon himself to interpose in civil things, to dispose of states and kingdoms; a power which Christ refused: 'Man, who made me a judge over you?' Luke 12:14. As to matter of religion, some things are in their own nature good and some evil; some things of a middle nature and indifferent. As to the first, God hath established them by his laws; as to the other, they are left to arbitrament, to abstain and use for edification, according to the various postures and circumstances of times, places, and persons, but so that we should never take from any believer, or suffer to be taken from him, that liberty which Christ hath purchased for us by his blood. It is a licentious abuse of power not to be endured. We are to 'stand fast in that liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,' Gal. 5:1. The apostle mainly intends it of the observance of the ceremonial law, which was a bondage, because of the trouble and expense. Oh! but then the price wherewith Christ bought our freedom should make us more chary of it, and stand in the defence of it with greater courage and constancy, whatever it cost us. The captain told Paul that his liberty as a Roman was 'obtained



with a great sum,' Acts 22:28. Now, the court of Rome doth challenge such a power, that it commandeth and forbiddeth those things which God hath left free, as distinction of days, meats, marriage, according to their own pleasure, 1 Tim. 4:3; nay, sometimes dispenseth with that which God hath expressly commanded or forbidden; and then what doth it but make him equal with God, yea, superior to him? That physician possibly may be borne with that doth only burden his patient with some needless prescriptions, if for the main he be but faithful; but if he should mingle poison with his medicaments, and also still tire out his patient with new prescriptions, that are altogether troublesome, and costly, and nauseous, and for the number of them dangerous to life, it behoveth his patient to look to his health. And this is the very case. The Pope doth sometimes make bold with dispensing with God's laws, and doth extinguish and choke Christian religion by thousands of impositions of indifferent things, which is not to be endured.

And then as to the authority itself; according to the eminency of the lawgiver, so is his authority more or less absolute. Therefore when a mortal man shall challenge an authority so absolute as to be above control, and to give no account of his actions, and it is not lawful to say to him, What doest thou? or inquire into the reason, or complain of the injury, this is that which the churches of Christ cannot endure. Therefore they had just ground and cause of withdrawing, and making up a body by themselves, rather than yield to so great encroachments upon Christian liberty; to receive the decrees of one church, and that so erroneous and imposing, without examination or leave of complaint.

3. That which grieveth, and did grieve, and cause this withdrawing, is both papal infallibility and freedom from error. That any church which is made up of fallible men should arrogate this to themselves

(especially the Roman, which of all churches that ever Christ had upon earth is most corrupt), that they should fasten this infallibility to the papal chair, which is the fountain of those corruptions, this they look upon as a great contradiction, not only to faith, but to sense; and as hard a condition as if I were bound, when I saw a man sick of the plague, and the swelling and tokens of death upon him, yet to say he is immortal, nay, that that part wherein the disease is seated is immortal. This was the burden that was imposed upon the people of God, that they should yield to this.

Secondly, Come to their heresy in doctrine. To rake in this filth would take up more time than will comport with your patience. It is almost everywhere corrupt; the only sound part in the whole frame is the doctrine of the Trinity, which yet the schoolmen have entangled with many nice and unprofitable disputes, which render their glorious and blessed mystery less venerable. We must do them right also in this, that they grant the doctrine of Christ's satisfaction, and that he not only died for our good, but in our stead, and bore our punishment; they grant the truth of it, but deny the sufficiency of it: so mightily weaken, if not destroy it, while they think it must be pieced up by the sacrifice of the mass, human satisfaction, by the merit of works, purgatory, and indulgences. But in all other points of religion, how corrupt are they! That which most offends the reformed churches is their equalling traditions with the scripture; yea, their decrying and taxing the scriptures as obscure, insufficient, and as a nose of wax, pliable to several purposes; their mangling the doctrine of justification, which we own to consist in the imputation of Christ's righteousness received by faith; and they plead in the works of righteousness which we have done; and so, if the apostle may be judge, 'make void the grace of God,' Gal. 2:21. And then the merit of works, not expecting the reward of them from God's mercy, which becometh Christian humility; but from the condignity of the

work itself, which bewrayeth their pharisaical pride. We say that sins are remitted by God alone, exercising his mercy in Christ through the gospel, towards those that believe and repent. But the Papists say, pardon may be had by virtue of indulgences, if a man give such a price, do this or that, say so many ave marias and paternosters, though far enough from true faith and repentance. The one savours of the gospel, the other of the tyranny of the Pope of Rome, that hath set himself in the place of God, and substituted his laws instead of the law of Christ. So their portentous doctrine of transubstantiation, that a priest should make his maker, and a people eat their God. I could represent the difference of both churches, both in excess and defect. In excess, what they believe over and above the Christian faith. The true church believes, with the scriptures, and with the primitive churches, that there is but one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to be religiously invocated and worshipped. They plead the creature, angels and saints, are to be both religiously invocated and worshipped. The scripture shows that there is but one surety and mediator between God and man, he that was both God and man, Jesus Christ. They say that the saints are mediators of intercession with God, by whose merits and prayers we obtain the grace and audience of our supplications. The scripture saith that Christ's propitiatory sacrifice offered on the cross is sufficient for the plenary remission of all our sins. They say the sacrifice of the mass, which the priest under the species of bread and wine substantially, that is, by consecration into the body and blood of Christ, offered to God, that this is available for the remission of sins both of quick and dead. That the remission of sins obtained by Christ, and offered in the gospel to the penitent believer, is bestowed and applied by faith, this is the opinion of the scripture. They say remission of sins is obtained and applied by their own satisfactions and papal indulgences. That true repentance consists in confession of sin with grief, and desire of the grace of Christ, with a serious purpose of newness of life, this is the

doctrine of the scripture. They think that to the essence of true repentance there is required auricular confession, penal satisfactions, and the absolvance of the priest, without which true faith profiteth nothing to salvation. Again, the scripture teacheth this doctrine, that the ordinances confer grace by virtue only of God's promises, and the sacraments are signs and seals of the covenant of grace to them that believe. And they would teach us that they deserve and confer grace from the work wrought. The scripture teacheth that good works are such as are done in obedience to God and conformity to his law, and are completed in love to God and our neighbour. They teach us that there are works of supererogation, which neither the law nor the gospel requireth of us; and that the chief of these are monastical vows, several orders and rules of monks and friars. The scripture teacheth us that God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is only to be worshipped, both with natural and instituted worship, in spirit and in truth; and they teach both the making and worshipping of an image, and that the images of saints are to be worshipped. The scripture teacheth that there is but one holy apostolical catholic church, joined together in one faith and one Spirit, whose head, husband, and foundation is the Lord Jesus Christ, out of which church there is no salvation; and they teach us the Church of Rome is the centre, the right mother of all churches, under one head, the Pope, infallible and supreme judge of all truth; and out of communion of this church there is nothing but heresy, schism, and everlasting condemnation. Instead of that lively faith by which we are justified by Christ, they cry up a dead assent. Instead of sound knowledge, they cry up an implicit faith, believing as the church believes. Instead of affiance, they cry up wavering, conjectural uncertainty.

Thirdly, Come to their worship. Their adoration of the host, their invocation of saints and angels, their giving to the Virgin Mary and

other saints departed the titles of mediator, redeemer, and saviour, in their public liturgies and hymns; their bowing to and before images; their communion in one kind, and that decreed by their councils, with a non obstante Christi instituto, notwithstanding Christ's express institution to the contrary; their service in an unknown tongue, and the like, are just causes of our separation from them. But it is tedious to rake in these things. So that unless we would be treacherous to Christ, and not only deny the faith, but forfeit sense and reason, and give up all to the lusts and wills of those that have corrupted the truth of Christianity, we ought to withdraw, and our separation is justifiable notwithstanding this plea.

The use. Here is reproof to divers sorts.

1. To those that think they may be of any sect among Christians, as if all the differences in the Christian world were about trifles and matters of small concernment, and so change their religion as they do their clothes, and are turned about with every puff of new doctrine. If it were to turn to heathenism, Turcism, or Judaism, they would rather suffer banishment or death than yield to such a change; but to be this day of this sect and to-morrow of another, they think it is no great matter. As the wind of interest bloweth, so are they carried, and do not think it a matter of such moment to venture anything upon that account. You do not know the deceitfulness of your hearts; he that can digest a lesser error will digest a greater. God trieth you in the present truth. He that is not faithful in a little will not be faithful in much, as he that giveth entertainment to a small temptation will also to a greater, if put upon it. Where there is not a sincere purpose to obey God in all things, God is not obeyed in anything. Every truth is precious. The dust of gold and pearls is esteemed. Every truth is to be owned in its season with full consent.

To do anything against conscience is damnable. You are to choose the way of truth impartially, to search and find out the paths thereof.

2. It reproveth those that will be of no religion till all differences among the learned and godly are reconciled, and therefore willingly remain unsettled in religion, and live out of the communion of any church upon this pretence, that there is so much difference, such show of reason on each side, and such faults in all, that they doubt of all, and therefore will not trouble themselves to know which side hath the truth. You are to choose the way of truth. And this is such a fond conceit, as if a man desperately sick should resolve to take no physic till all doctors were of one opinion; or as if a traveller, when he seeth many ways before him, should lie down and refuse to go any farther. You may know the truth if you will search after it with humble minds: John 7:17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' 'The meek he will teach the way.' If you be diligent, you may come to a certainty notwithstanding this difference.

3. It reproveth those that take up what comes next to hand, are loath to be at the pains of study, and searching, and prayer, that they may resolve upon evidence; that commonly set themselves to advance that faction into which they are entered. Alas! you should mind religion seriously; though not lightly leave the religion you are bred in, yet not hold it upon unsound grounds. As antiquity: John 4:20, 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain.' Or custom of the times and places where you live: Eph. 2:2, 'According to the course of the world,' the general and corrupt custom or example of those where we live; nor be led by affection to, or admiration of some persons, Gal. 2:12. Holy men may lead you into error. Nor by multitude, to do as the most do: 'Follow not a multitude to do evil;' but get a true and

sound conscience of things; for by all these things opinions are rather imposed upon us than chosen by us.

4. It reproves those that abstain from fixing out of a fear of troubles; as the king of Navarre would so far put forth to sea as that he might soon get to shore again. You must make God a good allowance when you embark with him; though called not only to dispute, but to die for religion, you must willingly submit: 'If any man come to me, and hate not his own life, he cannot be my disciple,' Luke 14:26. How soon the fire may be kindled we cannot tell; times tend to Popery; though there be few left to stick by us—the favour of the times runs another way—we ought to resolve for God, whatever it costs us.

5. It reproves those that think to reserve their hearts, notwithstanding outward compliance; the way of truth, being chosen, is to be owned, 2 Cor. 7:1; the outward profession is required as well as the inward belief: Rom. 10:10, 'For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.' A man that should lift himself among the enemies of his country, and fight with them, and say, I reserve my heart for my country, this is a mockage; as if a wife that prostitutes her body to another, should tell her husband she reserveth her heart for him. Satan would have outward prostration; he did not ask the heart, but, 'Fall down and worship me.'

Use 2. To press us to choose the way of truth. Take it up upon evidence, and cleave to it with all the heart.

First, Take it up upon evidence, the evidence of reason, scripture, and the Spirit. Reason will lead us to the scripture, the scripture will lead us to the Spirit; so we come to have a knowledge of the truth.

1. Reason; that is preparative light, and will lead the soul thus far. It is a thousand to one but Christianity is the way of God; it will see much of God in this representation: and if you should go on carnally, carelessly, neglecting heaven and Christ, reason will tell you you run upon a thousand hazards, that there are far more against you than for you in your sinful courses. Stand upon the way. Where may you find such likelihood of satisfaction, or probability of salvation as in the religion we have? Either this is true or there is none: that you should venture your souls rather here than elsewhere; and at least, that you should profess the Christian religion as men go to a lottery; reason will tell you thus. A man that comes to a lottery, it is uncertain whether he shall have a prize or no; but it is but venturing a shilling, possibly he may have a prize; so reason will tell you, if it be uncertain whether there be a heaven or a hell, yet it is a thousand to one there are both: I may have a prize; and it is but venturing the quitting of a few lusts that are not worth the keeping. There are some truths above reason, but none contrary to it; for grace is not contrary to nature, but perfects it; therefore there is nothing in the gospel but what is agreeable to sound reason. Reason will tell us there is no doctrine agreeth so much with the wisdom, power, goodness, justice, truth, and the honour of God, as that doctrine revealed in the scripture.

2. When reason hath thus brought you to the scripture, there is the great warrant of faith: John 17:20, 'They that believe in me through their word.' And Isa. 8:20, 'To the law, and to the testimony, else there is no light in them.' That is the sacred standard by which we should measure all doctrines, and these will 'make wise the simple,' Ps. 19. The plainest, meanest, simplest man may find out the right way to heaven, if he will consult with God's book diligently, there he may become wise to salvation; the veriest fool and simple man may be taught how to walk directly and safely. This is the clue which brings us through all the labyrinths and perplexing debates in the



world, to consult with the word of God, that we may not receive the truth upon man's credit, but see the grounds of it with our own eyes. He that finds the pearl of price must dig for it: Mat. 13:44, he must read the scriptures, be much in the study of God's book.

3. The scripture leads us to the Spirit, because there are many mysteries in the gospel difficulty known, that will not be taken up by a sure faith without illumination from above. Besides, there are so many various artifices used by men to disguise the truth, Eph. 4:14. And besides, there is a connate blindness and hatred of truth, which is natural to men, and therefore it is the Spirit of God must help us to make a wise choice. Look, as in practical things, we shall never choose the way of truth in opposition to the falsity of worldly enjoyments without the light of the Spirit; therefore it is said, Prov. 23:4, 'Labour not to be rich, cease from thine own wisdom.' If a man be guided by his own understanding, he will choose riches: so also in matter of opinion, when we lean to our own understanding, we shall choose amiss. John 16:13, it is the Spirit of God that must guide us into all truth, therefore you must beg his direction; for if we that are so blind of heart be left to our own mistakes or the deceits of others, left to the direction of ourselves, how easily shall we err! Say, 'Lord, send out thy light and thy truth, to lead me to thy holy hill.'

Secondly, As we should choose the way of truth, so cleave to it with all firmness and perseverance, without seeking out any other way, John 6:67, 68. If you turn away from Christ, where will you get a better master? Change where you will, you will change for the worse; you will turn your back upon true comfort and true happiness, for he hath all this. So much for the first part, the rightness of David's choice, 'I have chosen the way of truth.'

In the latter clause, there you have his diligence and accuracy in walking according to the tenor of the true religion, 'Thy judgments have I laid before me.' By judgments is meant the precepts and directions of the word, as invested with threatenings and promises; for so the word contains every man's doom: not only the execution of God's providence, but the word, shows what will become of a man. Now these 'I have laid before me;' that is, propounded them as the rule of my life; as the king was to have the book of the law always before him, Deut. 17:19.

Doct. When we have chosen the way of truth, or taken up the profession of true religion, the rules of it should be ever before us.

Three reasons for this:—

1. To have a holy rule and not a holy life is altogether inconsistent. A Christian should be a lively transcript of that religion he doth profess. A Christian should be Christ's epistle, 2 Cor. 3; a walking Bible: Phil. 2:15, 16, 'shining as lights, holding forth the word of life.' How? Not in doctrine, but in practice. A suitable practice joined with profession puts a majesty and splendour upon the truth. If there are many doubts about the true religion, why they are occasioned by the scandalous lives of professors; we reason from the artist to the art itself. Look, as there is a correspondence between the stamp and the impress, the seal and the thing sealed, so should there be between a Christian's life and a Christian's belief; the stamp should be upon his own heart, upon his life and actions; his action should discover his opinion, otherwise he loseth the glory and the benefit of his religion; he is but a pagan in God's account,' Jer. 9:25; he makes his religion to be called in question; and therefore he that walks unsuitably, he is said to 'deny the faith,' 1 Tim. 5:8. To be a Christian in doctrine and a pagan in life is a temptation to atheism to others; when the one

destroys the other, practice confutes their profession, and profession confutes their practice; therefore both these must be matched together. Thus the way of truth must be the rule, and a holy life must be suited.

2. As to this holy life, a general good intention sufficeth not, but there must be accurate walking. Why? For God doth not judge of us by the lump, or by a general intention. It is not enough to plead at the day of judgment, you had a good scope and a good meaning; for every action must be brought to judgment, whether it be good or evil, Eccles. 12:14. When we reckon with our servants, we do not expect an account by heap, but by parcels; so a general good meaning, giving our account by heap, will not suffice, but we must be strict in all our ways, and keep close to the rule in every action, in your eating, trading, worship: Eph. 5:15, 'See that you walk circumspectly,' &c. See that you do not turn aside from the line and narrow ridge that you are to walk upon.

3. Accurate walking will never be, unless our rule be diligently regarded and set before us. Why?

[1.] So accurate and exact is the rule in itself, that you may easily swerve from it; therefore it must always be heeded and kept in your eye, Ps. 19. David admired the perfections of the law for the purity of it, and for the dominion of it over conscience. What was the issue of that contemplation? See ver. 12, 'Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.' Thus the best man, when he compares himself with the law, will be forced to blush, and acknowledge more faults than ever he took notice of before. When we see the law reacheth not only to the act but the aim, not only to the words but the thoughts and secret motions of the heart, then, Lord! who knows his errors? The law of God sometimes is said to be

broad and sometimes narrow; a broad law: Ps. 119:96, 'Thy commandment is exceeding broad.' Why broad? Because it reacheth to every motion, every human action; the words, the thoughts, the desires, are under a law. Nay, yet more, the imperfect and indeliberate motions of the soul are under a law; therefore the commandment is exceeding broad. On the other side it is said to be narrow, 'A strait gate, and a narrow way,' Mat. 7:14. Why? Because it gives no allowance to corrupt nature; we have but a strait line to go by. So that we need regard our rule.

[2.] We are so ignorant in many particulars relating to faith and manners, that we need often consult with our rule. The children of light have too much darkness in them, therefore they are bidden to look to their rule: Eph. 5:17, 'Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.' Blind consciences will easily carry us wrong; and we have some new things still to learn from the word of God, for knowledge is but in part; therefore our rule should be ever before us.

[3.] So many and subtle are those temptations which Satan sets on foot to make us transgress this rule. The devil assaults us two ways—by 'fiery darts,' and by 'cunning wiles,' Eph. 6:11. He hath not only violent temptations, burning lusts, or raging despair, but he hath ensnaring temptations by his wiles, such as most take with a person tempted; and he 'transforms himself into an angel of light,' 2 Cor. 11:14; covers his foul designs with plausible pretences; therefore we need have our rule and the word of God ever before us.

[4.] We are weak, and easily overborne, and therefore should bear our rule always in mind. God's people, their greatest sins have been out of incogitancy; they sin oftenest because they are heedless, and forgetful, and inattentive. Therefore, as a carpenter tries his work by

his rule and square, so should a Christian measure his conversation by the rod of the sanctuary. God, whose act is his rule, cannot miscarry. So the schoolmen, when they set out God's holiness, say God's hand is his rule. But we, that are creatures, are apt to swerve aside, therefore need a rule. We should always have our rule before us. We are to walk according to rule, Gal. 6, and Josh. 1:7, 8, 'The book of the law shall not depart from thee,' &c. If we would have our rule before our eyes, we should not so often swerve. Christians, though you be right in opinion, that will not bring you to heaven, but you must have the rules of this holy profession before you.

Use. Oh, then, let the word of God be ever in sight as your comforter and counsellor! The more we do so the more shall we walk in the fear of God. You are not to walk according to the course of this world, but according to rule; and therefore you are not to walk rashly and indeliberately, and as you are led and carried on by force of present affections, but to walk circumspectly, considering what principle you are acted by, and what ends; and the nature and quality of our actions are always to be considered. Remember you are under the eye of the holy and jealous God, Josh. 24:9, and eyed by wicked men who watch for your halting, Jer. 20, and eyed by weak Christians, who may suffer for your careless and slight walking, who look to the lives of men rather than their principles. You are the 'lights of the world,' Mat. 5:14, and light draws eyes after it; you are 'as a city upon a hill.' You that pretend to be in the right way, the way of truth, will you walk carelessly and inordinately? You are compassed about with snares; there is a snare in your refreshments, Ps. 69; your estates may become a snare, 1 Tim. 6:9; your duties may become a snare: be 'not a novice, lest you come into the condemnation of the devil,' 1 Tim. 3. Therefore take heed to your rule, be exact and watchful over your hearts and ways.

## SERMON XXXIII

### **I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame.—VER. 31.**

IN the former verse David speaks of his choice, 'I have chosen the way of truth;' then of the accurateness of his prosecution, 'Thy judgments have I laid before me.' Now he comes to his constant perseverance therein, 'I have stuck unto thy testimonies.' These two verses follow one another in a very perfect order and coherence. We must begin with a right choice, there we must lay the foundation, 'I have chosen the way of truth,' and then persevere. There is a constancy in good and an obstinacy in evil. The devils sin from the beginning, as the good angels continued in their first estate. Men that are engaged in an evil course often continue in it without retractation; they are no changelings, always the same; that is no honour to them. Luther, when he was charged with apostasy for appearing against the Pope: *Confitetur se apostatam esse, sed beatum et sanctum, qui fidem diabolo datam non servavit*—he confesseth he was an apostate, but a holy and blessed one, that he did not keep touch with the devil. Constancy must ever be understood with respect to a right choice; for to break faith with Satan is not matter of dishonour, but of praise. We must go on with an accurate prosecution, for that giveth us experience, and causeth us to find joy and sweetness, and power in the truth, and is a great means of constancy.

If men would be constant, the next thing they must do is to practise that religion they choose, and live under the power of it. Holiness is a great means of constancy: 1 Tim. 3:9, 'Holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience.' As precious liquors are best kept in clean vessels, so is the mystery of faith in a pure conscience. Men may be stubborn in their opinions out of natural courage, and the engagement of credit and interests; but this is of little worth without practical godliness: their orthodoxy and Tightness in opinion will not bring them to heaven, nor shall they be saved because they are of such a sect or party. But then all must be closed up by persevering in our resolutions; otherwise all our former zeal will be lost. 'I have chosen the way of truth; thy judgments have I laid before me;' and then now, 'I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame:' 2 John 8, 'Look to yourselves, that ye lose not those things which ye have wrought.' All that a man hath done and suffered, watching, striving, praying, they come to nothing unless we stick to it and persevere. Under the law a Nazarite was to begin his days of separation again, if he had defiled himself; if he had separated himself for a year, and kept his vow within two days of the year, he was to begin all anew, Num. 6:12; and the interpretation of that type I cannot give you better than in the prophet's words: Ezek. 18:24, 'When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be remembered.' When they turn head against their former profession, it comes to nothing. Thus you see what a perfect dependence there is between this verse and the former.

In the words there is—

1. A profession, I have stuck unto thy testimonies.
2. A prayer, O Lord, put me not to shame.

First, For the profession, 'I have stuck to thy testimonies.' Saith Chrysostom, he doth not say, I have followed thy testimonies, but stuck or cleaved; stuck so fast that nothing could remove him, no difficulties, trials, shakings; he was still firm.

Doct. Those that have chosen the way of God, and begun to conform their practice thereunto, ought with all constancy to persevere therein.

First, We have the same reasons to continue that we had to begin at first. There is the same loveliness in God's ways; Christ is as sweet as ever; heaven is as good as ever. If there be any difference, there is more reason to continue than there was to begin. Why? Because we have more experience of the sweetness of Christ. You knew him heretofore only by report and hearsay; but now, when you have walked in the way of holiness, then you know him by experience; and if you have tasted, 1 Peter 2:2, then certainly you should not fall off afterwards. Upon trial Christ is sweeter; and the longer you have kept to conscience, heaven is nearer; and would a man miscarry and be discouraged when he is ready to put into the haven? Rom. 13:11, 'Your salvation is nearer than when you first believed.' The nearer we are to the enjoyment of any good, the more impatient in the want of it; as natural motion we find swifter in the end, because it is nearer to the centre; but violent motion is swiftest at first; as when a stone is thrown upward, it is swifter at first, but when the impression of the external force is more spent, then the motion is weaker. It argues that you are not seriously thorough with God, if you should break with him after some profession of his name; now your motion should be more earnest, more strong towards him. I speak this, because we are so apt to 'cast off our first faith,' 1 Tim. 5:12; and to 'lose our first love,' Rev. 2:4; and to grow remiss and lazy, and neglect our first works, 2 Chron. 17:3. Jehoshaphat is said to 'walk in the first ways of



his father David.' We see many at the first are carried on with a great deal of affection and zeal; and there are many promising beginnings of a very flourishing spring; but yet they are no sure prognostications of a joyful harvest. Why, consider with yourselves, We have the same reasons to continue as to begin, yea, much more, as heaven is nearer. In a marriage relation true affection increaseth, but adulterous love is only hot while it is new. If our hearts be upright with God, we will increase with zeal for his glory and love to his testimonies.

Secondly, The danger and mischievous effects of apostasy, and falling off, that is another reason why we should stick to his testimonies.

1. It is more dishonourable to God than a simple refusal; for you bring an ill report upon him, as if he were not a good master. A wicked man that refuseth grace doth not so much dishonour God, because his refusal is supposed to be the fruit of his prejudice; but now you that cast him off after trial, your apostasy is supposed to be the fruit of your experience, as if the devil were a better master; when you have tried both, you return to him again. Tertullian, in his book *De Pœnitentia*, hath this saying, After you have tried God, you do as it were deliberately judge Satan's service to be better, or at least you do not find that in God you did expect. Therefore the honour of God is mightily concerned, and lies at stake when you fall off after you have seemed to begin with him with a great deal of accurateness. And God pleads for himself, and stands for his credit, which seems to be wronged by this apostasy, Jer. 2:5, casting off his service for the idols of the nation: 'What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?' and Micah 6:3, 'O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.' What! can you complain of God? Is God hard to be pleased,

backward to reward? What cause of distaste have you found in him?—for implicitly you do as it were accuse him.

2. When you fall off after a taste of the sweetness and practice of godliness, your condition is worse than if you had never begun. There are two dreadful scriptures which speak of the condition of total apostates after some taste, and after they have had some savour of holy things, and some delight in the ways of God. One is Heb. 6:4–6, 'For it is impossible,' &c. Christians, after they have had some taste, and some enlightening, and made a savoury profession of godliness, afterwards they split themselves; some fall forward to errors and preposterous zeal; others fall backward by an unfaithful heart; one breaks his face, the other breaks his neck, as old Eli. But a little to clear that place. Certainly all of us should stand in fear of this heavy judgment of being given up to perish by our apostasy, to an obstinate heart, never to reconcile ourselves by repentance, even the children of God; for he proposeth it to them, supposeth they, are made partakers of the heavenly calling. The apostle doth not speak there of every sin against knowledge, but of apostasy from the faith of Christ, and not of apostasy of general professors, that lightly come and lightly go, as the loose sort of Christians here among us; but specially of those that had a taste, savoury experience of the sweetness of God's ways. Again, he doth not speak of apostasy for a fit, in some great temptation of fear, but of deliberate apostasy of those that were enlightened, feeling, tasting, so as to make some strict profession; afterward turn off, lose all, turn atheists, antiscriturists, formalists, renouncing Christ and the world to come, in the hope of which they seemed before to be carried out with a great deal of delight, and strength and affection. The apostle saith, It is impossible they should be saved, because it is impossible they should repent. This is a fearful state; and yet, as fearful as it is, it is not unusual: it is a thing we see often in some that have made a

savoury profession of the name of God, and afterwards have been blasted, either given up to an injudicious mind, or to vile affections, and are fallen off, and it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance. Oh, then, you that have begun, and have had a taste of the ways of God, and begun to walk closely with him, you should lay this to heart! Therefore this is propounded to believers, that they should keep at a very great distance from such a judgment, lest we grow to such an impenitent state as to be given up to a reprobate mind and vile affections.

The other place is 2 Peter 2:21, 22, 'It had been better for them not to have known,' &c. Mark, there are some that through the knowledge of Christ may upon some general assent to gospel truths take up a strict profession of the name of Christ, may escape the pollution of the world, that is, outward and gross sins, being enrolled among God's children, and have the privileges of the members of his church, and yet after this may fall off dreadfully. It were far better for such never to have been acquainted with God and Christ than to return to their old bondage. A sin after knowledge and profession of the right way is greater than a sin of bare ignorance; therefore their condition is far more deplorable than the condition of other sinners, for no men sin with such malice as they do; they have had greater conviction than others, not only external representations of the doctrine of Christ, but some taste, and have made some closure with it in their own souls; they are more given over by God than others; and so there are none persecute and hate profession and strictness so much as they that are fallen from it; and they are more oppressed and entangled by Satan, as the jailor that hath recovered the prisoner which ran from him, loads him with irons. Therefore we had need betimes look to it, and continue and persevere in the practice of the ways of God, which we have owned and taken up upon experience.

Use 1. Get grace, then look after perseverance. Evil men must get grace; and God's children their business is to persevere in that state to which they have attained.

But what should we do to persevere?

First, Be fortified against what may shake you from without; beware of being led away by offences and scandals. Three things are wont to give offence, and exceedingly shake the faith of some, viz., errors, persecutions, scandals.

1. Errors. Be not troubled when differences fall out about the truths of God, nor shaken in mind; the winds of error are let loose upon the floor of the church to sever the chaff from the solid grain: 1 Cor. 11:19, 'There must be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest.' Take heed of taking offence at errors. I do not speak now of being led captive by error. Many question the ways of God, and give over all religion because there are so many differences and sects; therefore they think nothing certain. Certainly God saw this discipline to be fittest for his people; he hath told us there must be errors; he would not have us take up religion upon trust, without the pains of study and prayer. Lazy men would fain give laws to heaven, and teach God how to govern the affairs of the world; they would have all things clear and plain, that there should be no doubt about it. But the Lord in his wise providence saw it fit to permit these things, 'that they which are approved may be made manifest.' Men to excuse the trouble of search, study, and prayer, would have all agreed, else they take offence at religion, and think it to be but a fancy; that is one means to draw them off, even after some profession. What the canonists say grossly, this was their blasphemy, that God were not discreet and wise, unless he had appointed one universal test and one infallible interpreter; this is

men's natural thoughts, they would have such a thing. The Jews say, Certainly Christ was not the true Messiah. Why? Because if he had, he would not come in such a way as to leave any of his countrymen in doubt. So many think religion is but a fancy; they fall off to atheism and scepticism at last, and irresolution in religion, because there are so many sects and divisions, and all upholding it with plausible pretences. To excuse laziness, we pretend want of certainty. But God's word is plain to one that will do his will, John 7:17, if we will use all the means God hath appointed, and unfeignedly and with an unbiassed heart come to search out the mind of God.

2. Persecutions, they are an offence: Mat. 11:6, 'Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.' When the people of God are exposed to great troubles when they are in the world, they have but a mean outside. What! are these the favourites of heaven? It makes men take offence. Christians, what religion is it you are of? Is it not the Christian religion, whose great interest and work it is to draw you off from the concernments of the present world unto things to come? The whole drift and frame of the Christian religion is to draw men's hearts off from earthly things, and to comfort and support them under the troubles, inconveniences, and molestations of the flesh; therefore for a Christian to hope an exemption from them, is to make the doctrine of the gospel as incongruous and useless as to talk of bladders and the art of swimming to a man that never goes to sea, nor intends to go off from the firm land.

3. A great occasion to shake the faith of many is scandals, the evil practices of those that profess the name of God. Oh! when they run into disorder, especially into all manner of unrighteousness, and iniquity, and cruel things, and make no conscience of the duties of their relations as subjects, as children, and the like, it is a mighty offence; and we that have to do with persons and sinners of all sorts

find it a very hard matter to keep them from atheism, such stumbling-blocks having been laid in their way. Scandal is far more dangerous than persecution. There are many that have been gained by the patience, courage, and constancy of the martyrs, but never any were gained by the scandalous falls of professors. Persecutions do only work upon our fear, which may be allayed by proposal of the crown of life; but by scandalous action, how many settle into a resolved hardness of heart! In crosses and persecutions a man may have secret likings of truth, and a purpose to own it; but by scandal he dislikes the way of God, of religion itself; it begets a base and vile esteem thereof in the hearts of men, so they are loose and fall off. And this mischief doth not only prevail with the lighter sort of Christians, but many times those which have had some taste, it makes them fly off exceedingly: Mat. 18:7, 'There will be offences, but woe be unto them by whom they come.' Christ hath told us all will not walk up to the religion they own; therefore we must stand out against this temptation.

Secondly, Be fortified within, by taking heed to the causes of apostasy, and falling off from the truth either in judgment or practice. What is there will make men apostates?

1. Ungrounded assents. A choice lightly made is lightly altered. When we do not resolve upon evidence, and have not taken up the ways of God upon clear light, we shall turn and wind to and fro as the posture of our interest is changed. First we must 'try all things,' then 'hold fast,' 1 Thes. 5:21. Men waver hither and thither for want of solid rooting in truth. They take up things hand over head, and then like light chaff they are 'driven about with every wind of doctrine,' Eph. 4:14. Half conviction leaveth us open to changes: James 1:8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways;' a man that seems to have a faith concerning such a thing, then seems to have a doubt

concerning such a thing; sometimes led by his faith, at other times carried away by his doubts. If we have not a clear and full persuasion of the ways of God in our own minds, we shall never be constant.

2. Want of solid rooting in grace, that is, 'rooted in faith,' Col. 2:7, or 'rooted and grounded in love,' Eph. 3:17; as to both it is said, Heb. 13:9, 'It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace,' that is, by a sound sense of the love of God in Christ. A sweet superficial taste may be lost, but a sound sense of the love of God in Christ will engage us to him. Oh! we have felt so much sweetness, and have had such real proof of the goodness of Christ, that all the world cannot take us off. The more experience you have, and the deeper it is, the more you will be confirmed. The most of us content ourselves but in a superficial taste. When we hear of the doctrine of salvation by Christ, we are somewhat pleased and tickled with it; but this is not that which doth establish us, but a deep sense of God's grace, or feeling the blood of Christ pacifying our consciences; this is that which establisheth our hearts, and setteth us against apostasy.

3. Unmortified lusts, which must have some error to countenance them. By an inordinate respect to worldly interests, we are sure to miscarry. A man governed by lusts will be at uncertainty, according as he is swayed by the fear or favour of men or his carnal hopes: 2 Tim. 4:10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world.' If a man hath love to present things, if that be not subdued and purged out of his heart, he will never be stable, never upright with God. It may be he may stand when put upon some little self-denial for Christ; he may endure some petty loss, or some tender assault. Ay, but at length the man will be carried away as Joab, that turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom, 1 Kings 2:28; there will some temptation come that will carry them away, though

at first they seem to stand their ground, as long as lust remains unmortified in the heart.

4. Sometimes a faulty easiness. As there is an ingenuous facility — 'The wisdom that is from above is gentle, and easy to be entreated,' James 3:17—so there is a faulty easiness, when men cannot say nay; when they change their religion with their company, out of a desire to please all, and cameleon-like they change colour with every object. Some are of such a facile easy nature, soon persuaded into great inconvenience. This faulty easiness always makes bold with God and conscience to please men, when we are of this temper: Jer. 38:5, 'The king is not he that can do anything against you.' It is not a good disposition, but baseness and pusillanimity. It is observed of Chrysostom, though a good man in the main, yet he ran into many inconveniences. Why? Because he was, through simplicity and plainness of his nature, easily to be wrought upon. Therefore though a good man (in regard of the sweetness of his temper and converse) should be as a loadstone, yet he should be also resolute and severe in the things of God. Paul, though they did even break his heart, they could not break his purpose.

5. Self-confidence, when we think to bear it out with natural courage and resolution, as Peter did, 'Though all men forsake thee, yet will not I.' We are soon overborne, and a light temptation will do it. God gives men over that trust in themselves, for the Lord takes it to be his honour to be the saint's guardian, to 'keep the feet of his saints,' 1 Sam. 2:9. He will be owned and depended upon.

6. There is an itch of novelty, when men are weary of old truths, and only rejoice in things for a season, John 5:35. There are many that look for all their virtue and their experience from their notions in



religion. Thus they run from doctrine to doctrine, from way to way, so remain unmortified.

Thirdly, Take heed of the first decays, and look often into the state of your hearts. A man that never casts up his estate is undone insensibly; therefore look often into the state of your hearts, whether you increase in your affections to God, in the power of holiness, or whether you go backward. It is the devil's policy, when once we are declining, to humble us further and further still, as a stone that runs down the hill; therefore take heed, look to the first declinings. A gap once made in the conscience, grows wider and wider every day; and the first declinings are the cause of all the rest. Evil is best stopped in the beginning. And, therefore, when you begin to be cold, careless in the profession of godliness, and not to have the like savour as you were wont to have, take heed. A heavy body, moving downward, still gets more strength, it goes down and moves faster still. Oh, therefore, stay at first! The first remitting of your watch and spiritual fervour is that which is the cause of all the mischief that comes upon many, so that they are given up to vile affections and lying errors. It is easier to crush the egg than kill the serpent. He that keeps his house in constant repair prevents the fall of it, therefore look to your hearts still. Our first declinings, though never so small, are very dangerous. Pliny speaks of the lioness, lib. viii. cap. 16; first she brings forth five lions, then four, then three, then two, then one, and for ever afterward is barren. Thus we first begin to remit of our diligence in holy things, and are not so frequent in acts of communion; then this and that goes off, till we have but little left us; and then all is gone, and men grow worse and worse. I may resemble it to Nebuchadnezzar's image, the head of gold, the breasts of silver, the thighs of brass, the feet of iron and clay, still worse and worse. So men are embasing by degrees, and fall off from God, and their savour of the ways of God.

Fourthly, Often review your first grounds, and compare them with your after experiences, and what fresh tastes you had then of the love of God to your souls: Heb. 3:14, 'We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.' The first rejoicing of faith, the sweet sense that you had, oh, how precious was Christ to you then, when first you came out of your fears! Revive this upon your heart; this will stir you up to be faithful to God. When the love of Christ was fresh upon your hearts, your motions were earnest. Many begin like a tree full of blossoms, give great hope of fruit. We should labour to keep up this affection, and that a cursed satiety may not creep upon us.

Use 2. If those that have chosen the way of God and begin to conform their practice ought with all constancy to persevere, then it reproveth

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1. Those that take up religion only by way of essay, to try how it will suit with them; they do not entirely, and by a resolute fixed purpose, give up themselves to the Lord. You should resolve upon all hazards; not take up religion for a walk, but for a journey. Not like going to sea for pleasure; if they see a storm coming, presently to shore again; but for a voyage to ride out all weathers. Thus you should do, stick to the ways of God, and at first make God a good allowance, that 'neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword, nor anything, may separate you from Christ,' Rom. 8:35. We should count all charges, and resolve upon the worst.

2. It reproves aguish Christians, whose purity and devotion come upon them by fits: Hosea 6:4, 'Their righteousness is as the morning dew.' The morning dew, that cannot endure the rising sun, is soon wasted and spent when the sun ariseth with his heat and strength;

whereas our righteousness should not be like the morning dew, but like the morning light.

3. It reproves them that are only swayed by temporal advantages, that are off and on; as the Samaritans, when the Jews were favoured by Alexander and other princes, then they would deny the temple that was upon Mount Gerizim, and say that they were brethren to the Jews; but when the Jews were in danger, then they would disclaim them. Thus many are swayed by temporal advantages, either intending or omitting the conscience of their duty, as they are favoured by men. But we are to stick to God's testimonies.

Secondly, Let us come to David's prayer, 'O Lord, put me not to shame.' It is in the nature of a deprecation, or a prayer for the prevention of evil. The evil deprecated is shame. By shame some understand the reproaches of wicked men: Lord, let me not suffer their reproach, for I have stuck unto thy testimonies. A man that doth not stick to God's testimonies, that is not zealous and constant, will be put to shame before God and man, and made a scorn by them, and lie under great reproach; therefore, Lord, prevent this reproach. These reproaches are grievous, to be borne. It is against the spirit of man to be contemned, especially when he doth well. But certainly this cannot be meant; he would not so earnestly deprecate this, I should think, at least, not in such an expression, 'O Lord, put me not to shame.' He speaks of such a shame wherein God had a great hand. It is true, God may suffer this in his providence. Well, then, this shame may be supposed to result either from his sin or from his sufferings.

First, From sin, 'I have stuck unto thy testimonies;' oh! suffer me not to fall into any such sinful course as may expose me to shame, and make me become a reproach to religion. Observe—

Doct. The fruit of sin is shame.

Shame is a trouble of mind about such evils as tend to our infamy and disgrace. Loss of life is matter of fear; loss of goods is matter of grief and sorrow; but loss of name and credit is matter of shame; and therefore it is a trouble of mind that doth arise about such evils as tend to our infamy and disgrace. Now this infamy and disgrace is the proper fruit of sin. To prove it by scripture, reason, and experience. To prove it by scripture: Shame entered into the world by sin; though they were naked, yet till they had sinned 'they were not ashamed,' Gen. 2:25, with Gen. 3:10; there was *verecundia*, an awful majesty, or a holy bashfulness in innocency; but not *pudor*, a fear of reproach and infamy; that came in by the fall. To prove it by reason: There are two things in sin, folly and filthiness, and both cause shame; it is an irrational act, and it hath a turpitude in it; therefore the fruit of sin is shame, and a fear of a just reproof. And then by experience: How do men hang the head and blush when they are taken in any unseemly action! All evil causeth shame. All sin, as soon as it is committed, it flasheth in the face of conscience. Shame is the striving of nature to hide the stain of our souls, by sending out the blood into the face for a covering; it labours most under this passion. And this shame accompanieth sin, not only when men are conscious of what we do, but it is a fear of a just reproof from God, nay, of a just reproof from themselves. There is a double loathness and fear in shame—when men sin, they are loath to look into their own heart, and loath to look God in the face: 1 John 3:20, 'If our heart condemn us,' &c. When men have guilt upon their hearts, they are loath to take the candle of the Lord and look into the state of their souls. And they are loath to look God in the face; therefore the apostle adds, 'If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God,' that our prayers be not interrupted. As holy David had his shyness when he had been sinning away his peace; he 'kept silence,' Ps. 32:3. He was

fain to thrust forth his heart by a practical decree, and bring it by force into God's presence. Indeed some men are grown shameless, having a depraved judgment, and corrupted all their doings, Zeph. 3:7; such have outgrown the common principles of natural honesty; and of all diseases, those which are insensible are the worst. Therefore when men are grown into a state of insensibility, and lose those feelings of conscience, it is very sad. Yet those which are most obdurate have their hidden fears, and are afraid of God and conscience, and are loath to be alone themselves, and are fain to knit pleasure to pleasure, to keep up this victory, and are forced to live in a jolly course, that they may bring a greater brawn upon their hearts.

Use. Let this press us to avoid sin: Rom. 6:21, 'For what fruit had ye of those things whereof ye are now ashamed?' If you sin, there will be shame. Sin in the greatest privacy brings shame. Though you should be solitary and alone with yourselves, yet there is an eye sees and an ear hears all that you do. It was one of the rules of Pythagoras, Reverence thyself. If there were no other witness, there is a law of God in our own hearts that will upbraid us for sin.

Again, David makes this request when he had professed perseverance, 'I have stuck unto thy testimonies,' yet, 'Lord, put me not to shame.' Note from thence—

Doct. A man that hath long kept close to God in the way of his testimonies, yet he should pray to be kept from falling into shameful sin. Why?

1. They which are most steadfast are not past all danger: 1 Cor. 10:12, 'Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' He that hath the firmest footing may fall, and that foully too. When he begins to grow negligent and secure, he may be soon surprised, and drawn to dishonour the name of God; and as David, who was a

man after God's own heart, sinned so foully that the name of God was blasphemed among the heathen. When once we come out of our fears, and are possessed of the love of God, we think there needs not be such diligence as when we were doubtful, and kept in an uncertain condition, and so carry the matter as if we were past all danger. Oh, no! sin many times breaks out of a sudden; and after the first labours of soul in regeneration and terrors of the law are gone, there is great danger of security, and secretly and silently things may run to waste in the soul. God's children have been in most danger when to appearance there was least cause of fear. Lot, who was chaste in Sodom, fell into incest where there were none but he and his two daughters. He, whose righteous soul was vexed at their abominations, how was his conscience cast asleep by security! A child of God may fall into the grossest sins. David, whose heart smote him for cutting off the lap of Saul's garment, yet afterward fell into uncleanness and blood, and his conscience falls asleep. Therefore there needs watching and praying to the last.

2. The miscarriages of God's children are most shameful. Oh, how will the Huns of the world laugh to see a Noah drunk! So a child of God, when he hath fallen into disorder, how will this furnish the triumphs of the uncircumcised! Blind Samson did not make such sport for the Philistines as a child of God for a wicked man, when he hath fallen into some notable excess: 2 Sam. 12:14, 'By this deed thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.' Wicked men have a conscience, and they would be glad of any pretext to shake off the name of religion. When the children of God keep up the lustre of it, and live up to the majesty of their religion, the awe of it falls upon wicked men. But when they run into practices condemned by the light of nature and the laws of nations, it hardens wicked men, and takes off this awe and fear upon them. It is no matter what a rude Scythian or barbarous Goth doth, if they should exercise rapine

and commit uncleanness; no matter what open enemies which are at defiance with God; though they break the laws of God over and over again, it is no such dishonour; but for a child of God, he that professeth the Christian name, to walk disorderly, it reflects dishonour upon God.

3. Because of the hopes they have of speeding in prayer: 1 Tim. 2:8, 'I will that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting.' Those that in a humble sense of their own weakness and fear of the mischief of being a blemish to religion, when they come to pray, they may be persuaded of God's goodness, of whom they have such long experience, that he will not fail them at length.

Use. Let us pray that we may not dishonour the gospel in our trials, that God would not leave us to sin or shame, by total apostasy or by any scandals, that our crown may not be taken from us.

Secondly, As this shame may be supposed to arise from his sin, so also from his sufferings, or from the disappointment of his hopes. Hope deferred leaves a man ashamed; therefore, Rom. 5:5, the apostle saith 'Hope maketh not ashamed.' When a man hath given out to others he hath such defences, hopes, expectations, and these fail, then he is ashamed. Thus David begs God would own him, that he might not be a scorn to wicked and ungodly men. Note—

When they that stick to God's testimonies are disappointed of their present hopes, it is matter of shame.

Observe it, and humble yourselves in your Father's anger, when he seemeth to go cross to our prayers and hopes, and gives to wicked men advantages against us: Num. 12:14, 'If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days?' When God doth not make good the confidence of his people, rather the contrary, the

confidence of their enemies does as it were spit in their face; then it is time to take shame to themselves, and humble themselves before the Lord.

## **SERMON XXXIV**

**I will run the way of thy commandments,  
when thou shalt enlarge my heart.—VER.**

**32.**

IN these words there are two parts:—

1. A supposition of strength or help from God, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.
2. A resolution of duty, I will run the way of thy commandments.

Where—(1.) Observe, that he resolves, I will. (2.) The matter of the resolution, the way of thy commandments. (3.) The manner how he would carry on this purpose, intimated in the word run, with all diligence and earnestness of soul.

The text will give us occasion to speak—

1. Of the benefit of an enlarged heart.
2. The necessary precedency of this work on God's part before there can be any serious bent or motion of heart towards God on our part.
3. The subsequent resolution of the saints to engage their hearts to live to God.



4. With what earnestness, alacrity, and vigour of spirit this work is to be carried on, 'I will run.'

First, Let me speak of the enlarged heart, the blessing here asked of God. The point from hence is—

Doct. Enlargement of heart is a blessing necessary for them that would keep God's laws.

David is sensible of the want of it, and therefore goes to God for it.

1. I shall speak of the nature of this benefit.

2. The necessity of it.

First, As to the nature, what this enlargement of heart is. There is a general and a particular enlargement of heart.

1. The general enlargement is at regeneration or conversion to God. When we are freed from the bonds of natural slavery, and the curse of the law, and the power of sin, to serve God cheerfully, then is our heart said to be enlarged. This is spoken of in scripture: John 8:36, 'If the son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.' There are two things notable in that scripture—that this is freedom indeed, and that we have it by the Son. (1.) That this the truest liberty, then are we free indeed. How large and ample soever our condition and portion be in the world, we are but slaves without this freedom. As Austin said of Rome, that she was *Domitrix gentium et captiva vitiorum*—the mistress of the nations and a slave to vices; so vicious men are very slaves, how free and large soever their condition be in the world. Joseph was sold as a bondsman into Egypt; but his mistress, that was overcome by her own lust, was the true captive, and Joseph was free indeed. (2.) The other thing observable from this text is, that we have

this liberty by Christ, he purchased it for us. This enlargement of heart from the captivity of sin cost dear. Look, as the Roman captain said, Acts 22:28, 'With a great sum obtained I this freedom,' they were tender of the violation of this privilege of being a citizen of Rome, a free-born Roman, because it cost so dear. And when the liberties of a nation are bought with a great deal of treasure and blood, no wonder that they are so dear and precious to them, and that they are so willing to stand for their liberty. Certainly our liberty by Christ was dearly bought. One place more I shall mention: Rom. 8:2, 'For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.' The covenant of grace is there called 'the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus;' and the covenant of works is called 'the law of sin and death.' To open the place: The covenant of grace, that is accompanied with the law of the spirit; the covenant of works, that is the law of the letter—that only gives us the letter and the naked knowledge of our duty. *Lex jubet, gratia juvat*; it is 'the law of the spirit;' and not only so, but 'the law of the spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus,' because it works from the Spirit of Christ, and conforms us to the life of Christ as our original pattern. Well, then, this law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, it makes us free. This freedom, though purchased by Christ, is yet applied, executed, and accomplished by the Spirit. The Spirit makes us free, and from what? From 'the law of sin and death;' that is, from the law as a covenant of works, which is therefore called a law of sin and death, because it convinceth of sin, and bindeth over to death. It is the ministry of death to condemnation to the fallen creature.

Let us see what this general enlargement and freedom is from these places. It consists in two things—a freedom from the power and from the guilt of sin, or the curse and obligation to eternal damnation.

The first sort of freedom from the power of sin is spoken of Rom. 6:18, 'Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.' There is a freedom from sin, and a freedom for sin, or a freedom from righteousness, as it is called, ver. 20, 'When you were the servants of sin,' saith the apostle, 'you were free from righteousness.' To be under the dominion of sin is the greatest slavery, and to be under the dominion of grace is the greatest liberty and enlargement. Then is a man free from righteousness, when he hath no impulsions or inclinations of heart to that which is good, when righteousness hath no command over him, when he will not be held under the restraints of grace, when he hath no fear to offend or care to please God. But on the other side, then is a man free from sin when he can thwart his lust, always warring against it, cutting off the provisions of the flesh; when he hath no purpose and care to act his lust, but it is always the bent and inclination of his heart to please God; and this is our liberty and enlargement.

The other part of this liberty and enlargement is, when we are freed from the bondage of conscience, or fears of death and hell. Every covenant hath a suitable operation of the spirit attending upon it: the covenant of works hath an operation of the spirit of bondage; the covenant of grace hath an operation of the spirit of adoption. I say, the covenant of works, rightly thought of, produceth nothing in the fallen creature but bondage, or a dreadful sense of their misery; it is called the spirit of bondage, and every one which passeth out of that covenant hath a feeling of it: Rom. 8:15, 'You have not received the spirit of bondage, again to fear.' You had it once, but not again. Then are we enlarged in this sense when the shackles are knocked off from our consciences, when we have that other spirit, the spirit of adoption, or that free spirit, as it is called: Ps. 51:12, 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit.' This free

spirit enlargeth us, that we may serve God cheerfully and comfortably.

According to this double captivity (the slavery of sin and bondage of conscience) so must our freedom and enlargement be interpreted; a freedom from the power of sin, and a freedom from the guilt of sin. The carnal estate is often compared to a prison; as Rom. 11:32, 'God hath concluded,' or 'shut them all up together in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all;' Gal. 3:22, 'The scripture hath concluded,' or 'shut up all under sin;' συνέκλεισεν, that is the word. A man in his sinful and unbelieving state is like a man shut up in a strong prison, that is made sure and fast with iron bars and bolts, so that there is no hope of breaking prison; mercy alone must open the door to him: this being in prison notes the power of sin. But take the other notion, because of the guilt of sin. Now this prison is all on fire in the apprehension of the sensible sinner; and therefore the poor trembling captive, when the prison is all on a light flame, runs hither and thither, seeking an outgate and a way of escape, and mourns and sighs through the grates of the flaming prison. This is all our condition by nature. Now, when God loosens the bolts, and shoots back the many locks that were upon us, as the angel made Peter's chains fall off, Acts 12:12, then are we said to be enlarged, to run the way of his commandment, or, as it is expressed Luke 1:74, to be 'delivered out of the hands of our enemies, that we might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life;' when we are delivered from the powers of corruption, which are as bolts and locks upon us, and the power of sin is broken, and we let out of the stocks of conscience, that we might serve God without slavish fear. This is the first thing we should mainly look at; the general enlargement must always go before the particular. First see that you be converted to God. It is that which hardeneth many. You shall find many are praying for strengthening grace when they

should ask renewing grace; and when they should bewail the misery of an unregenerate carnal state, they confess only the infirmities of the saints, and so are like little children, that attempt to run before they can stand or go. Therefore here God must enlarge you, free you from the slavery of sin and bondage, that you may serve God.

2. There is a particular enlargement, or the actual assistance of the Lord's grace, carrying us on in the duties of our heavenly calling with more success. This is that which David begs in this place, 'If thou wilt enlarge my heart.' There are, after grace is received, many spiritual distempers which are apt to seize upon us. Sometimes we are slow of heart, sometimes in bonds and straits of conscience as to God's service. A man of spiritual experience is sensible of these things, of a damp which is many times upon his life and comfort, and want of strength and largeness of heart for God's service. Whosoever makes conscience of daily communion with God, and that in every service would do his uttermost, cannot but be sensible of straits; and therefore it is grievous to him to be under bonds and restraints, and that he cannot so freely let out his heart to God. Others that do not make communion with God their interest, that go on in a dead track and course of duty, are never sensible of enlargement or straitening.

But briefly, that we may know when the heart is enlarged, understand the nature of it, let us see when the heart in scripture is said to be enlarged.

1. You may look upon this enlargement as the effect of wisdom and knowledge; and so Solomon is said to have a large heart: 1 Kings 4:29, 'And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart even as the sand that is on the seashore.' The greater stock of sanctified wisdom and knowledge a man hath, the more is the heart enlarged; for he hath a treasure

within him, and he is ready to bring out of the good treasure of his heart good things. He that hath more gold than brass farthings, when he puts his hand into his pocket, will more easily bring forth gold than farthings; so when the heart hath a good stock of holy principles within, they are ready at hand, they break out more easily in our discourse, in our praying; we are ready in all temptations to check the sin. All grace is increased to us by knowledge: 2 Peter 1:2, 'Grace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord.' Still this way doth God enlarge the heart of his people. When the understanding is full of pregnant truths, the greater awe there is and check upon the heart to sin, and the greater impulsion to duty. Look, as the influences of heaven pass through the air, but they produce their effects in the earth; they do not make the air fruitful, but the earth; so do the influences of grace pass through the understanding, but they produce their fruit in the will, and show forth their strength in the affections; and therefore when we would have our affections for God, the way is to enlarge the understanding.

2. You may look upon it as the effect of faith, which wideneth the capacities of our souls, and doth cause us more to open towards God, that we may take in his grace; it doth enlarge our desires and expectations: Ps. 81:10, 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.' Surely a temple for the great God, such as our hearts should be, should be fair and ample. If we would have God dwell in our hearts, and shed abroad his influences, we should make room for God in our souls by a greater largeness of faith and expectation. The rich man thought of enlarging his barns when his store was increased upon him: Luke 12; so should we stretch out the curtains of Christ's tent and habitation, have larger expectations of God, if we would receive more from him. The vessels failed before the oil failed. We are not straitened in God, but in ourselves, by the scantiness of our own thoughts; we do not make room for him, nor greaten God: Luke 1:46,

'My soul doth magnify the Lord.' Faith doth greaten God. Why, can we make God greater than he is? As to his declarative being, we can have greater and larger apprehensions of his greatness, goodness, and truth.

3. We may look upon it as an effect of comfort and joy, through the assurance of God's love; for that enlargeth the heart, but sorrow straitens it, and puts it in bonds. The word that we translate grief, Judges 10:16, 'His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel;' in the Hebrew it is 'shortened' or 'lessened.' A man's mind is lessened when he is under that passion. Grievs contract and lessen the soul, but joy enlargeth it, as Isa. 60:5; and in this sense it is said, Ps. 4:1, 'Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress.' In sorrow the spirits return to comfort and support the heart, but in joy they are dilated and scattered abroad; and so this is that affection which sends abroad strength and life into all our actions. As this is true of joy and sorrow in common, so especially of spiritual joy and spiritual sorrow, which are the greatest of the kind; no sorrow like that sorrow, no joy like that joy; therefore nothing more enlargeth the heart. When God hides his face, when pressing troubles do revive a sense of wrath, alas! 'My soul is troubled,' saith the Psalmist, 'I cannot speak;' we cannot pour out our hearts to God with that largeness, that measure of strength, spirit, and life as before. But now, when we can joy in God as those that have received the atonement, when we have the comfort of a good conscience, the joy in the Holy Ghost, this causeth a forward and free obedience; and those that could hardly creep before, but languished under the burden of sorrows, when cheered and revived with the light of God's countenance, they can run and act with vigour and alacrity in God's service: Neh. 8:10, 'The joy of the Lord is their strength.' It is as oil to the wheels, as wings by which we mount to meet with God: Ps. 30:11, 'Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded

me with gladness.' It is an allusion to those eastern countries; when their garments were girded and tucked up, they were more expedite and ready to run. So here, when thou shalt enlarge my heart, then I will run the way of thy commandments. When our soul is filled with gladness, and comfortable apprehensions of the Lord's grace, we are carried out to God with. greater strength and liveliness.

4. We may look upon it as a fruit of love. For thus the apostle doth express his love to the Corinthians, 2 Cor. 6:11, 'O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged.' It is love which is the great poise and weight upon the soul that sets all the wheels a-going. When love is strong, the heart is carried out with fervour and earnestness: Neh. 4:6, 'We built the wall.' Why? 'For the people had a mind to the work;' then it went on speedily Where we have no affection to a thing, the least service is burdensome; but when our hearts are for it, then the most difficult thing will seem easy; Jacob's seven years' hard service were sweetened by his love to Rachel; yea, duties against the hair, as Shechem for Dinah's sake submitted to be circumcised. Love sets us a-work strongly.

Thus the general enlargement is when we are freed from the slavery of sin and bondage of conscience, that we may serve God cheerfully; and the particular enlargement, you may look upon it as a fruit of wisdom and knowledge, or of faith, or of joy, or of love; when we have a fruitful understanding, a large faith, a sweet delight in God, and a strong love to him.

Secondly, For the necessity of this, that the heart should be enlarged before we can run the way of God's commandments.

1. There needs a large heart because the command is exceeding broad: Ps. 119:96, 'I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.' A broad law and a narrow heart



will never suit. We need love, faith, knowledge, and all to carry us through this work, which is of such a vast extent and latitude.

2. We need an enlarged heart because of the lets and hindrances within ourselves. There is lust drawing off from God to sensual objects: James 1:14, 'Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.' Therefore there needs something to poise us, to incline us, to draw us on, to carry us out with strength and life another way, to urge us in the service of God. Lust sits as a clog upon us; it is a weight of corruption, Heb. 12:1, retarding us in all our flights and motions, thwarting, opposing, breaking the force of spiritual impulsions, if not hindering them altogether, Gal. 5:17. Well, then, lust drawing so strongly one way, God needs to draw us more strongly the other way. When there is a weight to poise us to worldly and sensual objects, we need a strength to carry us on with vigorous and lively motions of soul towards God, an earnest bent upon our souls, which is this enlargement of heart.

Use 1. Let us therefore look after this benefit, and acknowledge God in it.

First, Ask it often of God. God keeps assisting grace in his own hands, and disposeth it at pleasure, that he may the oftener hear from us. The prodigal, that had his portion in his own hands, went away from his father; and therefore we have but from hand to mouth, that we may be daily kept in a dependence and constant course of communion with God. It is pleasing to God, when we desire him to renew his work, to bring forth the actings of grace out of his own seed, to blow with his wind, with the breath of his Spirit upon our gardens, that the spices may flow out, Cant. 4:15. But now, when we depend upon ourselves, and neglect God, and think to find always a like largeness of heart and a like savouriness of spirit, we shall be but

like Samson: Judges 16:20, 'When his locks were gone, he thought to go forth and shake himself as at other times, and wist not that the Lord was departed from him.' So when our strength is gone and God withdrawn, we shall not find a like pregnancy and consistency of thoughts, a like readiness and vigour of affections in holy duties, but all will be out of order; the understanding is lean, dry, and sapless, the heart averse and dead; and therefore God will be acknowledged in our enlargements, both as to prayer and praise. In a way of prayer we should often seek to him; and he will be acknowledged in a way of praise likewise: Ps. 63:8, 'My soul followeth hard after thee; thy right hand upholdeth me.' If you find any strong actings of faith and love stirred up to follow hard after God, to pursue him close in holy duties, when you feel any of these vigorous and lively motions, ascribe it not to yourselves, but to God's right hand; he is to be owned in the work.' 'Not I,' saith the apostle, 'but the grace of God wrought in me.'

Secondly, Avoid the causes of straitening, if you would have this enlarged heart. What are they?

1. Ignorance and defect of gifts; for it is by knowledge all grace comes into the soul: Col. 3:16, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly.' When the understanding is fraught with spiritual treasure, when the word of God dwells in us richly, then we have it upon all occasions to help us, we have at home a truth ready, and can call it to mind, either for suppressing of temptation, or encouraging us to duty, or for allaying of such a grief, speaking comfort under such a cross; otherwise we are lean, dry, and cannot act with that fulness of strength. But—

2. Another thing that straitens the heart is the love of present things. So much as your hearts are enlarged to the flesh, so much they are

straitened to the spirit, 2 Cor. 6:13; as what the land loseth the sea gains. By pleasures and by the cares of the world your hearts are straitened towards God, they are 'overcharged,' Luke 21:34.

3. Sorrow and uncomfortable dejection of spirit, through the fears of God's wrath, or by reason of desertion, when we have a sense of his wrath, and when we can find no effects of his grace. God withdraws, you have not your wonted influences, your wonted answers of prayer: Ps. 77:4, 'I am so troubled that I cannot speak.' This locks up the heart, and hinders it in the service of God, that it cannot so freely come and pour out its soul.

4. Great sins work a shyness of God. The faulty child blusheth, and is loath to look his father in the face, when he hath been doing some offence. The Israelites, after they had sinned in the matter of the calf, they stood afar off, and worshipped every man in his tent-door. You lose your freedom by gross sins: 1 John 3:21, 'If our hearts condemn us not, then *παρρησίαν ἔχομεν*, we have confidence towards God;' we may come into God's presence without a self-accusing and condemning conscience. You have not this liberty and enlargedness of heart towards God when an accusing conscience pursues you. When a man hath lost his peace and comfort, he cannot come and tell God all his mind, his temptations, straits, doubts, fears.

5. Unbelief. That is a cause of straitening, when it represents God under an ill notion; as terrible: Lam. 3:10, 'He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places;' Isa. 38:13, 'I reckoned till morning, that as a lion so will he break all my bones: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me.' It fills us with misconceits of God, as if he were terrible. When one came tremblingly with a petition to Augustus, What! said he, art thou giving a sop, a bit to an elephant? We disguise the majesty of God by our unbelieving

thoughts; we come to him as to a bear and lion that is ready to tear us in pieces, and then we cannot have that cheerfulness and delight in his service.

6. Pride. We are not humbled, but puffed up, when our heart is enlarged, and abuse the quickening influences of the Lord's grace to feed our pride: Ps. 51:15, 'Open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.' He doth not say, Mine own praise; then I will discover my gifts, and show what I can do: but, Thy praise. Many beg quickening and enlargement to set off themselves, and ask contributions of heaven to supply the devil's service; or as he that lighted his lamp at the altar that he might go and steal with it. We would put up self as an idol in God's stead, and have help from God that we might make him serve with our iniquities, that we might set off ourselves with honour and esteem in the world. Therefore God withdraws and withholds his hand. These are the causes of straitening.

Use 2. Let us then see if we have this benefit, an enlarged heart, which is so necessary for the keeping God's commandments.

Two things will deceive us: many think they have it when they have it not, and many think they have it not when indeed they have it.

1. Many think they have it when they have it not. Enlargement of gifts differs from enlargement of grace. A ready tongue many have—that depends upon the temper of the body—but not a humble heart. They may take pride and complacency in their own gifts, and yet not delight in communion with God. There are many in the world that have abilities of utterance, and some fanatical joys accompanying the exercise of it, and yet they have not an unfeigned love to God. Such as are enlarged in point of gifts, it is many times seen in this, that generally in private they are more careless, and they are more in

expression than in feeling. The great deceit and counterfeit of grace is parts and common gifts, especially when exercised in holy things, in a spiritual way, and for the good and edification of others. Certainly men have not spiritual enlargement when they still lie under the bondage and dominion of sin; and so though they may seem to have particular enlargement in some duties, and may be carried on with a great flush of gifts, yet they have not a general enlargement, the yoke is not broken, but still they are the servants of corruption.

2. On the other side, some think they have it not when indeed they have it. Why? Because they are not carried out in the work of God, as sometimes they seem to have been, with that liveliness and comfort. Let me tell you, there are necessary aids of grace, and there are more liberal aids of grace, over and above the necessary. If you have the necessary aids of grace, you are to acknowledge God hath enlarged your hearts, though you have not the larger measure, strength, and activity in God's service, which, upon the days of his magnificence and spiritual bounty, he is wont to dispense to his people. God doth not always continue these dispensations. Sometimes we find that Christians outgo themselves, and are enlarged beyond the ordinary pitch. Let me represent it by a similitude. We are not to esteem a river by its swelling and running over the banks after a mighty, long, and continued rain, but by its constant course; nor are we to judge of a town by the great concourse at a fair or market, the town is not every day so filled. So neither are we to judge of God's assistance by those high, tides of comfort or strength of gracious impulses which, in the days of spiritual bounty, he is wont to give. If you are enabled to walk humbly with God, though you have not such heights of affection, you should be thankful.

So much for the first thing the text offers, the blessing asked, viz., an enlarged heart.

## SERMON XXXV

**I will run the way of thy commandments,  
when thou shalt enlarge my heart.—VER.**

**32.**

THE second thing that is offered here is the necessary precedency of this work on God's part before there can be any serious bent and motion of heart towards God on our part. 'When thou shalt enlarge my heart.' When is causal, because thou shalt enlarge it. God only can enlarge the heart. We are sluggish, and loath to stir a foot in the ways of obedience, therefore God must enlarge. From first to last God doth all in the work of grace; he gives the habit and act. He plants graces in the heart, knowledge, faith, love, and delight; and then excites and quickens them to act. The habit of grace is called 'the seed of God,' 1 John 3:9; there it begins. Before we can fly we must get wings, we must have grace before we can run the way of God's commandments; and then quickening of the habits, the exciting of the soul to action; the deed as well as the will, Phil. 2:13; it is from God, the first inclination and actual accomplishment; he giveth to will, that is, the first inclination: 1 Kings 8:58, 'That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways,' &c. And then the deed, the outward expression of our obedience, it is still from God: Acts 4:29, the apostle goes to God for that, 'Grant unto thy servants that, with all boldness, they may speak thy word;' and so Col. 4:3, he begs, prays to God to open a door of utterance for them. There is a

door shut until God opens it. We cannot utter and express ourselves in a way of obedience without God's concurrence.

Use. Whenever you would undertake for God, get God first to undertake for you, as Hezekiah doth: Isa. 38:14, 'O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me.' Let every earnest prayer be accompanied with a serious purpose, and let every serious purpose be accompanied with earnest prayer: Cant. 1:4, 'Draw me and we will run after thee.' So here, 'Lord, I will run the ways of thy commandments.' Ay, but as to the event, we must suspend it: 'If thou wilt enlarge my heart.' This is the method we should use: first engage God by prayer, then engage our hearts by promise. Though we cannot lay wagers upon our own strength, yet we may resolve in God's strength, and ought to engage ourselves to duty: Jer. 30:21, 'Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me, saith the Lord?' We must promise what is due, but not presume as if we could carry our purpose without God. As to the event, they speak conditionally, 'When thou shalt enlarge my heart.' The children of God have no other confidence of their own affections but as God will put forth his power. They know they have a deceitful and corrupt heart; and to stand to their resolutions immutably, faithfully, needs more strength than their own. They resolve as to work, but as to event, they suspend that; they know their resolution will not be brought to anything unless God continue his grace and favour. The children of God, as they would own Christ as Lord, and commanding the work, so they promise obedience; that is their duty; and as they would own him a Saviour in helping them through the work, so they promise conditionally in his strength. As they are swayed by his sovereignty in his command, so they depend upon his all-sufficiency in his promise.

Here two cases may be handled; one is more generally—

Case 1. Whether we are to resolve upon a course of obedience when we are uncertain of God's assistance? The reason of doubting is, because we cannot perform it in our own strength. I answer—

1. It is your duty to engage and consent to give up yourselves to God's service whatever comes of it: 2 Chron. 30:8, 'Yield yourselves unto the Lord.' In the Hebrew it is 'strike hands with him' in his holy covenant: Rom. 12:1, 'I beseech you, present yourselves,' &c. You ought to come and present yourselves, own yourselves solemnly in a way of dedication to God. 'It was implied in our baptism, which is therefore called, 1 Peter 3:21, 'An answer of a good conscience towards God;' an answer upon God's demands in his covenant. An answer supposeth a question. God puts us to the question, Will you be my people? will you serve me faithfully and do my will? Then we ratify it by baptism. Necessary duties must be done whatever comes of it, as Abraham 'obeyed God, not knowing whither he went.'

2. As this is your duty, so, whether you resolve or no you are already obliged by God's command. This actual resolution of entering into covenant with God is only required as a means to strengthen us. Natural relations enforce duty without consent; a father is a father whether a child will own him in the quality of that relation, yea or nay. God's right is valid whether you will consent or not. Actual consent or purpose in your heart doth not give God greater right, but makes duty more implicit and active upon your own hearts. We cannot make the bonds of duty stronger, for God's authority is greater than ours, but we have a deeper sense when we own God's authority by our own engagement.

3. You have more cause to expect God's assistance in this way of engaging your heart to him than in standing loose from God, and neglect of his appointed means. You know the promise is made, Rev.



22:17, 'To him that will, let him take of the waters of life freely.' When there is a fixed bent of heart that comes from a secret impression of God's grace which causeth this will in you, when you have declared your will, you have more reason to expect God's concurrence.

4. It is a foolish course to refuse to make the covenant for fear of breaking it; as if a tradesman should neglect his calling, forbear to set up, because it is possible losses may come. Make it, then keep it in God's strength. Make it, but remember, your security lieth in God's promises, not in your own. It is your duty to engage to God; but as to the event, you cannot say you can go through with it, unless the Lord put in with his grace.

Case 2. The second case is more obvious and usual, viz., whether we are to do duties in case of deadness, indisposition, and straits of spirit? The reason of doubting is, because David seems to suspend his running upon God's enlarging—If thou wilt enlarge, then I will run. Ans. He suspends the event, but not his duty. He doth not say I will not stir unless thou enlarge my heart, but, If thou enlarge then I shall run. The plea of weakness must not be used, from the doctrine of God's concurrence to all acts of grace, as a shift, or turned into a plea for laziness. The right use of this doctrine is a constant dependence in a sense of our own weakness, and hearty thanksgiving when we have received any command from God. Now a form of thanksgiving is abused when it is made a plea for laziness. To resolve upon a loose course, and give over all, is an absurd inference from this doctrine; it is as if a man should say, my ploughing and sowing, unless God give the increase, will never make the corn grow, therefore I will hold my hand, and take the other sleep. It is God sends the wind, therefore I will not put forth the sails; that is no good inference. For further arguments, see ver. 25, where the question is

handled, whether we are to do duties in case of deadness. It is a most commendable thing to work notwithstanding indispositions. There is more faith in it; God's love is glorified when you can cast yourselves into his arms, then when he seems to shut up himself from your prayers, and to suspend the influences of his grace, Esther had great confidence to venture when no golden sceptre was held forth; so when we have no sensible comfort, then to venture and cast ourselves upon God. And it argues more faith in the power of God. As Abraham's faith was commended, that he could believe against hope; so, when all is dead, yet you will see what God will do for the quickening and enlarging of the soul. Then there is more obedience in it. No duty so commendable as that which is recovered out of the hands of difficulty, when in the face of temptation we can venture to go to God. And there is humility in it, when we can look upon ourselves as bound though God be free. I must wait upon him in the use of means, though I have a dead heart.

Thirdly, The subsequent operation of the saints; they that are acted by God act under him: 'Then will I run the way of thy commandments.'

First, Mark, he resolveth, 'Then I will run.' He doth not say, Then I should run, but will run, as binding his soul by a resolution, and his resolution by a solemn promise, 'Then I will run the way of thy commandments.' Here I might take occasion to speak of the good of binding the heart, and being resolved in a course of godliness. It is good to engage us to come to God, to keep to God, and to be hearty in his service.

1. This is that which engageth us to come to God, because of ourselves we are off and on, hanging between heaven and hell, and have many loose and wavering thoughts, until we come to a firm

purpose and determination, and that engageth the heart: Jer. 30:21, 'Who is this that engageth his heart to approach unto me, saith the Lord?' Before we come to this engagement, there are several things:—(1.) A simple and bare conceit of the ways of God, or of the goodness of holiness, this will not bring us to God, some general approbation of his ways. Many will say, 'God is good to Israel,' Ps. 73:1; but the heart never comes off kindly to choose God till the judgment determines, 'It is good for me to draw nigh to God,' ver. 28. This puts an end to many anxious traverses, debates, and delays in the soul. (2.) There are weak and wavering purposes, and faint attempts in the soul, that end but in wishes, which are soon broken off; but we are never converted and thoroughly brought to God till there be a full and fixed purpose: Acts 11:23, 'He exhorted them all, that with full purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.' When it comes to a plenary thorough purpose of heart, then grace hath wrought upon us.

2. As it will bring us to come to God, so it causeth us to keep to God. He that is unresolved is never constant: James 1:8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' There is in us a changeable heart, a rebelling nature; that meeting with temptations from without, unless there be a fixed purpose, alas! we shall be unstable in all our ways; all good wishes and faint purposes come to nothing, but we shall give out at every assault. But when we are firmly and habitually resolved, Satan is discouraged. This bindeth our holy purposes, like hemming of the garment, that keepeth it from ravelling out. Whilst we are thinking and deliberating what to do, we lie open to temptations, the devil hath some hope of us; but when the bent of our hearts is set another way, and the devil sees we are firmly resolved, and have holy purposes, he is discouraged. This was that which made Daniel so courageous and resolute in God's service: Dan. 1:8, 'He purposed in

his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat.'

3. By resolution we are quickened to more diligence and seriousness. Good purposes are the root of good works, and without the root there is no fruit to be expected. A true and inward purpose will not let us be idle, but still urging and soliciting us to that which is good, then we make a business of religion; whereas otherwise we make but a sport and recreation, that is, mind it only by the by. But now, 'One thing have I desired, and that will I seek after,' Ps. 27:4. When the heart is set upon a thing we follow it close, whatever we neglect. Whereas otherwise we are very lazy, careless, and do it as if we did it not; this makes us diligent, earnest, careful to maintain communion between God and us.

Use. Well, then, do you thus resolve and engage your hearts to walk with God. And for your direction—

1. Let it be the resolution of the heart, rather than the tongue: Jer. 30:21, 'Who is this that engageth his heart?' And Acts 11:23, 'He exhorted them with purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord.' Our resolution is not to be determined and judged of so much by the course of our language as by the bent of our heart. Empty promises signify nothing unless they are the result of the heart's determination: Deut. 5:28, 29, 'The people hath said well,' saith God, 'all that the Lord hath said, we will do. Oh, that they had such a heart within them!' Otherwise the duty hath no root, unless it be a fixed determination of the soul.

2. Let it not be a weak, broken, but full resolution. Cold wishes are easily overcome by the love of the world: Acts 26:28, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' That will not do, unless we be altogether. Carnal men, though they are not converted, yet they have

a kind of half turn; they have good wishes on a sudden upon a lively sermon; they would, but they will not. There needs a strong bent of heart. Bad purposes are more easily resolved and performed than good; Satan, the world, and the flesh do not hinder, but further them; so that good resolutions need to be thoroughly made: 1 Chron. 22:19, 'Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God.' When the heart is fixed by a persevering durable purpose, grace possesses it.

3. Let it not be a rash but a serious resolution, all difficulties being well weighed. In a fit or pang of devotion men will resolve for God, but it is soon gone: Josh. 24:19, 20, 'We will serve the Lord, for he is our God: and Joshua said, Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is an holy God, he is a jealous God;' that is, do you consider what you say? When you have weighty reasons and considerations to bear you up, you are more likely to hold. Sit down and count the charges; if you resolve for God, see what it is like to cost you, and consider where it is likely to fail, what difficulties you are most likely to meet withal, what lusts are most apt to break your purpose.

4. It must be a thorough, absolute, and peremptory resolution. Whatever it cost you, resolve to part with all for the pearl of price, Mat. 13:46, 47, and take Christ for better for worse. A marriage may be almost made, but there is one article they stick at, and it is broken off; so some are at the very point of giving up themselves to God, but there is one article they stick at; it is not an absolute resolution.

5. Let it be a present, and not a future resolution: Ps. 27:8, 'When thou saidst, Seek ye my face;' like a quick echo he returns upon God, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' As soon as you hear God's voice, before the heart grow cold again, it is good to resolve; for afterwards it is but a cheat to put off importunity of conscience for the present.

6. Let it be a resolution made in a sense of your own insufficiency, and with dependence upon Christ, not in a confidence of your own strength. Peter went forth in a confidence of his own resolution, 'Though all men forsake thee, yet will not I;' but how soon did he miscarry! Resolve in God's strength: Ps. 119:8, 'I will walk in the way of thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.' If God forsake you, all comes to nothing; therefore in and by God's strength resolve for God.

Secondly, The matter of the resolution, 'The way of thy commandments.' Which we may consider either simply and absolutely in itself, or with respect to the resolution. With respect to the resolution observe, the matter is good he resolves upon. Some will resolve upon a course of sin, as they, Acts 23:12, that bound themselves under a curse to kill Paul. In this case a vow is a bond of iniquity. Many will bind themselves never to forgive their neighbour such an offence. Again, the matter is necessary. It is contrary to christian liberty needlessly to bind ourselves where God hath left us free. Many will in some indifferent things bind themselves, make rash and unnecessary vows, as to play no more at such a game, drink no more in such a house or company. Alas! what doth this do to cure the heart? This is but like the stopping of one leak in a ruinous ship that is ready to fall in pieces. Resolution is for the weighty things of Christianity, or cleaving to God in a course of obedience, not for some by-matters. Resolve on the most necessary work. Again, this resolution is propounded universally, indefinitely, 'in the way of God's commandments,' whatever shall appear to be the will of God. When our consent is bounded with reservations, we do not come up to the mind of God, and that will bring you but half way to heaven. He that is half holy, half religious, will be but half saved. Paul gives God a blank, and bids him write his terms: Acts 9:6, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' So we must submit ourselves to all the ways of

God without exception. Thus we may consider it as it falls under a resolution, 'The way of thy commandments.'

But consider the expression absolutely, why are the commandments called a way?

1. There is an end for which man was appointed, and that was to seek after true happiness. All desire to be happy by an inclination of nature, for hereunto were we appointed by God. 'Many say, Who will show us any good?' Ps. 4:6; but men's practice is contrary, they live as if their end were to be miserable.

2. This true happiness lieth in the enjoyment of God; that is the great end of reasonable creatures, angels and men, actively to glorify God, and to enjoy him: other creatures were made to glorify him objectively, but not to enjoy him.

3. For the compassing this end there is a way; for every end is attained by the means. What is this way? God's commandments: Eccles. 12:13, 'Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.' That was the result of Solomon's critical search in and about the ways of true happiness; he found that a constant, uniform, universal obedience was the only way to true happiness.

4. The commands of God are legal and evangelical: they are both to be regarded:—(1.) The evangelical commands come first into consideration by the fallen creature; there the great command is to believe in Christ, John 6:29, 1 John 3:23. To believe in Christ is the only way to the Father. Then (2.) The moral law, that is the rule of our duty, without which we can never be saved, Rom. 10:14.

Use. Well, then, let me press you to consideration and resolution. (1.) Consideration, that we may think of our end, and think of our way,

and may not go on as beasts, without any recollection. Luke 15:17: We never 'come to ourselves' till we consider the end why we were born and why God sent us into the world. Whence am I? why do I live here? To delight myself in the creature, to wallow in pleasures, or to look after communion with God? We live but as beasts, not as men, till we return and remember our creator, in the enjoyment of whom is our only happiness. (2.) Then come to resolution; there is intentio, electio, consensus, and imperium; all these should be fixed after we have considered for what am I made? what is the way I am to walk? The first act of the soul is intentio; that belongs to the last end; surely this must be my scope, that God may be my portion. The next act is electio, or choice; that belongs to the means. Now the great means is Christ Jesus, he is the way to the Father. Oh, let me choose him that I may enjoy God for my portion! The next act is consensus, the will and understanding together; there is a consent to the terms. Notwithstanding all the conditions upon which these means are to be had, yet there is a full consent of the will to use them, so a consent to take Christ upon his own terms. After this there is imperium, a command for an industrious prosecution; this shall be my business, this I will look after. There should be a decree in our souls for God; God is my scope, Christ my way; I must take him; I will go about this work, walk in this way, that I may at length enjoy him.

Fourthly, The last circumstance is the manner, 'I will run the way,' &c. By running is meant cheerful, ready, and zealous observance of God's precepts. It is not go or walk, but run. They that would come to their journey's end must run in the way of God's commandments. It noteth speedy or a ready obedience without delay. We must begin with God betimes. Alas! when we should be at the goal, we scarce set forth many of us. And it noteth earnestness; when a man's heart is set upon a thing, he thinks he can never soon enough do it. And this



is running, when we are vehement and earnest upon the enjoyment of God and Christ in the way of obedience. And it notes, again, when the heart freely offereth itself to God. Now this running is very necessary, as it is the fruit of effectual calling. When the Lord speaks of effectual calling, the issue of it is running; when he speaks of the conversion of the Gentiles, 'Nations that know thee not shall run to thee;' and 'Draw me, and we will run after thee;' and 'In the day of thy power thy people shall be a willing people.' There are no slow motions, but when God draws there is a speedy, an earnest motion of the soul. And this running, as it is the fruit of effectual calling, so it is very needful; for cold and faint motions are soon overborne with every difficulty and temptation: Heb. 12:1, 'Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.' When a man hath a mind to do such a thing, though he be hindered and jostled, he takes it patiently; he goes on, and cannot stay to debate the business. A slow motion is easily stopped, whereas a swift one bears down that which opposeth it; so when men run and are not tired in the service of God. And then the prize calls for running: 1 Cor. 9:24, 'So run that ye may obtain.' There is a prize, which is eternal life in Christ Jesus, the reward or crown which he keepeth for us in heaven. They that ran for a garland of flowers in the Isthmic games—the apostle alludes to them—how would they diet themselves that they might be in breath and heart to win a poor garland of flowers! There is a crown of glory set before us, therefore we should so run that we may obtain, and be temperate in all things; we should keep down the body, deny fleshly lusts, and the like.

Use. To reprove faint cold motions in the things of God. Many, instead of running, lie down, or, which is worse, go back again, or at best but a very slow pace. Christ is running to you to snatch you out of the fire, and will you not run towards him? When we have abated the fervour of our motion towards God, then we lie open to

temptation; therefore let us not loiter; run, it is for a crown. If heaven be worth nothing, lie still; but if it be, run. Wicked men run fast to hell, as if they did strive who should be soonest there; bewail your slowness and lameness in obedience.

## **SERMON XXXVI**

## **Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end.—VER. 33.**

THE man of God had promised to run the way of God's commandments; but being conscious of many swervings, beggeth God further to teach him.

In the words two things are observable:—

1. A prayer for grace.
2. A promise made upon supposition of obtaining the grace asked. He promiseth—

[1.] Diligence and accuracy of practice, I will keep it.

[2.] Perseverance, unto the end.

First, In the prayer for grace observe—

1. The person to whom he prays, O Lord.
2. The person for whom, teach me.
3. The grace for which he prayeth, to be taught.
4. The object of this teaching, the way of God's statutes.

The teaching which he beggeth is not speculative, but practical; to learn how to walk in the way of God.

1. David, a man after God's own heart, maketh this prayer. The more love any have to God, the more they desire to know his ways. Carnal

men are of another spirit; they say, Job 21:14, 'Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.' The more ignorant the more quiet. They that love their lusts cannot heartily desire the knowledge of those truths which will trouble them in the following of their lusts. We often consult with our affections about our opinions; and where we have a mind to hate, we have no desire to know, Ordinary professors, a little knowledge serveth their turn, some few obvious truths, but others, such as David, follow on to know the Lord. David, that had a singular measure of knowledge already, yet there is no end of his desire in this psalm; and shall we be contented as if we needed no more?

2. Consider David, a prophet, a teacher, a penman of scripture. There was some knowledge which the prophets got by ordinary means, and some by immediate revelation; as Daniel by vision, and Daniel by reading of books, Dan. 7:2, 9:2; either by a new revelation, or by the study of what was already revealed. And if extraordinary men were bound to the ordinary duties of God's service as the means of their improvement and growth in grace, such as reading, prayer, hearing, meditation, use of seals, &c., surely none can plead exemption or conceit themselves to be above duties. Now, that they were thus bound we find by David's prayer for knowledge, Daniel's reading of books, namely that of Jeremiah, and all of them meditating or inquiring diligently what manner of salvation should ensue: 1 Peter 1:10, 11, 'Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you; searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow;' meditating and prying into the meaning of that salvation which by the motion of the Spirit they held forth to others, labouring to make these truths their own, and to get their hearts affected therewith. In their prophetic revelations they

were φερόμενοι, 2 Peter 1:21, forcibly moved by the Spirit, and carried beyond their intention, and the line of their natural strength, but in other things they got knowledge by the same means that we do, and as believers were to stir up the gifts and graces which they had in the ordinary way of duty, waiting and crying for the influences of the Lord's grace. You must distinguish, then, of what they did when they acted as prophets and when they acted as believers.

3. David, that had means external sufficient to direct him in the way of God, as the scriptures then written, the ordinances of the law, and the expositions of the scribes, yet beggeth God to teach him. So must we beg God to teach us, whatever means we have. It is true we have an advantage above the Old Testament church, as we have their helps and more, and the doctrine of salvation is now clearer, and the gifts and graces of the Spirit more plentifully dispensed since the price of redemption is actually paid, than before, when God gave out grace and glory only upon trust; yet still we are to go to God for his teaching, because the means are not successful unless he join his influence; especially to give us this practical knowledge, teaching in order to keeping the way of God's statutes. I say, though we have the word, and many pastors and teachers better gifted than in the Old Testament, Eph. 4:11, yet God must be our teacher still, if we mean to profit; for 'Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but God giveth the increase,' 1 Cor. 3:6. To seek knowledge in the means with the neglect of God will never succeed well with you; as we ministers must not rest upon our work, but pray much for success (*bene orasse est bene studuisse*—Luther), so you hearers must not rest in the fruit of our studies, but still beg God to teach you every truth.

But all this will be more evidently made out in the following points.

Doct. 1. Divine teaching is necessary for all those that would walk in the way of God's statutes.

1. We have lost our way to true happiness. Adam lost it, and all mankind in him; ever since we have been wandering up and down: Ps. 14:3, 'They are all gone aside,' i.e., gone out of the way of holiness as it leadeth to true happiness: Eccles. 7:29, 'God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions;' wander in a maze. Man at first, that had perfect wisdom to discern the way to true happiness, and ability to pursue it, now is full of crooked counsels, being darkened with ignorance in his mind, and abominable errors and mistakes, and seconded with lusts and passions.

2. We can never find it of ourselves till God reveal it to us: 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good,' Micah 6:8. It is well for man that he hath God for his teacher, who hath given him a stated rule by which good and evil may be determined.

[1.] Because there are many things which nature would never reveal to him; as the whole doctrine of redemption by Christ. The book of the creatures discovereth the mercy of God, but giveth not the least hint of the way how that mercy should come unto us, speaketh nothing of God incarnate, two natures in Christ's person, the two covenants, the way of salvation by Christ's death, &c. These could never be known by natural reason, for all these things proceed from the mere motion of God's will, without any other cause moving thereunto than his own love and compassion: John 3:16, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' And how could any man divine what God purposed in his heart, unless he himself revealed it?

[2.] Because those things that nature teacheth it teacheth but darkly, and with little satisfaction, without the help of scriptures; as that there is one God, the first cause of all, omnipotent, wise, righteous, good, and that it is reasonable he should be served; that reasonable creatures have immortal souls, and so die not as the beasts; that there is no true happiness in these things wherein men ordinarily seek it; that since virtue and vice receive not suitable recompenses here, there must be punishment and reward after this life; that men live justly, do as they would be done to, be sober and temperate; that reason be not enslaved to sensual appetite; all which nature revealeth but darkly: so that the wisest men that have lived according to this light in one thing or other have been found fools: Rom. 1:22, 'Professing themselves wise, they became fools.' But all these things are clearly revealed in scripture, which discovers the nature and way of worshipping the true God, what that reward and punishment after this life is, and the right way of obtaining the one and eschewing the other, with weighty arguments to enforce these things.

[3.] That we may have assurance that the worship which we give to God is pleasing to him, there must be a revelation of his will; otherwise, when we have tired ourselves in an endless maze of superstitions, he might turn us off with 'Who hath required these things at your hands?' Isa. 1:12. Therefore, for our security and assurance it concerneth us to have a stated rule under God's own hand, and God must be both author and object of worship.

3. Besides the external revelation there must be an inward teaching: 'They shall all be taught of God,' John 6:45; not all the prophets that wrote scripture, but all that come to Christ for salvation. And this is prophesied of that time when the canon and rule of faith should be most complete; then there will be still a need that they should be taught of God before their hearts be drawn into Christ. As the book of

the scriptures is necessary to expound the book of the creatures, so and much more is the light of the Spirit to expound the book of the scriptures. Others teach the ear, but God openeth the heart. The rule is one thing, and the guide is another. The means were never intended to take off our dependence upon God, but to engage it rather, that we may look up for his blessing: 1 Cor. 3:6, 'I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase;' 2 Cor. 4:6, 'God, that commanded (ὁ εἶπὼν) light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Though the gospel hath enough in it to evidence itself to the consciences of men, yet God must make use of his creating power before this light can break in upon our hearts with any efficacy and influence: 'The law is light,' Prov. 6:23. Yet not comprehended by darkness: John 1:5, 'The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not,' which rests in the hearts of all men that remain in their natural condition. It is not enough to see any object to have the light of the sun, unless we have the light of the eye. The scripture is our external light, as the sun is to the world; the understanding is our internal light. Now this eye is become blind in all natural men, and in the best it is most imperfect; therefore the eyes of the understanding must be opened by the spirit of wisdom and revelation, Eph. 1:17, 18. Though truths be plainly revealed by the Spirit of God in scripture, yet there must be a removal of that natural darkness and blindness that is upon our understandings. Outward light doth not make the object conspicuous without a faculty of seeing in the eye; a blind man cannot see at noonday, nor the sharpest sight at midnight. The work of the Spirit is to take off the scales from our eyes, that we may see clearly what the scripture speaketh clearly. Now scripture is perfected, that is the great work, to strengthen the faculty.



4. This inward teaching must be renewed and continued from day to day, or else we shall soon miscarry by our mistakes and prejudices. David is often pressing God with this request, 'Lord, teach me;' which plainly showeth that not only novices, but men of great holiness and experience, need new direction every day. The shameful miscarriages of God's wisest people are enough to show the necessity of this, and the many cautions in the word of God do abundantly confirm it: Prov. 3:5, 6, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' There is nothing that keepeth up our dependence upon God, and should quicken us in our daily prayers, as the sense of this. Many times we come to God in the morning, and pray coldly and drowsily, because we go forth to the occasions of the day in the presumption of our wit; but it is a thousand to one but we smart for our folly before the evening come. Alas! such is the inconstancy and uncertainty of man's understanding, that unless we have continual light and direction from God, and he lead us by the hand through all our affairs, passion or unbelief, or some carnal affection, will make us stumble and dash against one divine precept or another. This concerneth all Christians, much more those in public station, whose good or evil is of a more universal influence. Such was David. Men of place and power and interest had need have this often in their mouths and hearts, 'Lord, teach me the way of thy statutes.' Homer has a notable saying in his *Odyssey*—

"Τοῖος γὰρ νόος ἐστὶν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων,

Ὅτιον ἐπ' ἡμᾶρ ἄγησι πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε."

See Casaubon, *Ep.* 702,—a most divine sentence from a heathen poet, that mortal man should not be proud of his wit, for he hath no more understanding of his affairs than God giveth him from day to

day. A sentence so admired by the heathens, that many of them transcribed it in their writings with admiration; as Clemens Alexandrinus speaketh of Archilochus, who, as he took other things from Homer, so his putting it into his verse thus—

"Τοῖος γὰρ ἀνθρώποισι θυμὸς, Γλαῦκε, Λεπτίνεω παι,

Θνητοῖς ὁποῖον Ζεὺς ἐφ' ἡμέρην ἄγοι."

Augustine De Civitate Dei, telleth us, lib. v. cap. 8. Cicero rendered it into Latin verse thus, though with some loss of the sense—

"Tales sunt hominum mentes quales pater ipse,

Jupiter auctiferas lustravit lumine terras."

I quote all this to show you how precious such a hint was to heathens, as expressing a great deal of reason; and shall not we Christians wait upon God for the continual direction of his Spirit?

Now there is a twofold reason for this:—

1. Because this actuateth our knowledge, which would otherwise lie asleep in the habit; and then, though we are wise in generals, we should be to seek for direction in particular cases, or at least not have such a lively sense of God's will as to check the present temptations we meet with in the course of our affairs, and do too often induce us to miscarry. The temptation being dexterously managed by Satan, and entertained by our present thoughts, will easily overbear a latent principle long ago received, unless it be afresh revived and set a-work by God's Spirit; therefore we need that the Spirit should be our monitor, and cause truths formerly delivered to return with fresh force upon the heart. And indeed it is his main work to 'bring things to our remembrance,' John 14:26, and to blow up our light and

knowledge into an actual resistance of whatever is contrary to the will of God, or to furnish us with seasonable thoughts in every business and temptation.

2. We have but a glimmering light when we are blinded with passions, and are in some sort ignorant of what we know, cannot deduce those conclusions which are evidently contained in known and avowed principles. Hagar could not see the well before her eyes, by reason of her passion and grief, till God opened her eyes: Gen. 21:19, 'And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.' The ground was not opened to cause the fountain to bubble up, but her eyes were opened to see it. And Calvin giveth the reason why she saw it not, because *dolore attonita, quod expositum erat oculis non cernebat*—things at hand cannot be seen when the mind is diverted by the impression of some strong passion; and it is true of the eyes of the mind; we do not see what we see, being overcome by love, or fear, or hope, or anger, or some cloud that interposeth from the passions. As David, when he fumbled about God's providence, being blinded by the prospering of the wicked, calleth himself beast for not discerning his duty in so plain a case: Ps. 73:22, 'So foolish was I, and ignorant, and as a beast before thee.' In the perplexities of his mind he could not see clear principles of faith which before he had sufficiently learned, but could not then make use of for the settling and composing his heart.

Use 1 is for information.

1. The difference between the way of God and the way of sin. We have need of none to teach us to do evil—*Vitia etiam sine magistro discuntur*; we have that from nature; but in the way of God we must be taught and taught again; God must be our teacher and daily monitor.

2. It informs us that as to knowledge and direction there must be much done. Poor man, lying in the darkness and shadow of death, it was necessary for him—

[1.] That some doctrine should be revealed by God, by which he might understand how God stood affected towards him, and he ought to be affected towards God.

[2.] That this doctrine being revealed by God, it should be kept safe and sound, free from oblivion and corruption, in some public and authentic record, especially in these last times, when not only the canon is enlarged, but the church propagated far and near, and obnoxious to so many calamities, and men are short-lived, and there are not such authentic witnesses to preserve the credit of a divine revelation.

[3.] That this writing and record be known to come from God's own hand by some infallible proof, to the end that it may be entertained with the more reverence.

[4.] To own this authority, and discern God's mind, we need a suitable faculty, or a heart disposed by the Holy Ghost to receive the proof which God offereth, namely, that we should be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and open our eyes.

[5.] It is not enough to own our rule, but we must be continually excited to study it, that we may come to a saving measure of the knowledge of God's mind in the word.

[6.] After some knowledge our ignorance is apt to return upon us, unless the Holy Ghost do still enlighten us and warn us of our duty upon all occasions.

Use 2. In the sincerity of your hearts go to God for his teaching. God is pleased with the request: 1 Kings 3:9, 10, 'Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart, to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.' Oh! beg it of God.

1. The way of God's statutes is worthy to be found by all.

2. So hard to be found and kept by any.

3. It is so dangerous to miss it, that this should quicken us to be earnest with God.

1. It is so worthy to be found; it is the way to eternal life and to escape eternal death; and in matters of such a concernment no diligence can be too much: Prov. 15:24, 'The way of life is above to the wise, to depart from hell beneath.' It is the way that leadeth to life and true happiness.

2. It is so hard to find and keep; it is a narrow way: Mat. 7:13, 14, 'Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat; because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.' There is defect, here excess. A gracious spirit, that would keep with God in all things, is sensible of the difficulty; there are many ways that lead to hell, but one way to heaven.

3. It is so dangerous to miss it in whole or in part; in whole, you are undone for ever; in part, in every false religion such disadvantages, so little of God's presence and the comforts of his Spirit: 1 Cor. 3:15, 'If any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss, but he himself

shall be saved, yet so as by fire.' A man should look after the most clear and safe way to heaven.

Doct. 2. That divine teaching is earnestly desired by God's children.

How often doth David repeat this request! These expressions are strange to us, who, as soon as we have gotten a little knowledge, think we know as much as we need to know, and are wise enough to guide our way without further direction; but they are not so to the people of God.

Reas. 1. It is a hard matter to understand a thing spiritually and as it ought to be understood. There is an understanding of things literally, and a spiritual discerning: 1 Cor. 2:14, 'A natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' There is a knowing things at random and by a general knowledge, and a knowing things as we ought to know: 1 Cor. 8:2, 'If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.' There is a knowing the truth as it is in Jesus: Eph. 4:21, 'If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.' It is not every sort of knowledge that is saving; a man may go to hell with speculative light; that never reacheth the heart: such as is practical and operative, the scripture presseth knowledge, and the modus of it.

2. God's children are sensible of their own insufficiency, and so of the need of a constant dependence upon God; sound and saving knowledge is ever humble. They have clearer light than others, and so best see their own defects: Prov. 30:2, 'Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man;' and are, too, most sensible of corruptions, and see most of the excellency of the object: 1 Cor. 8:2, 'If any man think that he knoweth anything, he

knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.' They study their own hearts, and so are conscious to many weaknesses; they know how easily they are misled by the wiles of Satan and the darkness of their own hearts; whereas a presumptuous formalist goeth on boldly, and in the confidence of his own wit runneth headlong into temptation.

3. Their strong affection to knowledge; they desire to know more, for there is more still to be learned in the word of God. Though taught in part, they see what a small measure of knowledge they have attained unto; till they attain the beatifical vision they are never satisfied: Hosea 6:3, 'Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord;' still increasing and bettering their notions concerning the things of God.

4. Their great care that they may not go astray, nor offend in matter, or manner, or principle, and end. They whose hearts are set upon exact walking would fain know what God would have them to do in every action and in every circumstance: Lord, teach me; let thy Holy Spirit guide me, and direct me in performing acceptable obedience to thee. It was David's resolution, ver. 32, 'I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.' Now we have his prayer for direction in this verse, 'Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes;' I would know it that I may keep it. It is a very troublesome condition to a child of God when he is in the dark, and knoweth not what to do, and is forced to walk every step by guess, and cannot find the ground sure under him. The conflict between duty and danger doth not trouble so much as between duty and duty: John 12:35, 'He that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.' Oh! it is a sad judgment to wander in a maze of confusions, and to be like those that thought to go to Dothan, and found themselves in Samaria, 2 Kings 6:20.

Well, then, the use is, Have we this temper of God's people? Do we look after spiritual knowledge, such as will not only store the head with notions, but enter upon the heart? Are we sensible of our weakness and Satan's wiles, and that God, that hath begun the work, must perfect it? Do we make it our happiness to grow rich in knowledge, and better our apprehensions concerning God and the things of God? Would we understand every point of duty that we may fulfil it? As face answereth to face in water, so should heart to heart, the heart of one child of God to another.

Doct. 3. All that teaching that we expect or get from God must still be directed to practice: 'Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end.'

1. This is God's intention in teaching, therefore should be our end in learning. The end of sound knowledge is obedience: Deut. 4:5, 6, 'Behold I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it: keep therefore and do them, for this is thy wisdom.' Others do little more than learn them by rote, when they know them only to talk of them, or fashion their notions and plausible opinions that they may hang together.

2. It is not the knowing, but obeying, will make us happy. We desire to know the way that we may come to the end of the journey; to inquire the way and sit still will not further us: 'Blessed are they that hear the word and keep it,' Luke 11:28; 'He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction,' Prov. 10:17. None but desire to be happy; walk in God's way; he goeth on right that submitteth to the directions of the word.

3. All the comfort and sweetness is in keeping: Ps. 19:11, 'In keeping thy commandments there is a great reward;' many sweet



experiences. Notions breed a delectation when they are right, but nothing comparable to practice.

4. He that will do shall know: John 7:17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know the doctrine whether it be of God.' Such as truly fear God, and make conscience of every known duty in their practice, have God's promise that they shall be able to discern and distinguish between doctrine and doctrine; others provoke God to withhold light from them. Not that the godly are infallible. Alas! the best men's humours and fleshly passions do often mislead them, but this is the fruit of their careless walking.

Use 1. Is to reprove them that desire knowledge, but only to inform their judgments or satisfy their curiosity, not to govern their hearts in the fear of God, or to reform their practices. Such are foolish builders: Mat. 7:26, 27, 'Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man that built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.' These do but increase their own condemnation: Luke 12:47, 'That servant which knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.' Like many that study maps, not to travel, but only to talk and understand how countries are situated.

Use 2. It directeth us in our desires of knowledge, what should be our scope. Come with a fixed resolution to obey, and refer all to practice. Knowledge is the means, doing is the end: Deut. 5:31, 'I will speak unto thee all the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments which thou shalt teach them, that they may do them in the land which I give them to possess it.' *Media accipiunt amabilitatem, ordinem et mensuram a fine*—the desire, measure,

order of the means are to be esteemed as regulated by the end; therefore still prize this knowledge, so far forth as it directs to practice.

Doct. 4. In this practice we must be sincere and constant. 'I will keep it'—

1. Having such a help as this continual direction.

2. Such an engagement as this condescension to direct and warn a poor creature. And 'to the end,' that is to the end of my life; there is no other period to our obedience but death. The Greek hath it, διὰ παντὸς, 'continually.' The word doth properly signify the heel or sole of the foot; by traduction thence, the end of a thing, and sometimes a reward and recompense.

[1.] It is not enough to begin a good course, but we must go on in it, if we mean to reach the goal, else all our labour is lost; the end crowneth the work.

[2.] God, that made us begin, doth also make us to continue to the end. Is the beginning from God, the end and perfection from us? This is to ascribe that which is less perfect to God, and that which is more perfect to us.

## SERMON XXXVII

**Give me understanding and I shall keep  
thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my  
whole heart.—VER. 34.**

IN these words you have—(1.) A prayer, give me understanding. (2.) A promise, and I shall keep thy law. (3.) The promise amplified, by expressing the exactness and sincerity of that obedience, yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. The first point is—

That there needeth a great deal of understanding to keep God's law.

1. That he may know his way, and understand what God commandeth and forbiddeth; for it is the wisdom of a man to understand his way, and to know the laws according to which he liveth: Col. 1:9, 10, 'Filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that ye may walk worthy of God unto all well-pleasing.' We have such great obligations to God, both in point of hope and gratitude, that we have reason to study our duty exactly, that we may not displease him and cross his will in anything. We take it for granted that a man should comply with the will of him upon whom he dependeth. We have all and look for all from him; therefore we should walk worthy of God unto all well-pleasing, which we can never do without much knowledge and understanding; therefore we should search out the mind of God in everything.

2. To avoid the snares that are laid for us in the course of our duty to God. There is a crafty devil and a deceitful heart; so that a man that would walk with God had need have his eyes about him. For the wiles of Satan: Eph. 6:11, 'Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.' His enterprises or devices: 2 Cor. 2:11, 'Lest Satan should get an advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices.' He is ready to entrap us and ensnare us by plausible temptations; he suiteth the bait to every appetite. Then our own hearts: Jer. 17:9, 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?' There is a deceiver in our own bosoms, that will represent good under the notion of evil,

and evil under the notion of good; that will cheat us of present duties by future promises. And therefore *Ingeniosa res est esse Christianum*. He that would keep God's law had need be a very understanding man, that Satan entrap him not, and his own heart deceive him not, and so he smart for his folly: 'Walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil,' Eph. 5:15.

3. That he may respect things according to their order and places, and give them precedency in his care and practice as their worth deserveth, which certainly belongeth to understanding or wisdom to do. As (1.) That God should be owned before man, and served and respected before our neighbour or ourselves; for God hath a right in us antecedent to that of the creature: Acts 5:29, 'We ought to obey God rather than men.' Many times God's children are put to it, divided between duty and duty; duty to their parents, duty to their magistrates, and duty to God. Now it requireth understanding how to sort both duties. When the inferior power crosseth the will of the superior, the higher duty must take place, and we must dispense with our duty to men, that we may be faithful to God. Alas! the corruption of nature would teach us to do otherwise; we love ourselves more than our neighbour, and our neighbour more than God. Out of self-interest we comply with the lusts of men, and in complying with the lusts of men make bold with God. This wisdom every one that would keep God's law must learn, that we are bound to none so much as to God, from whom we have life, and breath, and all things; that none can reward our obedience so surely, so largely, as God, who can bear us out when men fail; that none can punish our disobedience so much as God. If these considerations were more in our hearts, we would not sin so boldly, nor serve God so fearfully and cowardly as usually we do, nor comply with men to the wrong of our souls. We may refuse obedience in a particular instance where we do not refuse

subjection. (2.) That heaven is to be preferred before earth, and the salvation of our souls before the interests and concernments of our bodies: Mat. 6:33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' And whosoever fail in this point of wisdom are very fools: Luke 12:20, 'But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?' There should be no delays in heavenly matters. We busy ourselves about other things, and defer our care for eternity from day to day; but this should be sought before every other thing. (3.) That present affliction is to be chosen rather than future, and temporal rather than eternal. A wise man would have the best at last, for to fall from happiness is the utmost degree of misery—*Miserum est fuisse beatum*. And therefore better suffer now, with hopes of reward in another world, than take pleasure now, to endure pains to come: 2 Tim. 2:3, 'Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.' It is better to do so than to have all our hopes spent: 'Son, in thy lifetime thou receivedst thy good things,' Luke 16:25. That which is present is temporal, that which is to come is eternal: 2 Cor. 4:18, 'While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' The good and evil of the present state is soon over. Now we stand not upon a short evil, so we may compass a great good. (4.) That things of profit and pleasure must give place to things that belong to godliness, virtue, and honesty; for the bastard good must give place to the true, real good. Profit and pleasure are but bastard goods. They are counted understanding men in the world that make pleasure give way to profit; therefore Solomon saith, 'Where there are no oxen the crib is clean, yet there is much gain by the labour of the ox.' I am sure he is an understanding man before God that maketh both give way to honesty and godliness; for the same reason that will sway us to make

pleasure give way to profit will also teach us to make profit give way to the interest of grace. As for instance, that pleasure is a base thing as being the happiness of beasts; so is profit, as being the happiness of the children of this world, in contradistinction to holiness, the perfection of the next. The pleasure of sense is only in this life, so is worldly gain only serviceable in our pilgrimage; pleasure in excess destroyeth profit; so doth profit destroy grace. As the world scorneth a man that hath wasted an estate upon his pleasures, so do God and angels him that, from the abundance of his wealth, maketh havoc of a good conscience, and neglecteth things to come: 'Godliness is the great gain,' 1 Tim. 6:6. (5.) That the greatest suffering is to be chosen before the least sin. In sufferings, the offence is done to us; in sin, the offence is done to God. The evil of suffering is but for a moment, the evil of sin for ever; in suffering we lose the favour of men, in sin we lose the favour of God; suffering bringeth inconvenience upon the body, sin upon the soul; suffering is only evil in our sense, sin whether we feel it, yea or nay. It requireth spiritual wisdom and understanding to choose of evils the least, as well as of goods the best: Moses, Heb. 11:25, 'choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.' (6.) That a general good is to be chosen before a particular, and that which yieldeth all things rather than that which will yield a limited and particular comfort. Riches will avail against poverty, and honour against disgrace; but 'godliness is profitable for all things,' 1 Tim. 4:8; it will yield righteousness, comfort, and peace eternal, and food, and raiment, maintenance, and eternal life. Now these and many such principles must be engrafted in the heart if we would keep God's laws. The reasonableness of such propositions in the theory may easily appear; but as to practice, we are governed by sense and human passion, which judgeth the quite contrary of all this, and causeth us to make bold with God because afraid of men, to follow earthly things with the greatest delight and earnestness, and spiritual

things in a formal and careless manner, to be all for the present and nothing for things to come, and to sell the birthright for a mess of pottage, to make a wound in our souls to avoid a scratch in our bodies, and for a little particular contentment to neglect the things of God.

4. Understanding is necessary, that we may judge aright of time and place and manner of doing, that we may do not only things good but well, where to go, where to stand still; as it is said, they sought of God a right way, Isa. 8:21, and David behaved himself wisely in all that he did, 1 Sam. 18:5. It is for the glory of God, and the credit of religion, and the peace of our own souls, that we should regard circumstances as well as actions, and discern time and judgment, that we do not destroy what we would build up. Therefore understanding is necessary. See further ver. 98 of this psalm.

5. Because our affections answer our understanding. If we understand not, how can we believe? If we believe not, how can we love? If we love not, how can we do? Knowledge, persuasion, affection, practice, these follow one another, where the faculties of the soul are rightly governed, and kept in a due subordination. Indeed, by the fall the order is subverted: Titus 3:3, 'Serving divers lusts and pleasures.' Objects strike upon the senses, sense moveth the fancy, fancy moveth the bodily spirits, the bodily spirits move the affections, and these blind the mind and lead the will captive. But a true understanding makes us more steadfast.

Now all these considerations do show us our need of understanding, and that a Christian should be prudent, not headstrong and precipitant, 'Like horse or mule, that have no understanding,' Ps. 32:9, but wise and knowing in all principles, actions, and circumstances that belong to his duty, if he would honour his

profession, and not follow the brutish motions of his own heart, but God's direction. Now, if we would have understanding, we must—

1. Attend upon the word; that will make us 'wise to salvation,' 'wiser than our enemies,' 'than our teachers,' 'than the ancients.' Than enemies: A man that consulteth not with flesh and blood, but the word and rule of his duty, will find plain honesty at length to be the best policy. Than teachers: Because he contented not himself with the naked rules delivered by them, but laboured with his conscience to make them profitable to himself. Than ancients, or men of long study and experience. That is a costly wisdom; when men have smarted often, they learn by their own harms to be circumspect. If there were no other way to be wise than by experience, miserable were man for a long time, and would be exposed to hazards and foul dangers before he could get it. But now scripture, which is not the result of men's experience, but God's wisdom, is not such a long and expensive way.

2. Use much meditation in debating matters between God and your souls: Ps. 119:99, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation;' and 2 Tim. 2:7, 'Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.'

3. Prayer, as David doth here ask it of God. Desire him to remove that darkness of spirit which sin hath brought upon you, that you may not govern your life by sense and passion, but by his direction: Job 32:8, 'There is a spirit in man, but the inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding.' Man hath reason, but to guide it to a spiritual use, that is above his power. The Psalmist complaineth of all natural men: 'There is none that understandeth, none that doeth good to no one,' Ps. 14:2; and Rom. 3:11, 'There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.' Therefore it is



God must give understanding at first conversion: Acts 16:14, 'God opened the heart of Lydia;' and Acts 26:18, 'To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins,' &c. By a fuller illumination: Eph. 1:17, 18, 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, that father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened,' &c.; otherwise we have not a heart to perceive, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear: Deut. 29:4, 'Yet the Lord hath not given you a heart to perceive, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear unto this day.'

Secondly, The next thing that I shall observe is this—

That upon the supposition of this benefit he promiseth obedience, I shall keep thy law.

Doct. They that have understanding given by God will keep his law.

1. That it is their duty, and they ought so to do, there is no question; for all knowledge is given us in order to practice, not to satisfy curiosity or feed pride, or to get a fame and reputation with men of knowledge and understanding persons, but to order our walk: Col. 1:9, 10, 'For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, cease not to pray for you, and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.'

2. That they will do so is also clear upon a twofold account:—

[1.] Because answerable to the discovery of good or evil in the understanding. There is a prosecution and an aversation in the will;

for the will doth necessarily follow practicum dictamen, the ultimate resolution of the judgment; for it is ὄρεξις μετὰ λόγου, not a brutish inclination, but a rational appetite. God hath appointed this course to nature; therefore when the judgment cometh to such a conclusion as is set down in the 73d Psalm, ver. 28, 'But it is good for me to draw near to God'—not only it is good, but it is good for me—the will yieldeth; for conviction of the judgment is the ground of practice. I know conviction and conversion differ, and the one may be where the other is not. But then it is taken for a partial conviction; the mind is not savingly enlightened and thoroughly possessed with the truth and worth of heavenly things; the most and greatest sort of men have but notions, a weak and literal knowledge about spiritual things, and that produceth nothing; they do not live up to the truth which they know. Others have besides the notion a naked approbation of things that are good. *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*—they see better things and approve them in the abstract; but this doth not come to a practicum dictamen; it is good, and good for me, all circumstances considered, thus to do. This is the fruit of spiritual evidence and demonstration, which always is accompanied with power, 1 Cor. 2:4. Carnal men think it is better for them to keep as they are, being blinded with their passions and lusts, though they could wish things were otherwise with them. But a godly man's judgment being savingly enlightened, determineth it is good, it is better, it is best for me; it is better to please God than men, to look after heaven than the world, &c. There is a simple approbation of good things, and a comparative approbation of them. Simple approbation is when in the abstract notion we apprehend Christ and pardon of sins and heaven good; but when compared with other things, and considered in the frame of Christian doctrine, or according to the terms upon which they may be had, they are rejected. Many approve things simply, and in the first act of judgment, but disallow them in the second, when they consider them

as invested with some difficult and displeasing terms, or compare them with pleasure and profit which they must forsake if they would obtain them; as the young man in the Gospel esteemeth salvation as a thing worthy to be inquired into, but is loath to let go his earthly possessions, Mat. 19:21, 22. He would have these good things at an easy rate, without mortifying the flesh or renouncing the world. But a godly man, that sits down and counteth the charges, all circumstances considered, resolves, It is good for me; as Boaz, liking the woman as well as her inheritance, took them both, which his kinsman refused, Ruth 4:9, 10; he would have the inheritance without the woman. They like Christ and his laws, as well as the benefits that he bringeth with him. He doth approve things upon good knowledge, and cometh to a well-settled resolution. Another defect in wicked men is because the judgment is superficial, and so comes to nothing. It is not full, clear, and ponderous; it is not a dictamen, a resolute decree, not ultimum dictamen, the last decree, all things considered and well weighed.

[2.] God's grace. God doth never fully and spiritually convince the judgment, but he doth also work upon the will to accept, embrace, and prosecute those good things of which it is convinced. He teacheth and draweth; they are distinct works, but they go together; therefore the one is inferred out of the other. Drawn and taught of God, both are necessary; for as there is blindness and inadvertency in the mind, so obstinacy in the will, which is not to be cured by mere persuasion, but by a gracious quality infused, inclining the heart, which by the way freeth this doctrine from exception, as if all God's works were mere moral suasion. The will is renewed and changed, but so as God doth it, by working according to the order of nature.

Use. By all means look after this divine illumination, whereby your judgment may be convinced of the truth and worth of spiritual

things. It is not enough to have some general and floating notions about them, or slightly to hear of them, or talk of them; but they must be spiritually discerned and judged of; for if our judgments were thoroughly convinced, our pursuit of true happiness would be more earnest; you would see sin to be the greatest mischief, and grace the chiefest treasure, and accordingly act.

God enlightening the soul doth—

1. Take away carnal principles. Many men can talk well, but they are leavened with carnal principles; as (1.) That he may do as most do and yet be safe: Mat. 7:23, 'Many will say in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?' &c.; 'And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity;' Prov. 11:31, 'Behold the righteous shall be recompensed upon the earth, much more the wicked and the sinner;' Exod. 32 &c. (2.) That he may go on in ungodliness, injustice, intemperance, because grace hath abounded in the gospel: Titus 2:11, 12, 'For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godlily in this present world;' and Luke 1:75, 'That we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.' (3.) That he may spend his youth in pleasure, and safely put off repentance till age. But Eccles. 12:1, we are bid to 'Remember our Creator in the days of our youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;' and Luke 12:20, when the rich man said to his soul, 'soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry;' God said unto him, 'Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?' Heb. 3:7, 'Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day, if

ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts,' &c. Men think it is a folly to be singular and precise; that it was better when there was less preaching and less knowledge; that small sins are not to be stood upon. But God, enlightening the soul, maketh us to see the vanity and sinfulness of such thoughts.

2. There is a bringing the understanding to attend and consider. There is much lieth upon it: Acts 16:14, 'The Lord opened the heart of Lydia, so that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul;' that is, weighed them in her heart.

## **SERMON XXXVIII**

### **Yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.—VER. 34.**

I COME now to the last clause, I shall observe it with my whole heart. The point is—

Doct. That it is not enough to keep God's law, but we must keep it with the whole heart.

Here I shall show you—

1. That God requireth the heart.
2. The whole heart.

First, God requireth the heart in his service. The heart is the Christian's sacrifice, the fountain of good and evil, and therefore should be mainly looked after. Without this—

1. External profession is nothing. Most Christians have nothing for Christ but a good opinion or some outward profession. Judas was a disciple, but 'Satan entered into his heart,' Luke 22:3. Ananias joined himself to the people of God, but 'Satan filled his heart,' Acts 5:3. Simon Magus was baptized, but 'his heart was not right with God,' Acts 8:22. Here is the great defect.

2. External conformity is nothing worth. It is not enough that the life seem good, and many good actions be performed, unless the heart be purified; otherwise we do, with the Pharisees, 'wash the outside of the platter,' Mat. 23:25, 26, 'when the inside is full of extortion and excess.' It is the heart God looketh after: 1 Sam. 16:7, 'For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart;' Prov. 4:23, 'Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.' Cast salt into the spring. As Jehu said to Jonadab, so doth God say to us: 2 Kings 10:15, 'Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?' We should answer, It is. Men are not for obsequious compliances if not with the heart, so neither is God. Though thou pray with the Pharisee, pay thy vows with the harlot, kiss Christ with Judas, offer sacrifice with Cain, fast with Jezebel, sell thine inheritance to give to the poor with Ananias and Sapphira, all is in vain without the heart, for it is the heart enliveneth all our duties.

3. It is the heart wherein God dwelleth, not in the tongue, the brain, unless by common gifts; till he take possession of the heart all is as nothing: Eph. 3:17, 'He dwelleth in our hearts by faith.' The bodies of believers are temples of the Holy Ghost; yet the heart, will, and affections of man are the chief place of his habitation, wherein he resideth as in his strong citadel, and from whence he commandeth other faculties and members; and without his presence there he cannot have any habitation in us. The tongue cannot receive him by

speaking, nor the understanding by knowing, nor the hands by external working: Prov. 4:23, 'Out of it are the issues of life.' It is the forge of spirits: 'He dwelleth not in temples made with hands,' Acts 7:48; and Jer. 23:24, 'Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.' He will dwell in thine heart and remain there, if thou wilt give thy heart to him.

4. If Christ have it not, Satan will have it. The heart of man is not a waste; either God is there framing gracious operations, or the devil, who 'worketh in the children of disobedience,' Eph. 2:2. Will you give them to God to be saved, or to the devil to be damned? Whose they are now they are for ever.

5. If you love any, you give them the heart; and you are wont to wish that there were windows in your bodies that they might see the sincerity of your hearts towards them. Surely if you have cause to love any, you have much more cause to love God. No such friend as he, no such benefactor as he, if you consider what he hath done for us, what blessings he hath bestowed, internal, external, temporal, eternal. He hath given his Son, the great instance of love: John 3:16, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life;' his gospel, that his love might be preached to us; his Spirit, that not only sounded in our ears, but is shed abroad in our hearts, Rom. 5:5; his Christ to save us, his word to enlighten us, his Spirit to guide and direct us till we come to heaven, where he will give himself to us, an eternal inheritance. Certainly, unless void of all sense and common ingenuity, thou wilt say, as the Psalmist, Ps. 116:12, 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?' What indeed wilt thou render to him? Love will tell thee; but lest thou shouldst miss, God himself hath told thee: Prov. 23:26, 'My son, give me thine heart.' There is no need to wish for windows in thy body:

'He searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins;' Ps. 7:9, 'The righteous God trieth the hearts and reins;' and 1 Kings 8:39, 'Thou knowest the hearts of all the children of men.' The whole world is to him as a sea of glass. He knoweth how much thou esteemest and honourest him. If thou givest him the whole world, and dost not give him thy heart, thou dishonourest him, and settest something else before him.

6. This is, that all may give him. If God should require costly sacrifices, rivers of oil, thousands of rams, then none but the rich would serve him, and he would require nothing but what many hypocrites would give him. Then the poor would be ashamed and discouraged, not being able to comply with the command; yea, then God would not act like the true God, 'Who accepteth not the person of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of his hands,' Job 34:19. Say not, Micah 6:6–8, 'Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' But go to God and give him thy heart, this will make thy mite more acceptable than the great treasures of the wicked: Luke 21:1–4, 'And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury; and he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites; and he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all; for all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God, but of her penury she hath cast in all the living that she had.' We read in pagan story of one that, when many rich scholars gave gifts to Socrates, every one according to his birth and fortunes, a poor young man came to him and said—I have nothing worthy of thee to bestow upon thee, but that which I have I give, and that is myself; others that have given to thee have left more to



themselves, but I have given all that I have, and have nothing left me; I give thee myself. The philosopher answered—Thou hast given me a gift indeed, and therefore it shall be my care to return thee to thyself better than I found thee. So come to God; he needeth us not, but it is for our benefit: we should give our hearts and selves to him. He knoweth how much it is for our advantage that he should have our hearts, to make them better, to sanctify and save them.

Secondly, The whole heart. Here I shall show you—(1.) What it is to keep the law with the whole heart. (2.) Why we must keep the law with our whole heart.

1. What it is to keep the law with the whole heart. It is taken legally or evangelically, as a man is bound, or as God will accept what is required in justice, or what is accepted in mercy.

[1.] According to the rigour of the law. The law requireth exact conformity, without the least motion to the contrary, either in thought or desire, a full obedience to the law with all the powers of the whole man. This is in force still as to our rule, but not as to the condition of our acceptance with God. This, without any defect and imperfection, like man's love to God in innocency, since the fall is nowhere found but in Christ Jesus, who alone is harmless and undefiled, and will never thus be fulfilled by us till we come to heaven; for here all is but in part, but then that which is in part shall be done away. Then will there be light without darkness, knowledge without ignorance, faith without unbelief, hope without despair, love without defect and mixture of carnal inclinations, all good motions without distraction. Here is folly and confusion; here 'flesh lusteth against the spirit' in the best, Gal. 5:17. They have a double principle, though not a double heart.

[2.] In an evangelical sense, according to the moderation of the second covenant; and so God, out of his love and mercy in Christ Jesus, accepts of such a measure of love and obedience as answereth to the measure of sanctification received. When God sanctifieth a man he sanctifieth him as to all the parts and faculties of body and soul, enlighteneth the understanding with the knowledge of his will, inclineth the heart to obedience, circumciseth the affection, filleth us with the love of God himself and holy things. But being a voluntary agent, he doth not this as to perfection of degrees all at once, but successively, and by little and little. Therefore, as long as we are in the world there is somewhat of ignorance in the understanding, perversity in the will, fleshliness and impurity in the affections, flesh and spirit in every faculty, like water and wine in the same cup; but so as the gift of grace doth more and more prevail over the corruption of nature, light upon darkness, holiness upon sin, and heavenliness upon our inclinations to worldly vanities; as the sun upon the shadow of the night till it groweth into perfect day: Prov. 4:18, 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.' Therefore, when a man doth heartily apply himself to the things of God, and, acknowledging his defects, doth go on 'from faith to faith,' Rom. 1:17, from love to love, and from obedience to obedience, Heb. 6:10, and doth study to bring his heart into a further conformity to God, not looking back to Sodom or turning back to Egypt, God accepteth of these desires and constant and uniform endeavours, and will 'spare us as a man spareth his only son that serveth him,' Mal. 3:17—as a son, an only son, that is obsequious for the main, though he hath his failings and escapes. There is in them integrity, but not perfection; all parts of holiness, though not degrees: as in the body every muscle and vein and artery hath its use. Thus all Israel is said to seek the Lord with their whole desire: 2 Chron. 15:15, 'And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole

desire.' It is said of Asa, that 'he sought the Lord with his whole heart, yet the high places were not taken away.'

2. Now, the reasons why we must keep the law with our whole heart are these following:—

[1.] He that giveth a part only to God giveth nothing to God, for that part that is reserved will in time draw the whole after it. The devil keepeth an interest in us as long as any one lust remaineth unmortified; as Pharaoh stood hucking; he would fain have a pawn of their return; first their children, then their flocks and herds, must be left behind them. He knew this was the way to bring them back again. So Satan hath a pawn, and knoweth that all will fall to him at last: Hosea 10:2, 'Their heart is divided, now shall they be found faulty;' halting between God and idols. When men are not wholly and solely for God, but divided between him and other things, God will be jostled out at last. Grace is but a stranger, sin is a native, and therefore most likely to prevail, and by long use and custom is most strongly rooted. Herod did many things, but his Herodias drew him back into Satan's snare. A bird tied by the leg may flutter up and down and make some show of escape, but he is under command still. So may men have a conscience for God, and some affections for God, but the world and the flesh have the greater share in them. Therefore, though they do many things, yet still God hath no supreme interest in their souls; and therefore, when their darling lusts interpose, all God's interest in them signifieth nothing. As for instance, a man that is given to please the flesh, but in all other things findeth no difficulty, can worship, give alms, findeth no reluctancy to these duties, unless when they cross his living after the flesh, which in time swalloweth up his conscience and all his profession and practice. A man addicted to the world can deny his

appetite, seem very serious in holy duties, but the world prevaieth, and in time maketh him weary of all other things.

[2.] The whole man is God's by every kind of right and title; and therefore, when he requireth the whole heart, he doth but require that which is his own. God gave us the whole by creation, preserveth the whole, redeemeth the whole, and promiseth to glorify the whole. If we had been mangled in creation, we would have been troubled—if born without hands or feet. If God should turn us off to ourselves to keep that part to ourselves which we reserved from him, or if he should make such a division at death, take a part to heaven, or if Christ had bought part—1 Cor. 6:20, 'Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's'—if you have had any good work upon you, God hath sanctified the whole in a gospel sense, that is every part: 1 Thes. 5:23, 'And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ;' not only conscience, but will and affections, appetite and body. And you have given all to him for his use: 'I am my beloved's;' not a part, but the whole. He could not endure Ananias, that kept back part of the price; all is his due. When the world, pleasure, ambition, pride, desire of riches, unchaste love, desire a part in us, we may remember we have no affections to dispose of without God's leave. It is all his, and it is sacrilege to rob or detain any part from God. Shall I alienate that which is God's, to satisfy the world, the flesh, and the devil? It is his by creation, redemption, donation. When our flesh, or the world, or Satan, detain any part, this is, with Reuben, to go up unto our father's bed.

Use 1. First, to reprove those that do not give God the heart in their service; secondly, not the whole heart.

1. Not the heart, but content themselves with outward profession: Jer. 12:2, 'Thou art near in their mouth, but far from their reins.' God is often in their speech, but they have no hearty affection. Never was there an age higher in notions and colder in practice of Christianity. The heart is all; it is the terminus actionum ad intra, et fons actionum ad extra. It is the bound of those actions that look inward; the senses report to the phantasy, that to the mind, and the mind counsels the heart: 'If wisdom enter the heart,' Prov. 2:10. It is the well-spring of those actions that look outward to the life: Prov. 4:23, 'Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life;' Mat 15:19, and Prov. 4:4, 'Let thy heart retain my words; keep my commandments and live;' then other things will follow.

2. It reproves those that do not give God the whole heart, for he requireth that, and surely all is too little for so great and so good a master. God will have the heart, so that no part of it be left to others, or for ourselves to dispose of as we will: the true mother would not have the child divided, 1 Kings 3:26. God will have all or nothing, he will not part stakes with Satan; but Satan, if he cannot have all, will be content with a part. But who are they that do not give God the whole heart?

[1.] Those that are for God in their consciences but not in their affections. Conscience many times taketh God's part. Their affections are for the world, but their consciences are for God, as convinced men that do some outward work commanded in the law, but they have no love to the work. This will not serve the turn, for whatever is done by constraint, or the mere compulsion of a natural conscience, can never hold long. Nature will return to its bias again, however men force themselves for a while to comply with something which God hath commanded. They do not take up his ways by choice, but

upon compulsion and the urgings of conscience, which they no way liked.

[2.] Those that have their affections divided between God and the world, halting between two, they have some affection to spiritual things, the favour of God and holiness as the only means to make them happy, but the world and their lusts have the greater share. They are troubled a little, would have the favour of God, but upon their own conditions. The prevailing part of the soul bendeth them to carnal interests; as the person that was told that he must take up the cross and follow Christ, he is offended, Mat 11:21; the young man turned away discontented when he heard the terms, Mat. 19:21, 22. They like God's offers, but not his conditions to come up fully to his mind. They are loath to enter into gospel bonds. These do not entirely give up themselves to God; they have but an affection in part to the comforts of the gospel, but not to the duties of the gospel.

[3.] Those that will do many things, but stick at one part of their duty to God. Men may suffer much for God, sacrifice some of their weaker lusts, but whilst any one sin remaineth unmortified there is possession kept for Satan; as Saul destroyed the Amalekites, but kept the fattest of the cattle, and spared Agag. Herod will not part with his Herodias: Ps. 18:23, David saith, 'I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity.' Either some lust of the flesh, or of the eyes, or pride remaineth. There are some tender parts of the soul which are as the right hand and the right eye, men are loath to have them touched. They do not unfeignedly comply with God's whole will.

Use 2. To press you to give up the whole heart to God in a course of obedience.

Let us believe in God with all the heart: Acts 8:32, 'If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest,' &c.; and Prov. 3:5, 'Trust in the Lord with all thy heart.' This is the main thing of Christianity, when there is not only a naked assent, but when we embrace Christ with the heart, and there is a full and free consent to take him to all the uses for which God hath appointed him. So for love: Deut. 6:5, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might.' When we delight in God, and find full complacency in him as our all-sufficient portion, without reserving any part of our hearts for other things. So for obedience: 1 Chron. 28:9, 'And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.' But now, how shall we know that we give God all the heart in an evangelical sense?

Ans. 1. When our purpose is to cleave to God alone, and to serve him with an entire obedience both of the inward and outward man, purely and sincerely, without hypocrisy: Ps. 51:6, 'Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom;' and Phil. 3:3, 'For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.'

Ans. 2. When we do what we can by all good means to maintain our purpose, and are watchful and diligent, and serious in this purpose: 2 Kings 10:31, 'Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart, for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam which made Israel to sin.' see the contrary in Paul: Acts 24:16, 'And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.' They bent all their

studies and fervency of their spirit this way, with all earnestness of endeavour to come up to God's law.

Ans. 3. When we search out our defects, and bewail them with a kindly remorse, Rom. 2:29; when we run by faith to Christ Jesus, and sue out our pardon and peace: 1 John 2:1, 'My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not; and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.'

## **SERMON XXXIX**

**Make me to go in the path of thy  
commandments, for therein do I delight.**

**—VER. 35.**

DAVID in the former verses had begged for light, and now for strength to walk according to this light. We need not only light to know our way, but a heart to walk in it. Direction is necessary because of the blindness of our minds, and the effectual impulsions of grace are necessary because of the weakness of our hearts. It will not answer our duty to have a naked notion of truths, unless we embrace and pursue them. So accordingly we need a double assistance from God; the mind must be enlightened, the will moved and inclined. The work of a Christian lies not in depth of speculation, but in the height of practice. The excellency of divine grace consisteth in this, that God doth first teach what is to be done, and then make us to do what is taught, 'Make me to go in the path,' &c.

Here you have David's prayer, and an argument to enforce it.

1. His prayer, make me to go in the path of thy commandments.



## 2. His argument, for therein do I delight.

The argument is taken from his delight in the ways of God. This argument may be looked upon as the reason of making the request, or the reason of granting the request.

1. As the reason of asking. Those whose hearts are set upon obedience, they will be earnest for grace to perform it acceptably. Now, saith David, I would not be denied this request, for this is all my delight, to do thy will.

2. As the reason of granting. And there he may be supposed to lay forth his necessity and his hope. His necessity; though God had done much for him, yet he needed more still. God had given him scire, knowledge to know his duty; velle, to delight; now he begs perficere, to practise, to bring it to an issue. Though he had grace in some measure, yet he still needed an increase; God must work in us both to will and to do, Phil. 2:12. Sometimes God gives one where he gives not the other: Rom. 7:18, 'To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not.' Or else you may suppose him here to lay forth his hope. The granting of one grace makes way for another; for God will perfect what he hath begun, and where he hath given a disposition to delight in his ways, he will give grace to walk in his precepts: John 1:16, *χάρις ἀντὶ χάριτος*, 'Grace upon grace,' or 'grace after grace;' his giving grace to them is an argument why he will give more grace to them. Two things will be here discussed:—

[1.] The necessity of the efficacious assistance of grace, that we may walk worthy of God in all well-pleasing.

[2.] How acceptable a frame of heart it is when we are once brought to delight in the ways of God.

Doct. 1. For the first, that God from first to last doth make us to go in the path of his commandments.

David was a renewed man, a man that had gotten his heart into a good frame; for he owneth his delight in the paths of God's commandments, yet he begs for new strength and quickening, 'Make me to go;' 'Lead or walk me'—Sept.

First, That at first conversion God maketh us go in the path of his commandments; that is clear by scripture; for it is said, Eph. 2:10, that 'we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.' When we are renewed, we are as it were created over again; there is a power given us that we had not before to do this work. Clearly the apostle doth not speak there of the first creation—the end of our first creation was to serve God—but he speaks of supernatural renovation; for he saith, 'We are created in Christ Jesus.' There was a twofold creation at first: *Ex nihilo* and *ex inhabili materia*; either that which God created out of nothing, or if out of pre-existent matter, yet such as was wholly unfit and indisposed for those things that were to be made of it. Now, this latter suits with us: 'We are created in Christ Jesus to good works;' that is, we were altogether indisposed before to that which is good. We have our natural powers, but they are wholly viciously inclined till the Lord worketh on us, and infuseth a principle of new life. Till then we cannot do anything that is spiritually good. But when the Lord createth us anew, he furnisheth us with an inward power and ability to do good. What David prays for, 'Make me to go in the way of thy commandments,' God promiseth, Ezek. 36:27, 'I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.' God puts his spirit, a new principle of grace. When the gospel is proposed to a man, his will must be determined by something, either by an object or a quality, not by the

proposal merely of the object without; for the scripture shows there must be some work upon the heart, some divine quality infused within to incline and bend us to what is good. Well, then, first there must be an infusion of the principles of grace. In sinning, there the mischief began with an act. Adam sinned, and that infected his nature. But in grace the method is contrary; the principle must be before the action, God first sanctifieth our natures, and then we act holily; and this difference there is between acquired and infused habits: acquired habits follow action, for frequent acts beget a habit, as often swimming makes us expert in swimming, and much writing expert in writing; but gracious habits are infused, and so precede the act, as a wheel runs round, not to make itself round, but because it is round. Indeed there is a further radiation of grace by frequent acts as the means which God blesseth. Now, by this first work of grace we have three advantages:—

1. An inclination and tendency towards what is good. As all natures imply a propensity to those things which agree to such a nature, as sparks fly upward, and a stone moves downward—it is their natural propensity—so in the new nature there is a new bent and tendency of heart, which is to live unto God, Gal. 2:19; there is an inclination towards God and holy things; and therefore the apostle presseth them by virtue of this grace received to act according to the tendency of the new nature: Rom. 6:13, 'Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead;' that is his argument. As soon as the life of grace is infused, the soul bends towards God.

2. A preparation of heart for holy actions. There is a principle that will carry them to it. These 'vessels are fitted and prepared for their master's use,' and are 'prepared unto every good work,' 2 Tim. 2:21; they are fitted and rigged for all holy actions and employments: Eph. 2:10, 'Created unto good works, which God hath prepared that we

should walk in them.' He hath prepared them for us, and us to them. There is a suitableness in the new nature to what God requireth. As every creature is furnished with power and faculties suitable to those operations that belong to them, so when the Lord infuseth the principles of grace, and works upon the heart, we are suited to every good work, so that we need not new faculties, but new operations of grace to excite and move us. A ship that is rigged and fitted with Sails ready for a voyage needs a pilot to guide and steer it; so we need influences of grace. Therefore, when the Spirit is shed upon us afterwards, it is in another manner than upon the unregenerate. The unregenerate are objects of grace, but the renewed are instruments of grace; he works upon the one, but he works by the other.

3. There is a power and an ability to do good works when we are renewed; if otherwise, one of God's most precious gifts would be in vain, if we were altogether without strength. That is the description of carnal nature, Rom. 5:6, 'We were without strength;' therefore there is a power which must be improved, not rested in: Gal. 5:25, 'If ye live in the spirit, walk in the spirit.' There is an operation that accompanieth every life, and if there be a life of grace there will be a walking; and Col. 2:6, 'As ye have received Christ, so walk in him.' Grace received must not lie idle, but be put forth into act. Thus God creates and infuseth such divine qualities as may give us a tendency and preparation of heart, and strength to do that which may be pleasing to him.

Secondly, He vouchsafeth his quickening, actuating, assisting grace, for the improving these' principles infused, that their operations may be carried forth with more success: Ezek. 36:27, 'I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.' God gives not only life, but the constant motion of that life. Natural things do not act without his daily providential influence; and therefore it is said,

Prov. 20:12, God gives 'the hearing ear and the seeing eye;' not only doth give the eye and ear, the faculty, but the act of hearing and the act of seeing; he concurs to that: and therefore God concurs by his actual assistance, sometimes in a more liberal and plentiful manner, by the freer aids and assistances of his grace, and sometimes more sparingly, according to his own pleasure. He doth not only give us the habits of grace, 'He worketh all our works for us,' Isa. 26:12.

Now this actual help is necessary—

1. Partly to direct us: Ps. 73:24, 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.' We need not only a principle within and a rule without, but need also a guide. Though we have grace in our hearts, though we have the law of God to direct us, yet we need also a guide upon all occasions. The rule is the scripture, and the guide is the Spirit of God.

2. Partly to quicken and excite us by effectual motions. The heart of man is very changeable, and it is like the eye, easily discomposed and put out of frame. Deadness creeps upon us, and we drive on heavily in the work of God: Ps. 119:37, 'Quicken thou me in thy way.' God doth renew the vigour of the life of grace upon all occasions.

3. Partly to corroborate and strengthen that which we have received, and make it increase and grow in the soul, and more firmly rooted there, Eph. 3:16. The apostle prays that God would 'strengthen you with might by his Spirit in the inner man.' The inward man, the frame of grace that we have received, needs to be strengthened, increased, and be more deeply rooted in the soul. So 1 Peter 5:10, 'The God of all grace make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.' Many words are used, to show how God is interested in maintaining and keeping afoot the grace he hath planted in the soul.

4. Partly in protecting and defending them against the incursions and assaults of the devil. The regenerate are not only escaped out of his clutches, but appointed to be his judges, which an envious and proud spirit cannot endure; therefore he maligneth, assaulteth, and besiegeth them with temptations daily; therefore Christ prays, John 17:11, 'Keep through thy own name those whom thou hast given me.' When a city is besieged, fresh supplies are sent in; they are not kept to their standing provision: so it is not the ordinary power of God that doth preserve and keep us from danger; there is new relief and fresh strength: 'We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation,' 2 Peter 1:5. Now we experience the help we have from God, partly by the change and frame of our heart, when we are acted by him, and when we are not. When God by the impulsions of his grace doth quicken and awaken our hearts, we are carried on with a great deal of earnestness and strength; but at other times we seem to be much bound, and have not those breathings from the Spirit of God to fill our sails, and carry us on with the same life and strength. Yea, in the same duty how is a Christian up and down! carried out sometimes with a great deal of zeal and warmth; but if God withdraw that assistance before the duty be over, how do the affections flag! So that we are like the wards of a lock, kept up while the key is turned, but fall again when the key is turned the other way. While the work of grace is powerful, we are kept in a warm and heavenly plight. Thus as to duties we need spiritual relief.

Likewise in temptations, when we are ready to fall into such a sin with great proneness of heart, and the Lord quickens and excites us by his grace. It is often with a Christian as with David: Ps. 73:2, 'My feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipt;' even carried away by the violence of Satan, and importunate motions of our own lusts; then the Lord gives 'grace to help in a time of need,' Heb. 4:16.

In the original it is no more but this, Seasonable relief God vouchsafeth.

Object. Ay! but are we to do nothing when we are indisposed?

This case is often traversed in this psalm.

1. The precept of God falls upon us as reasonable creatures, and doth not consider whether we are disposed or indisposed; and God's influence is not our rule, but our help. We are to stir up ourselves; the Lord complains, Isa. 64:7, 'There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of me;' and Timothy is bid to 'stir up the gift of God which is in him,' 2 Tim. 1:6. God's assistance will be best expected in a way of doing; up and be doing, and the Lord will be with thee. When we stir up ourselves, and set ourselves to the work in the conscience of our duty, we can better expect God's help and assistance.

2. In great distempers there may be some pause. Elisha would not prophesy when he was under a passion of anger; therefore he calls for a minstrel to sing a psalm, 2 Kings 3:13–15, and as he played upon an instrument, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. He was under a passion, offended with the king of Israel, therefore he would not prophesy until his spirit was composed. Certainly we are not to run headlong upon duties in the midst of these distempers. Sailing is more safely delayed in time of an extreme storm. When the heart is put into some great disorder, in a great storm of spirit, the distemper should first be mourned for and prayed against.

The reasons why from first to last he must make us go in the way of his commandments.

1. God keeps this power in his own hands, that his grace might be all in all, and it is the glory of his actions always to set the crown upon grace's head. Not only those permanent and fixed habits which constitute the new man, but those daily supplies, without which the motions and operations of the spiritual life would be at a stand, are of grace. When the Lord reckons with his servants about the improvement of their talents, he doth not say, My industry, but, 'Lord, thy pound,' Luke 19:18; he puts all the honour upon grace. So 1 Cor. 16:10, 'Not I, but the grace of God;' so Gal. 2:20, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' So that still they are giving the glory to grace. Acts are more perfect than habits; therefore if we had only the power from God, and acts from ourselves, we should not give all to God. That acts are more perfect than the power is clear; it is more perfect to understand than to have a power to understand; power is in order to the act, and the end is more noble than the means.

2. This is a very great encouragement to us to set upon the exercise of grace in the midst of weaknesses, and several difficulties and temptations wherewith we are encompassed. Because God will enable and assist us, he will not leave us to our standing strength, but he concurs: Phil. 2:12, 13, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.' Why? 'For it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.' When God will concur to the will and to the deed, to both, when we have wind and tide, he is very lazy that will not take his advantage and ply the oar then. And the apostle was not disheartened with the several conditions he was to run through in his passage to heaven: Phil. 4:13, 'I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.' When we have such an able second—'God is at our right hand,' Ps. 16:8—we need not be so dismayed with temptations and difficulties we meet with in the progress of our duty; though we have many lets and hindrances, yet God will cause us to walk in his ways.



3. This keeps us humble and lowly in our own conceit, and that is very necessary for us; for pride is that sin which cleaves to us all our life, and is called 'pride of life,' and lasts as long as life lasts. How doth this keep us humble and lowly? Partly thus: because we have all by gift; 'What hast thou that thou hast not received?' 1 Cor. 4:7. All the strength that we have is but borrowed; and who will be proud that is more in debt than others? We would laugh at a groom that is proud of his master's horse. All grace comes from God. Shall we usurp the honour due to God? And partly because we have but from hand to mouth. Though we have all from God, yet we should soon grow proud if God did not diet us, and give out renewed evidences of his love and care over us by degrees, some now, some then, by fresh influences and acts of grace. Look, as David prays, Ps. 59:11, of his outward enemies, 'Destroy them not, O Lord, lest my people forget: scatter them by thy power, and bring them down.' Oh! if all enemies were destroyed at once, the people would forget thee, the deliverance would be past, antiquated, and out of date, and would not be so freshly thought of, nor produce such warm affections in the hearts of his people. So it is true in the spiritual world, God doth not destroy all at once, but brings down our spiritual enemies, that we may acknowledge whence we have it. And partly because this is a means to make us sensible of the mutability of our nature; for when all depends upon God, his coming and going, it will make us see what poor creatures we are of ourselves. When he comes, we are able to do something; when he goes, what poor creatures are we! 2 Chron. 32:31, 'God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.' When we are renewed yet are not fully recovered, there is a great deal of tang and taste of the old leaven, and if God leave us we shall soon sin; whereas if we were carried on with an even constant tenor of grace that is in our own keeping, we should be proud.

4. It endears the heart to God, and God to the heart, by acts of friendship and familiarity, as it extracts from us acts of prayer and dependence, and as we receive new supplies and daily influences of grace from him. God is more endeared to the soul by his multiplied free gifts. Look, as at every lifting up of the foot there are new influences of life go to that stirring and motion, so all in the spiritual life are his acts of grace. If so much rain fell in one day as would suffice for seven years, there would be no notice taken of God's acts of providence; God would not have such witness to keep up his memory to the sons of men. So here; if we had all graces in our souls, and needed not new excitement, but he dispensed all at once, God and we should grow strangers. When the prodigal has his portion in his own hands, he leaves his father: and therefore there must be continual acts of kindness to maintain a holy friendship between God and us.

Use 1. Look after renewing grace; see whether there be a principle of life in you or no, whether you be his workmanship in Christ Jesus. Better never be his creature if not a new creature; a dog is in a better condition. You can do nothing in the spiritual life until there be a principle; in vain to expect new operation before a new creation be passed upon you. The stream cannot be maintained without the spring.

2. Let us pray for strength upon all occasions, and beg the renewings of God's efficacious grace, that we may avoid sin, and be ready to every good work. Alas! there are many discouragements from without, and sundry baits which tickle the flesh, and would seduce us from our duty. Unless the Lord stand by us, and protect and strengthen us within, deadness will soon creep upon us, and our heart run out of order. Look after new influences of grace; this will make you ready to every good work; not only the remote preparation,

but the furniture of the faculties and abilities: 'Lo I come to do thy will;' and this will make you fruitful, otherwise you will be as dry trees in God's garden; and this will make you lively and constant, not off and on, but fixed with God.

3. If all depends upon God, then let us not by any negligence of ours, or by presumptuous sins, provoke God to withdraw his assisting grace from us. This is the apostle's meaning when he saith, Phil. 2:12, 13, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling,' &c. Oh! take heed; go about the business of religion with holy caution and jealousy over yourselves, and fear the Lord's displeasure, for all depends upon him. Dependence among men begets observance; where men have their meat, drink, clothing, they will be careful to please there. So 'work out your salvation, &c., for it is God that worketh in you,' &c. You have all from God; the business of the spiritual life will be interrupted and be at a stand if God withhold his grace. Every sin weakens that you have already, and provokes God to withhold his hand that he will not give more. That which is the greatest ground of comfort and confidence is always the greatest ground of fear and trembling. It is a ground of great comfort and confidence in the spiritual life that he will help us in every action of ours; and it is a ground also of the greatest fear and trembling, that we should be careful not to offend him upon whom all depends.

The second point:—

Doct. 2. That they which delight in God's commandments will beg his gracious assistance, and are most likely to speed in their requests.

I make it to be both the reason of asking and the reason of granting.

First, The reason of asking.

1. What is this 'delight in God?' What is necessary to it?
2. What are the fruits and effects of it?

First, What is necessary to it?

1. A new nature, for what we do naturally we do with complacency and delight. That which is forced and done against the grain and bent of our hearts can never be delightful, and therefore there needs a principle of grace within: Ps. 112:1, 'Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.' Where there is true grace and the fear of God, there we will delight greatly. So Rom. 7:22, 'I delight in the law of God after the inward man.' Where there is an inner man, a frame of grace in the heart, that will bring delight. See the character of a blessed man: Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord.' Quite contrary to the hypocrite. He may act from compulsions and urgings of conscience, from legal bondage: it may be a sin-offering, but it is not a thank-offering; he cannot do it with that delight and complacency that God hath required. Job. 27:10 it is said, 'Will he always call upon God? will he delight himself in the Almighty?' In his pang, in his distress, when his conscience pincheth him sore, he will be calling upon God. Ay! but hath he any delight in God? He wants sincere grace. Some time he may come with his flocks and herds to seek the Lord: Hosea 5:6, 'And cry, Arise, Lord save us,' Jer. 2:27. Some unwilling services he may perform upon foreign reasons, from constraint, from his affliction and anguish of soul; but these things are never done with delight; there needs then a principle of grace.

2. Peace of conscience, or a sense of our reconciliation with God, is very necessary to this delight in the ways of God: Rom. 5:11, 'We joy in God as those that have received the atonement.' Christ hath made the atonement. Now, when we receive the atonement, that is, are

possessed of it, and look upon ourselves as involved in the reconciliation Christ hath made for us, then we joy in God. The joy of a good conscience is necessary to this delight in the ways of God.

3. A good frame of heart must be kept up, for the joy of a Christian may be impaired by his own folly and prevalency of carnal distempers. There is dulness and a damp that is apt to creep upon us; either by carnal pleasure, or worldly lusts and cares, we may abate of our cheerfulness. Christ tells us, Luke 21:34, that both of them overcharge the heart. Or some presumptuous sin lately committed, when the weight of it lieth upon the conscience, we lose this free spirit: Ps. 51:12, 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit;' our delight is quenched, and we lose that free spirit which otherwise we should have. And therefore we must watch against carnal distempers, and also presumptuous sins, that we may not lose our liberty and our comfortableness in God's service; for when a Christian hath a good frame of heart, he is filled as with gladness, and the joy of the Lord is as oil to the wheels, and it strengthens his affections, and he is carried on with a great deal of cheerfulness.

4. There is needful, too, some experience; for besides the joy of God, there is the inward pleasure of a good conversation. The ways of God are all ways of pleasantness to them that walk in them, Prov. 3:17. They which will make trial will find Christ's yoke easy; yea, they will find a sweetness in God's ways beyond whatever they could think or expect. Some experience of the pleasantness in the paths of wisdom breeds great delight.

Secondly, What are the effects of this delight?

1. A cheerfulness of spirit, a ready obedience: Ps. 40:8, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God.' They find more solid joy in living holily than

in all the pleasure of sin and vanity of the world; therefore they cheerfully practise that which God requireth of them.

2. They are full of joy and gladness in all their approaches to God: Ps. 122:1, 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.' Oh! then they can go to God, and draw off from the distractions of this world, that they may unbosom themselves, that they may be in God's company, either in public or private.

3. They are weaned from earthly pleasures. When they have tasted of this hidden manna, the garlic and onions of Egypt lose their relish; and they find more sweetness, more rejoicing, in the testimony of their consciences, than ever they could find in the world. It is their meat and drink to do the will of God, to be just, holy, temperate, strict, to walk closely with God; here is their pleasure and delight of their souls: John 4:34, 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.'

Now the reasons of this. They which have their hearts set upon holiness must have delight. A man whose heart is set upon earthly things will come and howl for corn, wine, and oil, outward enjoyments, Hosea 7; and a man that makes a loose profession of religion would fain be feasted with comforts, and eased of the smart of his conscience; he loves to hear of the privilege part of Christianity; but they come not to God with a true heart, whatever profession they make, Heb. 10:27. They embrace Christ as Judas kissed him, to betray him, or as Joab embraced Amasa, that he might smite him under the fifth rib; so these are so earnest for pardon of sin, and the privilege part of Christianity, but mind not the higher part, which is sanctification. But now a man that is fallen in love with holiness, and whose heart is sincerely bent to God, desires grace to

incline his heart to God and the ways of God, and keep exactly with him.

Secondly, As this is the reason of asking, so likewise of granting, 'Make me to go in the path of thy commandments, for therein do I delight.' Take four considerations for this:—

1. God will add grace to grace. When God hath given the will, he will give the deed, further grace, to add new influences to his own seed. We tell God of the dispositions that are in our hearts, that he may perfect them, and ripen his own seed: John 1:16, 'Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace;' grace upon grace, or grace after grace. God's giving one grace is an argument why he will give more grace.

2. God looks after affection rather than action. Sometimes he takes the will for the deed, but never the deed for the will. Where there is a will and delight in his ways, that is it which is most acceptable to him. Look, as to love sin is more than to commit it—a man may commit it out of frailty, but he that loves and cherisheth it is exceeding bad—so where there is delight in the ways of God, and the soul is gained to them. This is that God looks after, the affection.

3. Of all our affections delight and complacency is most acceptable. The promise is made to such: Ps. 37:4, 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and he will give thee the desire of thine heart.' It is a slander that the hypocrite brings upon God: Job 34:9, 'He hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God.' There is a great deal of profit, for God looks to the affection, and of all affections to the delight.

4. When this delight is not set upon privileges, but upon grace and obedience, this is more acceptable to God, 'I delight in thy ways.'

When we set upon obedience it is a sign we mind God's interest more than our own comfort; that is our own interest, but subjection to God and holiness, that is for his glory; therefore, when the heart is set upon obedience, then he will give in supplies of grace.

Use. Oh! that we could say that we take joy and pleasure in the way of his commandments: Thou hast given me delight in thy ways, give me strength to keep them. To corrupt nature the ways of God are burdensome, but to his children 'the commandments of God are not grievous;' we shall not then want influences of grace.

## **SERMON XL**

### **Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness—VER. 36.**

IN the former verses David had asked understanding and direction to know the Lord's will; now he asketh an inclination of heart to do the Lord's will,

The understanding needs not only to be enlightened, but the will to be moved and changed.

Man's heart is of its own accord averse from God and holiness, even then when the wit is most refined, and the understanding is stocked and stored with high notions about it; therefore, David doth not only say, 'Give me understanding,' but 'Incline my heart.' We can be worldly of ourselves, but we cannot be holy and heavenly of ourselves; that must be asked of him who is 'the father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift.' They that plead for the power of nature shut out the use of prayer; for if by nature we



could determine ourselves to that which is good, there would be no need of grace; and if there be no need of grace, there is no use of prayer. But Austin hath said well, *Natura vera confessione, non falsa defensione, opus habet*—we need rather to confess our weakness than defend our strength. Thus doth David, and so will every broken-hearted Christian that hath had an experience of the inclinations of his own soul; he will come to God and say, 'Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.'

In which words there is something implied and something expressed. That which is implied is a confession; that which is expressed is a supplication. That which he confesseth is the natural inclination of his heart to worldly things, and by consequence to all evil; for every sin receiveth life and strength from worldly inclinations. That which he begs is, that the full bent and consent of his heart may carry him out to God's testimonies. Or, briefly, here is—

1. The thing asked, incline my heart.
2. The object of this inclination, expressed positively, unto thy testimonies; negatively, and not unto covetousness.

Here is the object to which, and the object from which. To which, 'Incline me to thy testimonies,' and suffer me not to decline to worldly objects, expressed here by the lust which is most conversant about them, 'covetousness.'

Let me explain them more fully. 'Incline my heart;' the word implies —

1. Our natural obstinacy and disobedience to God's law; for if the heart of man were naturally prone, and of its own accord ready to obedience, it were in vain said to God, 'Incline my heart.' Ay! but till

God bend us the other way we lie averse and awkward from his commandments. As God is said here to incline us, so, John 6:44, he is said to draw us. There is a corrupt will which hangs back, and desires anything rather than that which is right. We need to be drawn and bent again like a crooked stick the other way.

2. It implies God's gracious and powerful act upon the soul, whereby the heart is fixed and set to that which is good, when there is a proneness another way; this is the fruit of effectual grace.

Now let us see when the heart is inclined, and how this is brought to pass.

1. When is the heart said to be inclined? I answer—When the habitual bent of our affections is more to holiness than to worldly things; for the power of sin stands in the love of it, and so doth our aptness for grace in the love of it, or in the bent of the will, the strength of desire and affections by which we are carried out after it. *Amor meus est pondus meum, eo feror quocunque feror*—our love is the weight that is upon our souls. Nothing can be done well that is not done sweetly. Then are we inclined, when our affections have a proneness and propension to that which is good. Now these affections must be more to holiness than to worldly things; for by the prevalency is grace determined, if the preponderating part of the soul be for God. It is not an equal poise; we are always standing between two parties. There is God and the world; a sensitive good drawing one way, and there is a spiritual good draws us another way. Now grace prevails when the scales are cast on grace's side. I say it is the habitual bent, not for a pang; the heart must be set to seek the Lord: 1 Chron. 22:19, 'Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God;' and the course of our endeavours, the strength and

stream of our souls runs out this way; then is the heart said to be inclined to God's testimonies.

2. How is it brought to pass? or how doth God thus reduce and frame our hearts to the obedience of his will? There are two ways which God useth—by the word and by his Spirit, by persuasion and by power; they shall be 'taught of God,' and they are 'drawn of God:' John 6:44, 'The Lord will allure Japheth;' so he works by persuasion, Gen. 9:27; and then by power, Ezek. 36:26, 27, 'I will cause you to walk in my ways,' &c. God tempers an irresistible strength and sweetness together, fortiter pro te, Domine, suaviter pro me. He worketh as God, therefore he works strongly and invincibly; but he persuades men as men, therefore he propounds reasons and arguments, goes to work by way of persuasion; strongly according to his own nature, sweetly according to man's, by persuasions accompanied by the secret efficacy of his own grace. First he gives weighty reasons, he casts in weight after weight till the scales be turned; then he makes all effectual by his Spirit. Morally he works, because God will preserve man's nature and the principles thereof; therefore he doth not work by violence, but by a sweet inclination, alluring and speaking comfortably unto us: Hosea 11:4, 'I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.' God knows all the wards of man's heart, and what kind of keys will fit the lock; therefore he suits such arguments as may work upon us, and take us in our month, and then really and prevailingly, so as the effect may follow. Surely God hath more hand in good than Satan hath in evil; otherwise man were as praise worthy for doing good as reprobable for doing evil. God inclines the heart to that which is good, and persuades it by his grace. God knows how to alter the course of our affections by his secret power, therefore doth not only lead, but draw, works intimately upon the heart.

Unto thy testimonies, so the word of God is called, for it testifieth of his will. There we have a clear proof and testimony how God stands affected to every man, what kind of affection God hath to him.

And not to covetousness. Mark the phrase 'incline,' &c. Doth God incline us to covetousness? No; but he permits us to the inclinations of our own hearts, justly denying his grace to those that do offend him, and upon the suspension of his grace nature is left to her own sway: the presence of the master or pilot saves the ship, his absence is the cause of the shipwreck. And so the schools say, God inclines to good efficienter, working it in us; and to evil deficienter, withdrawing his grace from us. A like expression you have Ps. 141:4, 'Incline not my heart to any evil thing.' God may as a lord do what he pleaseth with his own; and as a just judge may give over our hearts to their own natural wicked inclination; therefore David deprecates it as a judicial act.

'Not to covetousness.' This is mentioned because our too much love to worldly things is the special hindrance of obedience; it takes off our hearts from the love and care of it. And then, when he saith 'Not to covetousness,' he herein implies his own esteem and choice, as preferring God's testimonies above all riches; and possibly intimates the sincerity of his aims, that he would not serve God for temporal advantages and worldly respects. Satan accuseth Job for such a perverse respect: Job 1:9, 'Doth Job serve God for nought?' David, to prevent such a surmise, that he was not led by any thought of gain to desire godliness, saith, 'To thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.'

Two points offer themselves from these words:—

1. That it is God alone that sets our hearts right, or inclines them from their carnal bent to his own testimonies.

2. That covetousness, or the flagrant desire of worldly things, is a great let or hindrance from complying with God's testimonies.

Doct. 1. That it is God alone that sets our hearts right, or inclines them from their carnal bent to his own testimonies.

That I shall illustrate by these considerations:—

First, The heart of man must have an object unto which it is inclined or whereunto it doth cleave; for it is like a sponge, that being thirsty in itself, sucks in moisture from other things; it is a chaos of desires, seeking to be filled with something from without. We were made for another, to be happy in the enjoyment of a being without us; therefore man must have something to love; for the affections of the soul cannot lie idle and without an object: Ps. 4:6, 'The many will say, who will show us any good?' We all hunt about for a match for our affections, for some good to satisfy us.

Secondly, The heart being destitute of grace, is wholly carried out to temporal things. Why? Because they are next at hand, and suit best with our fleshly natures. I say, out of a despair of meeting with better, we take up with those objects that we are most conversant about, which are carnal contentments, the good of which we can apprehend and relish with our natural faculties. There are two reasons of the addictedness that is in man's heart to temporal things —(1.) Natural inclination; and (2.) Inveterate custom.

1. Natural inclination. That there is a greater proneness in us to evil than good is clear, not only by scripture but by plain experience. Now whence is it that we are thus viciously disposed? The soul being created by God, he infuseth no evil into it, for that would not stand with the holiness of his nature. I answer—Though the soul be created by God, yet it is created destitute of grace or original righteousness;

and being destitute of the image of God, or original righteousness, can only close with things present and known, having no other light and principle to guide it. Now things known and things present, they are the pleasures of the body, as meats, drinks, natural generation, wealth, and honour. Now, these being wholly minded, avert us from the love and study of supernatural things. It is true these things are good in themselves, and that self-love which carrieth us out to them is naturally good; but though it be naturally good, it proves morally evil when the love of these things destroys the love of God, which must needs be if we be destitute of grace. The love of ourselves and outward things necessarily grows inordinate, not being guided and directed by grace. It is a rule among divines, *Si non inest quod inesse deberet, necessario inerit quod non inesse deberet*—a privation falling upon an active subject (such as the soul of man is) doth necessarily infer disorder and irregularity in its operations. Take away light from the air, it must be dark, and when the sun is down it must be night. So it is if grace be taken away. The great work of grace is to make God our last end and our chiefest good. Now, this last end being changed, all things must needs run into disorder with man. Why? For the last end is principium universalissimum, the most universal principle upon which all moral perfections depend. Look, as Adam and Eve, after they had eaten the forbidden fruit, forfeited the image of God, and were polluted, so we. Why? Did God infuse pollution and filthiness in them? or had the fruit any such poisonous quality? No; their last end was changed, which is the great principle that runs through all our actions; and when our end is changed, then all runs to disorder. They fell from God, whom before they made their chiefest good, and their last end. I say, they fell from God as envious, false, and wishing ill to them; and by the devil's instigation turned to the creature to find happiness in them, against the express will and command of God. As the first man was infected, so are all men wholly perverted, for sin still consists in a conversion from God

to the creature, Jer. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:4. By the change of our end all moral goodness is lost, for all means are subordinate to the last end, and are determined by it. Now necessarily thus it will be without grace; there will be a conversion of a man to the creature and the body, with the conveniences and comforts thereof; the interest and concernments of the body are set up instead of God. For though the soul cometh down from the superior world, yet it soon forgets its divine original, and being put into the body, it conforms itself to the body, and only adheres to objects visible and corporeal. As water, being put into a square vessel, hath a square form, into a round vessel, hath a round form, so the soul, being infused into the body, is led by it, and accommodates all its faculties and operations to the welfare of the body. And thence comes our ignorance, averseness of soul from holiness, unruliness of appetite, and inclination to sensual things. In short, without grace, a man's mind is carried headlong after worldly vanities. As water runs where it finds a passage, so the soul of man, being destitute of the image of God, finds a passage towards temporal things, and so runs out that way.

2. As man is thus corrupted and prone to worldly objects by natural inclination, so by inveterate custom. As soon as we are born we follow our sensual appetite, and the first years of man's life are merely governed by sense; and the pleasures thereof are born and bred up with us, and deeply engraven in our natures; and by constant living in the world, conversing with corporeal objects, the taint increaseth upon us, and so we are more deeply dyed and settled in a worldly frame, and we live in the pursuit of honour, gain, and pleasure, according as the particular temper of our bodies and course of our interest do determine us: Jer. 13:23, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.' Custom is as another nature, and hardly left. We find by experience, the more we are accustomed to

any course of life, the more we delight in it, and are weaned from it with a very great difficulty. Every act disposeth the soul to the habit, and after the habit or custom is produced, then every new deliberate act adds a stiffness of bent or sway unto the faculty into which the custom is seated; and the longer this evil custom is continued the more easily are we carried away with temptations that suit it, and more hardly swayed to the contrary. Now this stiffness of will in a carnal course is that which the scripture calls hardness of heart and a heart of stone, for a man is ensnared by these customs; and of all customs, covetousness or worldliness is the most dangerous. Why? Because this is a sin of more credit and less infamy in the world, and this will multiply its acts in the soul most, and works incessantly: 'Having hearts exercised with covetous practices,' 2 Peter 2:14.

Well, then, these lusts being born and bred up with us from our infancy, they plead prescription. Religion, that comes afterward, and finds us biassed and prepossessed with other inclinations, which by reason of long use is not easily broken and shaken off; as upon trial, whenever we are called upon, or begin to apply ourselves to the ways of life, we shall be easily sensible of this stiffness of heart and obstinacy that bends us another way.

Thirdly, The heart being thus deeply engaged to temporal things, or things base and earthly, it cannot be set upon that which is spiritual and heavenly; for David propounds these things here as inconsistent, 'To thy testimonies Lord, and not to covetousness.' If the heart be addicted to worldly things, it is necessarily averse from God and his testimonies; for the habitual bent of the heart to any one sin is inconsistent with grace or a thorough obedience to God's will. That which the heart is inclined to hath the throne. Now, when we inquire after grace, Have I grace or no? have I the work of God upon my heart? the question is not what there is of God in the heart, but



whether that of God hath the throne. Something of God is in the heart of the wickedest man that is, and something of sin in the best heart that is; therefore which way is the sway, the bent, the habitual and prevailing inclination of the soul? what hath the dominion? 'Sin hath not the dominion, for ye are not under the law, but under grace,' Rom. 6:14. What hath the prevalency of the heart? Though the conscience takes part with God, as it may strongly in a wicked man, yet which way is the bent of our souls? And as all sin in its reign is inconsistent with grace, so much more worldly affections: Mat. 6:24, 'No man can serve two masters,' &c. It is as inconsistent as for a man to look two ways at once. And the Chaldee on this very text, 'Incline my heart to thy testimonies,' reads it, 'and not unto mammon.' You cannot be inclined to God and mammon: 1 John 2:15, 'If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' The world draws men from the love of God and from his service, and labour after temporal things deadens and hindereth us from looking after things which are eternal, and we lose the relish of things to come and things spiritual, the more the love of worldly things doth increase upon us. The schoolmen say of worldliness, it is that which most of all draws us off from God as our last end and chief good, and makes us cleave to the creature; therefore it is called 'adultery' and 'idolatry:' adultery, James 4:4, as it draws away our love, delight, and complacency from God; and idolatry, Col. 3:5, as it diverts our trust, and placeth it in wealth and sublunary things. The glutton or sensualist's love is withdrawn from God, and therefore his belly is said to be his god, Phil. 3:19. Interpretatively that is a man's God which is the last end of his actions, and upon which all his thoughts, affections, and endeavours run most. But now covetousness is not only a spiritual fornication, and adultery which draws off our affections from God, but idolatry. Considering our relation in the covenant, it is spiritual adultery; and above this, it is idolatry, because men think they can never be happy, nor have any

comfortable being, unless they have a great portion of these outward things.

Fourthly, This frame of heart cannot be altered until we be changed by God's grace. Why? For there is no principle remaining in us that can alter this frame, or make us so far unsatisfied with our present state as to look after other things, that can break the force of our natural and customary inclinations. There are three things which lie against the change of the heart towards God.

1. There is nature, which wholly carrieth us to please the flesh, and inordinately to seek the good of the body. Now nature cannot rise higher than itself, and determine itself to things above its sphere and compass; as the philosopher saith of water, it cannot be forced to rise higher than its fountain. Our actions cannot exceed their principle, which is self-love. But besides this—

2. There is custom added to nature, which makes it more stiff and obstinate; so that if it may be supposed that conscience is sensible of our mistake and ill choice, and some weighty considerations should be propounded to us, as it is easy to show that eternal things are far better than temporal, and spiritual things than carnal;—if conscience, I say, should come in, and represent the ill state wherein we are, yet because the poise of our hearts doth customarily carry us another way, we are not inclined to God, or to the concernments of eternal life; for it is not argument merely will do it. In a pair of scales, though the weights be equal, yet if the scales be not equal there may be wrong done; so though the argument be never so powerful, yet if the heart that weighs them be customarily engaged and carried away with the momentary and cursory delights of the flesh, alas! these will sway us, and affect us more than all those pure, everlasting delights we may enjoy by communion with God. In all reason a lesser good

should not be preferred before a greater; and worldly delights, which are not only base and dreggy, but also short and vanishing, and the occasion of much evil to us, these should not be preferred before eternal happiness. But here lies our misery, though the pleasures which affect us be less in themselves, yet our habitual propension and customary inclination to them is greater. Look, as in a pair of balances, though the weight of the one side be less, yet if the scales be not even and equally pendant, if the beam be longer on the side than the other, the lesser weight on the longer side of the beam will overpoise the greater weight on the shorter side; so while the soul is perverted by evil customs, and the heart doth hang more to temporal things than to spiritual and eternal, certainly there must be something from above that must determine us. Man's heart can never be swayed until the Lord joins the assistance of his grace.

3. There is God's curse, or penal hardness. For as nature groweth into custom, so by our sinful customs God is provoked, and doth withdraw those common influences of grace by which our condition might be bettered, and in justice he gives up our hearts to their own sway: Hosea 4:17, 'Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone;' Ps. 81:12, 'So I gave them up unto their own heart's lusts, and they walked in their own counsels.' so that we have not those frequent checks and gripes of conscience, those warnings and good thoughts as before. 'Let him alone;' providence, let him alone; conscience, let him alone; and the sinner is left to his own will. Therefore, out of all the work remaineth to be God's alone, who only hath authority to pardon, and power to cure the distempers of our hearts; he hath authority to take off that judicial hardness which he as a judge may continue upon us, and which the saints deprecate in these forms of speech, 'Incline my heart to thy testimonies,' &c. And so he hath power to take off the natural and customary hardness which is in us, 'For the heart of man is in his hand as the rivers of water,' Prov. 21:1,

and can as easily draw us out to good as water followeth when the trench is cut. But what needeth more arguing in the case? David saith here, 'Lord, incline mine heart; and 1 Kings 8:58, 'The Lord be with us, that he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and keep his commandment.' It is God's work alone to bend the crooked stick the other way. But you will say, this work sometimes is ascribed to man; for instance, ver. 112 of this psalm, 'I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end;' and Josh. 24:23, 'Incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel.'

I answer—These places do only note our subordinate operation, or the voluntary motion and resolution on our part. When God hath bent us and inclined us to do his will, when God hath made our love to act, and poised us to that which is spiritual and good, then we do incline, we bend our hearts this way. So that all these expressions Do not imply a co-ordinate but subordinate operation on man's part.

Fifthly, In this change there is a weakening of the old inclination to carnal vanities, and there is a new bent and frame of heart bestowed upon us. The heart is taken off from the love of base objects, and then fixed upon that which is good: Deut. 30:6, 'The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart,' &c. First, there is a circumcising, a paring away of the fleshliness of the heart; then an unfeigned love to God. So Ezek. 36:26, 27, 'I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.' First the untowardness of the will and affections is removed, and then a heart is given to us, which is tractable and pliable for gracious purposes. First the weeds are plucked up, then we are planted wholly with a right seed. Or first we 'cast off the old man,' then 'put on the new,' Eph. 4:22, 23. The natural inbred

corruption, which daily grows worse and worse, is more and more done away, as we cast off the old rotten garment when we put on the new.

Sixthly, When our hearts are thus changed, they are ever and anon apt to return to the old bent and bias again. For David, a renewed man, he doth thus speak to God, 'O Lord, incline my heart to thy testimonies, and not unto covetousness.' He found his heart bowing and warping back again, and being sensible of the distemper, complains of it to God. The inclination that is in them to evil is not so lost to the best of God's children, but it will return unless God still draw us after him. The spouse saith, Cant. 1:4, 'Draw me, and we will run after thee.' The spouse of Christ, those that were already taken into communion with him, they say, 'Draw me.' This is not a work to be done once and no more, but often to be renewed and repeated in the soul; for there are some relics of our natural averseness from God, and enmity to the yoke of his word, yet left in the heart: Gal. 5:17, 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit.' There are two active principles within us, and they are always warring one upon another. Therefore there is need not only to be inclined at first, and drawn towards God, but we must go to him again and again, and pray to him daily that he would continue the bent of our hearts right, and weaken carnal affections, that we may mind better things.

Use 1. The use is to set you right in point of doctrine as to the necessity of grace, to bring us into a state of doing God's will; because some do grant the necessity of grace in words, but in deed they make it void.

Pelagius at first gave all to nature, acknowledged no necessity of divine grace; but when this proud doctrine found little countenance, he called nature by the name of grace; and when that deceit was

discovered, he acknowledged no other grace but outward instruction, or the benefit of external revelation, that a man might by the word of God know and be put in mind of his duty. Being yet driven further, he acknowledged the grace of pardon, and before a man could do anything acceptably there was a necessity of the remission of sin, and then he might obey God perfectly. But that not sufficing, he acknowledged another grace, the example of Christ, which doth both secure our rule and encourage our practice; and so made the grace of Christ consist, not in the secret efficacy of his Spirit, but only in the example of Christ. But being driven further to acknowledge the same internal grace (I mean, his followers), they made it to consist in some illumination of the understanding, or some moral persuasion, by probable argument to excite the will; and this not absolutely necessary, but only for facilitation, as a horse to a journey, which otherwise a man might go on foot. Ay! but 'the law was impossible through our flesh,' Rom. 8:3. But all this is short of that divine grace that is necessary.

Now, there are others grant the secret influences of God's grace, but make the will of man be to a co-ordinate cause with God; namely, that God doth propound the object, hold forth inducing considerations, give some remote power and assistance; but still there is an indifferency in the will of man to accept and refuse as liketh him best. Besides all this, there is a prevailing efficacy, or a real influence from the Spirit of God on the will, whereby it is moved infallibly and certainly to close with those things which God propounds unto him. God worketh efficaciously and determinately, not leaving it to the liberty of man's will to choose or refuse it, but man is determined, inclined, and actually poised by the grace of God to that which is good.

Use 2. To press you to lay to heart these things.—(1.) Be sensible of the strength and sway of thy affections to temporal objects; there the work begins. And till we have a sight of the disease, we are not careful after a remedy. David, though regenerate, took notice of some worldly tendencies in his heart; and if we observe our hearts, we shall find so. Paul groaned under the relics of the flesh, and so should we under our bondage by sin. (2.) And then bewail it to the Lord, 'I am as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.' Jer. 31:18, to bewail this stiffness of heart, and the treachery of sin, whereby we are enchanted, wholly bent to that which is evil. (3.) And observe the abating of this strength of affection, and weaning of thy soul from such desires; for then the work of grace goes on when we begin to savour other things, and have inclinations of soul towards that which is heavenly and spiritual: 'They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the spirit the things of the spirit.' (4.) And then to press you to perpetual watchfulness over your own hearts, that you do not return to your old bent and bias again; for certainly thus they will do if we do not keep a severe hand over them, and be lifting up our affections to things that are above, where God is, and Christ at the right hand of God.

## **SERMON XLI**

### **And not unto covetousness.—VER. 36.**

Doct. 2. That covetousness, or an inordinate desire of worldly things, is the great let or hindrance to complying with God's testimonies.

By way of proof, I need to produce but that scripture, 1 John 5:3, 4, 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous; for whatsoever is born of God

overcometh the world.' The reason implies that if we had a greater conquest over worldly affections, it would not be so grievous to us to keep God's commandments; for the apostle's argument is built upon this supposition, that God's commands are only burdensome to them that lie under the power of carnal affections. All the difficulty in obedience cometh from our temptations to the contrary. Now all or most temptations from Satan and our own flesh have their strength from the world, and its suitableness to our affections. Master your love to the world, and temptations lose their strength.

To make this more clear, let us see—

1. What is covetousness.
2. How it hindereth from complying with God's testimonies.

First, What is covetousness? I shall give the nature, the causes, the discoveries of it.

First, the nature of it. It is an inordinate desire of having more wealth than the Lord alloweth in the fair course of his providence, and a delight in worldly things as our chiefest good.

1. There is an unsatisfied desire of having more. We may desire temporal good things for necessity and service. We carry about earthly tabernacles, that must be supported with earthly things, and therefore God alloweth us to seek them in a moderate way. But now when these desires grow vehement and impatient of check, and by an immodest importunity are still craving for more, it is an evil disease, and it must be looked unto in time, or it will prove baneful to the soul. There is a vital heat necessary to our preservation, and there are unnatural predatorious heats which argue a distemper. See how this desire is expressed in scripture: 1 Tim. 6:9, 10, 'He that will be rich



falls into temptation and a snare,' &c. He doth not say, He that is rich, but, He that will be rich; he that hath fixed that as his scope, and makes that his business; for the will is known by fixedness of intention, and earnestness of prosecution: he that makes it his work to grow great in the world. So Prov. 15:27, 'He that is greedy of gain troubles his own house.' Desires are the vigorous motions of the will; when they are eager, impatient, and immoderate, then they discover this evil inclination of soul. So Eccles. 5:10, 'He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase. This is also vanity.' There is a spiritual dropsy, when our desires grow the more the more we receive and enjoy; as fire by the addition of new fuel grows more fierce the more the flame increaseth. The contrary to this is expressed by Agur, and should be the temper of every gracious heart: Prov. 30:8, 'Give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with food convenient for me.' As to worldly things we should be indifferent, and refer ourselves to the fair allowance of God's providence, that he might carve out our portion, and do by us according to his own pleasure.

2. Not only this greedy thirst discovereth covetousness, but a complacency, delight, and acquiescency of soul in worldly enjoyments. So Christ Jesus in his parable against covetousness brings in a carnal wretch singing lullabys to his soul: Luke 12:19, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' He doth not wish for more, but pleaseth himself with what he had already, and yet in his language would Christ impersonate and set forth the dispositions of a covetous heart. So we are cautioned, Ps. 62:10, 'If riches increase, set not your hearts upon them.' When we set up our rest here, and look no further, we are guilty of this sin.

But now, because we may delight in our portion, and take comfort in what God hath given us; let us see when our delight in temporal things is a branch of covetousness. I answer—When we delight in them to the neglect of God, and the lessening of our joy in his service, and our hopes of eternal life are abated and grow less lively; when we so delight in them as to neglect God and the sweet intercourse we should have in him. Therefore covetousness is called idolatry, Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5, as it robs God of our trust, while we build upon uncertain riches as a stable happiness, and the best assurance of our felicity: Mark 10:23, 24, 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!' And when the disciples wondered, our Saviour answered, 'How hard is it for them that trust in riches!' &c.; that is, that set their confidence in them in that degree and measure as is only due to God. Then it is called adultery, James 4:4, because out of love to worldly things we can dispense with our love to God and delight in him, as the harlot draws away the affection from the lawful wife. In short, when we seek them and prize them, with the neglect of better, as spiritual and heavenly things are, Luke 12:21; Mat. 6:19–21, 33. Next to the love of God we must love ourselves, and there first our souls. Now we are besotted and enchanted with the love of the world, so as to slight the favour of God and the hopes of blessedness to come, this is adultery spiritual, and sets up another chief good.

Secondly, Let us come to the causes of it, and they are two—distrust of God's providence, and discontent with God's allowance. You have both in one place: Heb. 13:5, 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have.' These two, distrust and discontent, have a mutual influence upon one another. Distrust breeds discontent with our present portion, and discontent breeds ravenous desires, and ravenous desires breed distrust; for when we set God a task to provide for our lusts, certainly

he will never do it. I say, we can never depend upon him that he should provide for our lusts.

1. For the first of these, that is, distrust, or a fear of want, together with a low esteem of God's providence, which maketh us so unreasonably solicitous about outward provisions; therefore when Christ would cure our covetousness he seeks to cure our distrust: Luke 12:29, 'And seek ye not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.' do not hover like meteors in the air, antedating your cares, making yourselves more miserable by your own suspicions, and your own fears what shall become of you and yours. So Mat. 6:34, 'Take no thought for to-morrow; sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' I say, this carking about future things makes us so impatient and earnest after present satisfaction. God trained up his people to a waiting upon his providence. Manna fell from heaven every day, so 'sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' Every day we need look no further: 'Give us this day our daily bread.' But men fear future need and poverty, and so would help themselves by their own carking. So then diffidence of God's promises is the latent evil which lodgeth in the heart. Sordid sparing and greedy getting, that is on the top; but that which lies near the heart is distrust. We incline to sensible things, and cannot tell how to be well without them, and so resolve to shift for ourselves.

2. Discontent. Men have not so much as their rapacious desires crave, though they are allowed moderate supplies to keep them till they go to heaven; and therefore everything that they get serves but as a bait to draw them on further, so they are always 'joining house to house, and laying field to field,' Isa. 5:8. When once men transgress the bounds of contentment prescribed by God, there is no stop or stay. Look, as the channel wears wider and deeper the more water falls into it, the water frets more and more; so the more outward

things increase upon us, the more are our desires increased upon us. No man hath vast and unlimited thoughts at first. Men would be a little higher in the world, and a little better accommodated, and when they have that they must have a little more, then a little more; so they seize upon all things within their grasp and reach. Whereas if we had been content with our estate at first, we might have saved many a troublesome care, many a sin, many needless desires, and many a foolish and hurtful lust that proves our bane and torment. Be content with such things as you have now, or you will not be content hereafter; the lust will increase with the possession. As in some diseases of the stomach, purging doth better than repletion, not to feed the humour but to purge away the distemper; so here, it is not more that will satisfy us, but our lusts must be abated; if we were better satisfied with God's fair allowance we might be happy men much sooner than ever we shall be by great wealth.

Thirdly, For the discoveries of this sin. Aristotle, as it is a moral vice, placeth it in two things—in a defect in giving, and an excess in taking. We may better express both in scripture phrase, by greedy getting, and unmeet withholding.

1. Greedy getting, manifested either—

[1.] By sinful means of acquisition; as lying, cozening, oppression, profaning the Lord's day, grinding the faces of the poor, carnal compliances, or any other such unjust or evil arts of gain. Men stick not at the means when their desires are so strongly carried out after the end: Prov. 28:20, 'He that maketh haste to be rich cannot be innocent.' They leap over hedge and ditch, and all restraints of honesty and conscience, to compass their ends, all their endeavours are suited to their profit, and therefore consult not with conscience but with interest; and so prove treacherous to God, unthankful to

parents, disobedient to magistrates, unfaithful to equals, unmerciful to inferiors, and care not whom they wrong, so they may thrive in the world.

[2.] Though it go not so high as injustice, yet it appeareth by excessive labours, when endeavours are unreasonably multiplied, to the wrong both of the body and the soul. To the wrong of the body; see how they are described in scripture: Ps. 127:2, 'They rise early, they sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows;' and Ps. 39:6, 'He disquieteth himself in vain.' By biting cares: Eccles. 2:23, 'All his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night;' Eccles. 4:8, 'There is no end of his labours, neither is his eye satisfied with riches.' Men are full of biting cares, cruciating unquiet thoughts, and so 'pierce themselves through with many sorrows,' 1 Tim. 6:10. Riches are compared to thorns, not only for choking the good seed, but as piercing us through with many sorrows, as they prove troublesome comforts to a covetous man. And they wrong the soul when the heart is dead and oppressed by them: Luke 21:34, 'Take heed lest your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life.' The heart is burdened and oppressed, so as it hath no life and vigour for spiritual things, but is unbelieving and hard-hearted. The following the world brings a deadness upon us, and these preposterous and eager pursuits spend the strength of our affections, so that God and religion is jostled out and hath no due respect; the lean kine devour the fat, and Sarah is thrust out of doors instead of Hagar. Thus is greedy getting seen by unjust means, and the immoderate use of lawful means to the oppression of the body and soul.

2. The other discovery is an unworthy detention: Prov. 11:24, 'There is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.' This covetousness in keeping is seen partly—

[1.] By a sordid dispensing of our estate, or a denying of ourselves and others that relief which they should have. Ourselves: Eccles. 4:8, 'He bereaveth his own soul of good;' that is, of the comforts of the present life. But chiefly denying of others that relief they should have, a duty which our religion often presseth us to: Luke 12:33, 'Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, nor moth corrupteth.' We should rather scatter than hoard. The only means to discover we are not covetous, and to keep ourselves from the filth of this and other sins, is to be much in charity and distributing to those that have need: Luke 11:41, 'Give alms of such things as you have, and behold all things are clean unto you.' It bringeth a blessing, purgeth the soul from that stain which it secretly contracteth by possessing worldly things, as our fingers are defiled by telling of money. But now, when men are backward this way, part with a drop of blood as soon as anything for God's use, when they shut up their bowels against the miseries of others, then is there this unmeet withholding.

[2.] By our loathness to part with these things for the testimony of a good conscience. When we are put to trial, as Joseph was, to lose our coat that we may keep our consciences, I mean, to part with these outward things, or to defile ourselves by compliance with men; when we are put to this trial, those that will withhold and can dispense with the conscience of their duty to God, they are guilty of this sin: 2 Tim. 4:10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world.' Oh! it is a mighty insinuating thing that gets into the hearts of those that profess religion many times, so that they cannot deny any small conveniences for God. But the contrary is in those saints that 'take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they have in heaven a better and an enduring substance,' Heb. 10:34.

[3]. It appears again when we are loath to part with them in a way of submission to God's providence. Grief at worldly losses shows that these things have gained too much of our love. If we did 'rejoice in them' when we have them 'as if we rejoiced not,' then we would 'weep' for the loss of them 'as though we wept not,' 1 Cor. 7:31. They are both coupled together, for one makes way for the other. So we find the other couple: 2 Peter 1:6, 'Add to temperance patience.' Where there is temperance and moderation in the use of worldly things, there will be patience, a submission to God in the loss of them. He lost them without grief, because he possessed them without love. The greatness of our affliction comes from our affection to these things. Did we sit more loose from our earthly comforts, it would not be so irksome to part with them. Grief is always a sign of affection: John 11:34, and 'Jesus wept;' and then they said, 'Behold how he loved him!' When we are, surprised with so great sorrow and trouble at the parting of outward things, it may be said, 'Behold how we loved them.' Our hearts are not at so great an indifferency as they should be. The root of all trouble of spirit lieth in our inordinate affection. Get off that, and then what comfortable lives might we live!

Secondly, I am to show how it hindereth us from complying with God's testimonies. I shall do it by these arguments.

1. It disposeth and inclineth the soul to all evil, to break every command and law of God: 1 Tim. 6:10, 'The love of money is the root of all evil.' Let that once get into the heart and reign there, and then a man will stick at no sin, he becomes, as Chrysostom speaks, a ready prey to the devil; such a man doth but stand watching for a temptation, that Satan may draw him to one sin or other: Micah 2:2, 'They covet fields, and take them by violence.' First they covet; suffer that to possess the heart, and a man will stop at nothing, but break out into all that is unseemly. Let Judas be but inured to the bag, and

enchant his thoughts with this pleasing supposition that he may make a gain of his master, and he will soon come to a quid dabit: What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? he will soon betray him. Gehazi, let him but affect a reward, and he will dishonour God, and lay a stumbling-block in the way of that noble Syrian, that new convert: 'Is this a time to take bribes?' &c. Let Achan's heart be but tickled and pleased a little with the sight, and he will be purloining the wedge of gold and the Babylonish garment. Tell Balaam but of gold and silver, and he will curse Israel against his conscience, he will venture, though there be an angel in the way to stop him. Let Ahab but have a mind to Naboth's vineyard, and he will soon consent to Naboth's blood. Ananias and Sapphira, let them but look upon what they part withal, let but covetousness prevail upon their hearts, and they will keep back part of that which is dedicated to God. Simon Magus will deny religion, and return to his old sorceries again, that he may be some great one. So that there is no sin, be it never so foul, but covetousness will make it plausible, and reconcile it to the consciences of men.

2. As it doth dispose and incline the soul to evil, so it incapacitates us for God's service, both in our general and particular calling.

In our general calling, it makes us incapable of serving God. Why? It destroys the principle of obedience, is contrary to the matter of obedience, and it slights the rewards of obedience.

[1.] It destroys the principle of obedience, which is the love of God. This is that which constrains us, which carrieth us out with life and sweetness in God's service. Now, 1 John 2:5, 'If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' It destroys the principle that should act us in obedience.



[2.] It is contrary to the matter of obedience, which are the commands of God. The commands of God and mammon are contrary, Mat. 6:24. What are his commands? God saith, Pity the afflicted, relieve the miserable, venture all for a good conscience, seek heaven in the first place, seek it with your choicest affection, your earnest diligence. What saith mammon? Be sparing of your substance, follow the world as hard as you can, stick at nothing, lie, steal, swear, forswear, comply with the lusts of men, then you shall be rich. Well, now you see he that is ruled by mammon, or swayed by the inordinate love of worldly good, can never serve God; he is enslaved to another master; he loves wealth above all, he trusts it more than God's providence, he serves it more than God himself. Though his tongue dares not say that the earth is better than heaven, that the things of this life are better than the favour of God, yet his life saith it; for more of his heart and care runs out upon these matters. In short, it unfits you not only for one duty, but for all duties required of us. God's laws you know require respect to God, your neighbour, and to yourselves. Now he that is a slave to mammon, overcome by the love of worldly things, denies that which is due to God, his trust, his love, his choice affection. He denies what is necessary for his neighbour, and he denies what is comfortable for himself. He is unthankful to God, unmerciful to his neighbour, and cruel to himself.

[3.] It slightes the encouragements of obedience, which are the rewards of God, as it weakens our future hopes, and depresseth the heart from looking after spiritual and heavenly things. They despise their birthright for a mess of pottage; and when they are invited to the wedding, the choice things God hath provided for us in the gospel, they prefer their farm, oxen, merchandise before it. As it unfits us for the duty of our general, so for our particular callings and relations.' The love of the world will make him altogether unfit for

magistracy, ministry, the master of a family, or any such relation. In magistracy, who are the men that are qualified for that office? Exod. 18:21, 'Such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness.' Let covetousness possess the heart a little, and it will make a man act unworthily, timorously, with a base heart. Nay, for a piece of bread will that man transgress. Take a minister, and what a poor meal-mouthed minister will he make if his heart be carried out with love to worldly things? Therefore it is the qualification of his person: 1 Tim. 3:3, 'Not greedy of filthy lucre.' Let a minister be greedy of gain, it makes him sordid, low-spirited, flattering and daubing, to curry favour with men, more intent upon his gain and profit than the saving of souls. So for his work: 1 Peter 5:2, 'Feed the flock of God which is among you; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.' What a low flat ministry will that be, that is inspired with no other aim and impulsion but the sense of his own profit! If that be his great inducement to undertake that calling, and his great encouragement in discharging the duty of that calling, how will men strain themselves to please men, especially great ones, and writhe themselves into all postures and shapes that they may soothe the humours and lusts of others! He will curse where God hath blessed, if he be such as Balaam, who 'loved the wages of unrighteousness.' It is a powerful imperious lust, saith God, 'Will you pollute me for handfuls of barley and pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live?' Then you shall have them declaiming against the good, hardening the evil, complying with the fashions of the world. So in other callings. If a man be called to be a master of a family: Prov. 15:27, 'He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house.' What a trouble and burden will this man be to his servants and all about him! and how little will he glorify God in that relation! Nay, in all other stations this will make him an oppressing landlord, a false tradesman, an ill neighbour; and therefore it is the very pest and bane of human

societies. Thus you see how it unfits us for the service of God, both in our general and particular calling.

3. It hinders the receiving of good, and those means of reformation that should make us better. It fills us with prejudice against whatever shall be spoken for God and for the concernments of another world: Luke 16:14, 'And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things, and derided him.' Come with any strict and holy doctrine that shall carry out men to the interest of another life, and they will make a scoff at it. If the word stir us a little, and make us anxious and thoughtful about our eternal condition, the thorns, which are the cares of this world, choke the good seed, Mat. 13; it stifles our conviction, while it distracts our head with cares, and puts us out of all thought about things to come. If a man begins to do some outward thing, it makes him soon weary of religion and attendance upon the duties thereof: Amos 8:5, 'When will the Sabbath be gone, that we may set forth wheat?' They think all lost that is bestowed upon God. As Seneca said of the Jews, they were a foolish people, they lost the full seventh of their lives because of the Sabbath; so they think all Sabbath time lost. Nay, it distracts in duty: Ezek. 33:31, 'With their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.' It interlines our prayers, and the world will still be creeping; and when we are offering incense to God, we shall be mingling sulphur and brimstone of worldly thoughts with it; our minds will be taken up with worldly projects; and then it perverts the good we do, as they followed Christ for the loaves, John 6. It turneth religion into venale artificium, a trade to live by. If they do good things, it is for worldly ends; they make a market of their devotion, as the Shechemites would be circumcised, for then their substance and their cattle will be ours.

Use 1. It informs us of the evil of covetousness. Most will stroke it with a gentle censure, and say, Such an one is a good man, but a little worldly, as if it were no great matter to be so. Nay, they are apt to applaud those that are tainted with it: Ps. 10:3, 'He blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth.' He that getteth honour and riches by hook and crook is the only prudent and serious man in their account. It is a foul sin, though the men of the world will not believe it. Surely we have too mild thoughts of it, therefore do not watch and strive against it. The sensualist shames himself before others; but covetousness is worse than prodigality in many respects, as being not occasioned by the distemper of the body, as excess of drinking and lust is, but by the depravation of the mind; and when other sins decay, this grows with them; it is an incurable dropsy, Luke 12:15. The words are doubled for the more vehemency. Christ doth not only say, 'Take heed,' but 'Take heed and beware of covetousness.' Sins that are more gross and sensual are more easily discovered, and a sinner sooner reclaimed; but this is a secret sin, that turns away the heart from God, and is incessantly working in the soul. Look, as the scripture tells you, to make you careful against rash anger, that it is murder, 1 John 3:15; so to make you careful to avoid covetousness, the scripture tells you it is idolatry; and is that a small crime? What, to set up another God? Who are you that dare to harbour so great an evil in your bosom, and make no great matter of it? Will you dethrone that God which made you, and set up another in his stead? How can you hope he will be good to you any longer when you offer him so vile an abuse? It is adultery; it is a breach of your conjugal vow. You promised to renounce the world in your baptism, and gave up yourselves to his service, and will you cherish your whorish and disloyal affections that will carry you to the world in God's stead? We cannot think badly enough of such a sin.

Use 2. If covetousness be the great let and hindrance from keeping God's testimonies, then let us examine ourselves, Are we guilty of it? Doting upon the creature, and an inordinate affection to sensible things, is a natural, a hereditary disease, more general than we are aware of: Jer. 6:13, 'From the least to the greatest every one is given to covetousness.' It is a relic of original sin, and it is in part in the godly man, though it do not bear sway in him; there is too much of this worldly wretched inclination in a godly man's heart. Nay, those that seem most remote from it may be tainted with it. A prodigal, that is lavish enough upon his lusts, yet he may be sparing to good uses: so he is covetous; as the rich man that fared deliciously every day yet denied a crum to Lazarus, Luke 16:19–21. Those that aim at no great matter for themselves, that have not ravenous impatient desires, yet may be full of envy at the increase of others, and vexed to see them flourish; it may be they have no ability or opportunity to do anything for themselves, but have an evil eye at the increase of others. Most men are more industrious for the world, whereas they are overly and slight in heavenly matters; and that is evidence enough. Some are not greedy, but they are too sparing. They seek not, it may be, a higher estate, but they are too much delighted with present comforts. The gallant that pampers himself, and wastes freely upon his pride and lusts, may laugh in his sleeve, and say, I am free from this evil; yet his heart desires wherewith to feed his excess and bravery and pride. Covetousness may be entertained as a servant where it is not entertained as a master; entertained as a servant to provide oil and fuel to make other sins burn. Therefore let us see indeed whether we be not guilty of this sin?

1. It may be discovered by frequent thoughts, which are the genuine issue of the soul, and discover the temper of the mind; thoughts either by way of contemplation or contrivance. By way of contemplation, when our minds only run upon earthly things, and

that with a savour and sweetness: Phil. 3:19, 'Minding earthly things.' What a man doth muse upon, most think of when he is alone, and speak of in company, that will show him the temper of his heart. When men think of the world, and speak of the world, their heart is where their treasure is, Mat. 6:21. Nay, when they cannot disengage themselves from these thoughts in God's worship; their hearts go away in covetousness, Ezek. 33:31. Or else thoughts by way of contrivance: Isa. 32:7, 8, 'The liberal man deviseth liberal things, and the wicked man deviseth wicked devices.' The deliberations and debates of the soul discover the temper of it. A carnal heart is altogether exercised in carnal projects, as the rich fool discoursed and dialogised with himself. When men are framing endless projects, carking and caring, not how to grow good and gracious, but great and high in the world, they discover the spirit of the world.

2. And as by thoughts, so by burning and urgent desires; they are the pulses of the soul. As physicians judge by appetite, so may you by desires. A spiritual dropsy or an unsatisfied thirst argues a distempered soul, when, like the horseleech's daughter, you still cry, Give, give, and you are never contented, but must have more.

3. By the course of your lives and actions, and the uniformity of your endeavours. How shall we know who is the covetous man whom the Lord abhors? Luke 12:21, 'So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God,'—a man that is always growing in estate, and never looks to his soul, and to be rich in grace, spiritual experiences, and rich in good works, which is chiefly meant there by being rich towards God, a man that seeks not the kingdom of God in the first place, for that which you love best you will seek for, you will be most careful and diligent to obtain. Well, then, when you mind heavenly things by the by, and are very slight in seeking and inquiring after God, furnishing your souls with grace, and getting

assured hopes of heaven, and do not spy out advantages for the inward man, this evil disposition of the soul hath mightily invaded you, and then you can never do God any service.

Use 3. To press you to take heed of this great sin; and if you would mortify it, mortify the roots of it, which are distrust and discontent.

1. Distrust of God's providence. You that think you cannot do well unless you have a greater portion of worldly things, and that sets you upon carking, and if you have not this you cannot see how you and yours can be provided for; cure this. How? By God's promises: 1 Peter 5:7, 'Cast all your care upon him, for he careth for you.' Cannot you trust God upon the security of a promise? Cannot you go on in well-doing when the Lord hath said, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee'? Cure it by observing the usual course of God's providence. God provides for the young ravens, he clothes the lilies. It is Christ's argument, Will he be more kind to a raven than a child? will he take more care of a flower than of a son, one that is in covenant with him? Cure it by holy maxims and considerations. Remember all dependeth upon God's blessing: Luke 12:15, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness.' How should we do so? 'For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.' Alas! all is in God's hand, both being and well-being, life and estate, and all things else. God can soon blast abundance, and can relieve us in the deepest wants; he can give you a sufficiency in your deep poverty, 2 Cor. 8:2. If you should go on carking and caring and feathering your nests, God may take you off, or set your nests on fire. A little serves the turn to bring us to heaven; and when our desires are moderate, God will not fail: Prov. 16:8, 'Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right.'

2. For discontent with your portion, that you may not always be craving more, meditate upon the baseness and vanity of worldly things. They do but deceive us with a vain show; they cannot give us any true joy of heart, or peace of conscience, or security against future evil; they cannot give you health of body, nor add one cubit to your stature, nor one day to your lives. Now, should we disquiet ourselves for a vain show? Shall there be such toil in getting, such fear of losing, when they are of no more use to us in the hour of death? When you need strength and comfort most, all these things will leave you shiftless, helpless, if they continue with you so long. Nay, reason thus: the more estate the more danger, the greater charge lieth upon you. Larger gates do but open to larger cares. There is more duty, more danger, more snares, more temptations. When you have more, you will be more difficultly saved. It is a truth pronounced by the Lord of truth, that it is 'a hard matter for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.' It will be more hard to keep the flesh in order, to guide our spirits aright in the ways of God. If you must needs be coveting, labouring, and carking, you are called to better things: John 6:27, 'Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life;' 'Covet the best gifts,' 1 Cor. 12:31. Be as passionate for grace as others are for the world. If once you were acquainted with these better things, it would be so with you; you would never leave the fair and fresh pastures of grace for the barren heath of the world. If you did once taste the sweet of heavenly things, then let dogs scramble for bones and scraps; you have hidden manna to feed upon, the sense of God's love to look after, hopes of everlasting glory wherewith to solace your souls. If once you did taste of these everlasting riches you would do so: 1 Tim. 6:10, 11, there are many that 'through the love of money have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.'



Let the men of the world, whose portion and happiness lieth here, scramble for these things; but you, that profess yourselves children of God, follow after all the gifts and graces of the Spirit; let that be your holy covetousness, to increase in these things.

## **SERMON XLII**

**Turn thou away mine eyes from  
beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in  
thy way.—VER. 37.**

DAVID still continueth his requests to God for grace, and entitleth him to the whole work. He had prayed before that God would incline his heart, now that he would 'Turn away his eyes from beholding worldly vanities.' In this prayer there are two branches—the one concerneth mortification, the other vivification.

First, Turn away, then quicken, &c. The first request is for the removing the impediments to obedience, the other for addition of new degrees of grace. These two are fitly joined, for they have a natural influence upon one another; unless we turn way our eyes from vanity, we shall soon contract a deadness of heart. Nothing causeth it so much as an inordinate liberty in carnal vanities. When our affections are alive to other things, they are dead to God; therefore the less we let loose our hearts to these things the more lively and cheerful in the work of obedience. On the other side, the more the vigour of grace is renewed, and the habits of it quickened into actual exercise, the more is sin mortified and subdued. Sin dieth, and our senses are restored to their proper use. These two requests are fitly joined. Let us consider them asunder.

1. 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.' There observe—(1.) The object, vanity; (2.) The faculty, mine eyes; (3.) The act of grace desired, the removing of this faculty from this object.

[1.] The object, 'vanity.' Thereby is meant carnal and worldly things, worldly pleasures, worldly honour, worldly profits; all these are

called vanity, because they have no solid happiness in them, and do so easily fade and perish. Thus it is said, Prov. 31:30, 'Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain.' The same is true of any other transporting objects: 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,' Eccles. 1:2; and Job 15:31, 'Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity, for vanity shall be his recompense;' Rom. 8:20, 'The creature is made vanity.' By vanity there is understood the vain things of the world, which do so often deceive us as to the happiness they promise.

[2.] The faculty is mentioned, the eye. It is employed and commanded by the heart. But this enkindleth new flames there; and as it is set awork by it, so it sets the heart awork again. It is the instrument of increasing sin in us.

[3.] The act, 'turn away.' Our evil delight is too apt to fix it, and become a snare to us, till God cure both heart and sense by grace. He prayeth not from beholding it altogether, but from beholding as a snare.

Doct. It concerneth those that would walk with God to have their eyes turned away from worldly things. I shall give you the meaning in these propositions.

1. He that would be quickened, carried out with life and vigour in the ways of God, must first be mortified, die unto sin. The apostle there speaks of the fruit of Christ's death, being dead unto sin before he can live to God, 1 Peter 2:24. David first maketh it his request, 'Turn away mine eyes,' then 'Quicken.' Many would fain live with Christ, but first they must learn to die unto sin. It is impossible for sin and grace to live in the same subject.

2. One great means of mortification is guarding the senses, eyes, and ears, and taste, and touch, that they may not betray the heart. I put it

so general, because the man of God that is so solicitous about his eyes would not be careless of his ears and other senses. We must watch on all sides. When an assault is made on all sides, if one gate be open, it is as good as all were. The senses are the cinque ports by which sin is let out and taken in. The ingress and egress of sin is by the senses, and much of our danger lieth there; partly because there are so many objects that suit with our distempers, that do by them insinuate themselves into the soul, and therefore things long since seemingly dead will soon revive again, and recover life and strength. There are no means to keep the heart unless we keep the eye. And partly because in every creature Satan hath laid a snare for us, to steal away our hearts and affections from God. Partly because the senses are so ready to receive these objects from without to wound the heart, for they are as the heart is. If the heart be poisoned with sin, and become a servant to it, so are the senses of our bodies 'weapons of unrighteousness,' Rom. 6:13. Objects have an impression upon them answerable to the temper and the affections of the soul, and what it desireth they pitch upon; and therefore if we let the senses wander, the heart will take fire presently; and if we do not stop evil at the beginning, but let it alone to take head, we cannot stop it when we would, nor repress the motions of it from flying abroad.

### 3. Above all senses the eye must be guarded.

[1.] Because it is the noblest sense, given us for high uses. There is not only a natural use to inform us of things profitable and hurtful for the outward man, but a spiritual use to set before us those objects that may stir us and raise our minds to heavenly thoughts and meditations. For by beholding the perfection of the creatures we may admire the more eminent perfection of him that made them: Ps. 19:1, 'The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth

his handiwork;' and Ps. 8:3, 'When I considered thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained.' David, when he walked abroad in a moon-shining night, admired the glory of the moon and stars; the moon and stars are mentioned because it was a night meditation; his heart was set a work by his eyes: Rom. 1:20, 21, 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead,' &c. The perfections of the creatures are to draw us to God, and their imperfections and defects to drive us from themselves. The eye, as it is used, will either be a help or a snare; either it will let in the sparks of temptation, or enkindle the fire of true devotion. These are the windows which God hath placed in the top of the building, that man from thence may contemplate God's works, and take a prospect of heaven, the place of our eternal residence. *Os homini sublime dedit*—God made man with an erect countenance, not grovelling on the earth, but looking up to heaven, and viewing the glorious mansions above.

[2.] Because they have a great influence upon the heart either as to good or evil, but chiefly to evil. In this corrupt state of man, *ἐκ τοῦ ὁρεῖν γίνεταὶ τὸ ὁρᾶν*—by looking we come to liking, and are brought inordinately to affect what we do behold: Num. 15:39, 'That ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring;' Job 31:7, 'If my step hath turned out of the way, and my heart walked after mine eyes.' These are the spies of the heart—brokers to bring it and the temptation together; the eye seeth, and then by gazing the heart lusteth, and the body acteth the transgression. It is more dangerous to see evil than to hear it; the impression is greater; the relation of anything doth not affect us so much as the sight of it. Those that hear of the fury of wars, firing of houses, ravishing of virgins, killing and wounding of men, and the

like, cannot have so deep a sense of those things as they that see it. The sight of heaven works more than the report of it; as Paul, when he had a sight of these things, was in an ecstasy: the look doth immediately work on the heart. Well, then, it is dangerous to fix the eye on enticing objects, for it exciteth more than hearsay.

[3.] The eye must be looked to, because it hath been the window by which Satan hath crept in, and all manner of poison conveyed to the soul. I shall prove it—(1.) Doctrinally; (2.) Historically.

(1.) I shall give you doctrinal assertions. The eye hath been the inlet of all sin; as uncleanness: 2 Peter 2:14, 'Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin, beguiling unstable souls,' &c. In the original, it is 'eyes full of the adulteress;' and the eye enkindles impure flames in the heart: Prov. 6:25, 'Lust not after her beauty in thy heart, neither let her take thee with her eyelids.' Gazing on the beauty of women enkindleth foul flames within the breast, and we feel strange transports of soul when we give way to it. The evil heart is in its element when it is thus. Then covetousness gets into the heart by the eye: 1 John 2:15, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' And therefore the apostle, when he maketh a division of sin, he saith, 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world;' because the mind is so secretly enchanted with the love of those things it beholds, and are represented to it by the external senses. And Eccles. 4:8, 'There is no end of all his labour, neither is his eye satisfied with riches;' that insatiable thirst is enkindled in the soul by beholding the splendour of outward things; it is born and bred and fed by it, and the heart is secretly enchanted with a love to it, and therefore we must have more of it. Again drunkenness: Prov. 23:31, 'Look not thou upon the wine when it is

red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright;' that is so as to entice the heart to crave more and more till it cometh to excess. So envy: Mat. 20:15, 'Is thine eye evil because mine is good?' The more they see and behold the flourishing of others, the more is their evil disposition nourished.

(2.) Historical instances. Let me begin with the first transgression. It is said, Gen. 3:6, 'And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof,' &c. She was first corrupted in her sense; gazing on the fruit with delight, that was the first sin, before eating. The devil tempted Christ when he sought to corrupt the second Adam: Mat. 4:8, 'He taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.' He knew the best way to work was by sight, and though he could not prevail against Christ, he took that way that was most accommodate to his purpose. And afterwards what an account have we in scripture, how many were wounded by their eyes: The devil knoweth that is the next way to work upon the heart. So Potiphar's wife: Gen. 39:7, 'And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph, and she said, Lie with me.' There the mischief began; she pleased herself with looking on the Hebrew servant. So Achan: Josh. 7:21, 'When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels' weight, then I coveted them and took them,' &c. First saw, then coveted, then took, and then hid; and then Israel falls before the Philistines, and he is attached by lots and brought to judgment. So Shechem and Dinah: Gen. 34:2, 'And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her.' Seeing always cometh between the sense and the heart. So of Samson: Judges 16:1, 'Samson went to Gaza, and saw there an harlot,

and went in unto her.' So David was ensnared by looking on Bathsheba: 2 Sam. 11:2, 'And it came to pass in an evening tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house; and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.' That fired his heart, and brought such mischiefs upon him. Naboth's vineyard was hard by Ahab's palace, 1 Kings 21:1. It was ever in his eye, and therefore he is troubled and falls sick for it. So how many may thus complain that their souls have been by their eyes betrayed! As Jacob's sheep, by looking on the rods, brought forth young ones coloured by the rods, so our actions receive that from the objects we take in by the senses.

Use is to reprove those that are so careless of their senses. When they are left at random they soon prove the ruin of the soul. Solomon giveth us the reason of his folly and warping from God: Eccles. 4:10, 'Whatsoever mine eye desired I kept not from them.' I kept not mine eyes from any toy. Those men lie under the power of sin that let the boat run with the stream and never use any restraint; they are wafted down apace into the gulf of destruction. Those open the gates to the enemy, and give them free entertainment. 'A man that is careless of his senses is like a city without walls,' that lies open to all comers. The heart is a thoroughfare for sin and temptations. But because most men, yea, good men, have and may miscarry this way, whereby great mischiefs may come upon them, let me produce some considerations that they may see their folly that let their hearts run at random.

1. Foul sinners are awakened which we thought long since laid asleep, when we let the object strike too freely upon the soul. Who would have thought that David's heart should have been fired by a look? It is dangerous to dally with temptations, and to think no great harm will come of it. Stones running down hill are not easily



stopped. So here; when we yield a little to Satan's temptations, he carries us away by force; we cannot stop when we please.

2. Evil thoughts will be begotten in us, and they make us culpable before God, though they break not out into sinful acts. Looking causeth lusting, and that is adultery before God: Mat. 5:28, 'But I say unto you, Whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.' Christ came to restore the law to its spiritual sense. The Pharisees did not think the law broken but by outward gross acts and actual defilement; but Christ showeth that a wanton look is adultery; an envious look murders; the heart consenteth to sin though the body acts it not.

3. By leaving the senses without a guard, evil dispositions are impressed upon us secretly. Though we are not aware of any sensible-disorder for the present, the heart groweth vain and carnal by letting loose the eye to vanity. Job doth not only take notice of his eyes when they did stir up carnal thoughts for the present, Job 31:7, but saith, 'If my eyes have walked after my heart, and if my steps have turned out of the way;' he speaks twice of the disorders of his eyes. The heart may be corrupted by the eye, and therefore it concerns you to set a guard upon the senses: Prov. 4:25, 'Let thine eyelids look on, and thine eye straight before thee.' Let us mind our business, which is to go to heaven; whereas by gazing and wandering the heart comes to be enchanted with earthly things.

4. By wandering and letting loose the eye the heart is distracted in duty. Distraction in duty is a great and usual evil, and one cause of it is the curiosity of the senses. How often do we mingle sulphur with our incense, and come to worship God having our hearts to the ends of the earth! Men let loose their eyes, and then away go their hearts; and therefore, as Solomon saith, 'Take heed to thy foot when thou

enterest into the house of God,' Eccles. 5. Many come hither merely to see and to be seen, and to display their vanity by their vain attire. How many are there that let loose their eyes to vanity, when they should give up their ears to the counsel of God! Some dress up themselves in such vain attire and indecent fashions to draw the eyes of others to gaze upon them; this is a great affront to God's worship. Solomon saith, Prov. 17:24, 'The fool's eyes are to the ends of the earth.' One cause of distraction is the curiosity of the senses; our eyes run to and fro, and then our hearts wander and rove from the business we are about. It is a strange constancy and fixedness that is spoken of the priests at Jerusalem, that when Faustus, Cornelius, and Furius, and Fabius broke into the city with their troops, and rushed into the temple ready to kill them, yet they went on with the rites of the temple, as if there had been no such thing. And strange is that other instance of the Spartan youth, that held the censor to Alexander while he offered sacrifice. A coal lighting upon his arm, he suffered it to burn there rather than by any crying out of his disturb that worship. These instances are a shame to Christians, that we do not more fix our hearts when we are in the service of God.

Use 2. The second use is to press us to this piece of mortification, even to 'turn away your eyes from beholding vanity.' To help you in it you must—

1. Take Job's course: Job 31:1, 'I made a covenant with my eyes.' Job and his eyes were in covenant; there was a covenant between heart and eyes. Eyes, be you faithful to my soul, that there be nothing that may stir up carnal and impure thoughts, that there be no unclean objects that may fire my heart. Oh, the fool-hardiness of this age! Some will smile at this kind of discipline, to be so strict and precise. Why, is sin grown less dangerous, or is man's nature more wise and strong, or are we better fortified against temptations? Are our hearts

in a better posture than the servants of God of old? Surely not; and therefore set a watch upon your eyes, that sin break not in upon your heart.

2. Consider the vanity of the things we dote upon and take in by the eyes. So saith David, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.' They are poor vain perishing things, yet they suit too well with our senses. And consider what Solomon saith of these things, 'Wilt thou set thine heart upon that which is not?' We inflame our hearts with these things, and lust putteth a lovely face upon the object that suiteth with it; but alas! what are they? Whatever they seem to the beholder, it is but vanity: Ps. 39:6, 'Man flattereth himself in a vain show.' All the splendour and beauty of it is but vain: 1 Cor. 7:31, 'The fashion of this world passeth away;' it is but an empty thing, flying bubbles. Though the world is of some use to us in our pilgrimage, yet poor things they are, as that for them we should neglect our duty to God, and grow less lively therein, or have our hearts withdrawn from God. It is the temptation that maketh them seem comely. When these alluring vanities are before our eyes, lust puts a gloss upon them. But consider what they are indeed, and in comparison of those things from which they tempt you, namely, heaven and eternal blessedness.

3. Consider the cursed issue of these things, of letting loose thy eye and heart to vanity. When you please the eye you wound the heart, and make you unfit for your great account: Eccles. 11:9, 'Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: yet know that for all these things God will bring thee to judgment.' Go, drench and steep thy soul in carnal delights; when thy wandering and wanton eye doth influence the lusts of thy heart, and they begin to boil up, when thou hast not denied thyself anything thy

heart can wish and thine eye look upon, put in a little cool water to stop the boiling and raging of thy lust; remember that God will bring thee to judgment; though thou dost now smother thy convictions, and drown thy reason in these sensual delights, yet God will call thee to an account for all thy time, and parts, and strength, and wit, and talents intrusted with thee.

4. Pray, as David doth here, 'Turn away mine eyes.' He calleth upon God for the assistance of his grace; and Ps. 141:3, 'Set a watch upon the door of my lips.' He that bendeth and inclineth the heart by his grace to look after better things, must also bridle the senses. It is lust sets the eye awork, and causeth a deep complacency and delight in carnal things, and that is cured only by God's grace, Mark 10:27; therefore go and beg this mercy of him.

5. Constant watchfulness. Alas! we cannot open our eyes but we meet with a temptation, a door open for Satan to enter by; therefore we had need diligently and constantly to watch, especially when lusts are like to be stirred. Lot's wife might not look towards Sodom, but Abraham was bidden to look upon it. It was no temptation to him, but it was to her; she had her heart hankering after it, Gen. 19:17, compared with ver. 28. When we are in danger of a temptation, we should keep a severe and strict hand upon the senses, that they may not dwell unnecessarily upon alluring objects.

6. We have renounced the pomps and vanities of the world in baptism, and shall our eyes and hearts run after then? This is implied in our baptism, for baptism is called 'the answer of a good conscience towards God,' 1 Peter 3:21. It is an answer to God's demand in the covenant. God puts us to the question whether we will renounce the world and the vanities and pleasures thereof. Now, when we have renounced these things, shall our eyes and our hearts run after

them? shall we turn the senses against God who gave us the use of them? yea, against our souls? To shame you that have been no more faithful to your baptismal vow, consider what heathens have done. Basil relateth that Alexander, a young man, in the heat of blood and in the flower of his age, refused to see Darius's daughter. It is a shame, saith he, for him that hath conquered so many men to be conquered by a woman. It is said of some heathen that he put out his eyes that they might not be a snare to him. We have grace that we may not use such violence to our nature, but certainly the eyes of our lusts should be put out; you see our baptism engageth us. If heathens, those that never came under such an engagement to God, if they by the light of nature saw that the guarding of the senses was a help to the soul, it concerns us much more to renounce the pomps and vanities of the world.

Secondly, We come to the request, 'Quicken thou me in thy way.' By quickening is meant the actuation of the spiritual life; he beggeth grace to perform his duty to God with cheerfulness, liveliness, and zeal.

Doct. Quickening is very necessary for them that would walk in God's ways.

I shall not consider it here as a prayer to God, or as it is a blessing to be asked of God, but as it is necessary to obedience; and here I shall inquire—

1. What quickening is.
2. Show the necessity of it.

First, What quickening is. It is put for two things—(1.) It is put for regeneration or the infusion of grace; (2.) For the renewing the

vigour of the life of grace, the renewed influence of God, whereby this grace is stirred up in our hearts. First, for regeneration or the infusion of grace: Eph. 2:1, 2, 'When we were dead in trespasses and sins, yet now hath he quickened us.' Then we are quickened or made alive to God when we are new born, when there is a habitual principle of grace put into our hearts. Secondly, Quickening is put for the renewed excitation of grace, when the life that we have received is carried on to some further increase; and so it is twofold, either by way of comfort in our afflictions, or enlivening in a way of holiness.

1. Comfort in afflictions; and so it is opposed to fainting, which is occasioned by too deep a sense of present troubles, and distrust of God and the supplies of his grace. When the affliction is heavy upon us, we are like birds dead in the nest, and are so overcome that we have no spirit or courage in the service of God: Ps. 119:50, 'This is my comfort in affliction, for thy word hath quickened me.' Then we are said to be quickened when he raiseth up our hearts above the trouble, by refining our suffering graces, as faith, hope, and patience. Thus he is said to 'revive the contrite one Isa. 57:15; to restore comfort to us, and to refresh us with the sense of his love.

2. There is a quickening in duty, which is opposed to deadness of spirit, which is apt to creep upon us, that is occasioned by negligence and slothfulness in the business of the spiritual life. Now, to quicken us, God exciteth his grace in us. An instrument, though never so well in tune, soon grows out of order. A key seldom turned rusts in the lock; so graces that are not kept awork lose their exercise and grow lukewarm, or else it is occasioned by carnal liberty or intermeddling with worldly things. These bring a brawn and deadness upon the heart, and the soul is depressed by the cares of this world: Luke 21:34, 'Now, when you are under this temper of soul, desire the Lord to quicken you by new influences of grace.

Secondly, Let me show the necessity of this quickening, how needful it is.

1. It is needful, for without it our general standing is questionable, whether we belong to God or no: 1 Peter 2:5, 'Ye are living stones built up into a spiritual house.' It is not enough to be a stone in Christ's building, but we must be living stones; not only members of his body, but living members. I cannot say such a one hath no grace; but when they have it not it renders their condition very questionable; a man may be living when he is not lively.

2. Without it we cannot perform our duties aright. Religion to a dead heart is a very irksome thing. When we are dead-hearted we do our duties as if we did them not in our general course of obedience. We must go to God: Ps. 119:88, 'Quicken me after thy loving-kindness, so shall I keep the testimonies of thy mouth.' Then we do good to good purpose indeed. It is not enough for us to pray, but we must pray with life and vigour: Ps. 80:18, 'Quicken me, and I will call upon thy name.' So we should hear with life, not in a dull, careless fashion, Mat. 13:15.

3. All the graces that are planted in us tend to beget quickening; as faith, hope, and love; these are the graces that set us awork, and make us lively in the exercise of the spiritual life: 'Faith that works by love,' Gal. 5:6. It sets the soul awork by apprehending the sense of God's love; whereas otherwise it is but a dead faith, 1 James 2:16. Then for love, what is the influence of that? It constrains the soul, it takes the soul along with it, 2 Cor. 5:14, and Rom. 12:1. And then hope; it is called 'a lively hope,' 1 Peter 1:3. All grace is put into us to make us lively; not only the grace of sanctification, but the grace of justification is bestowed upon us for this end, that we may be cheerful in God's service: Heb. 9:14, 'How much more shall the blood

of Christ purge our consciences from dead works, that we may serve the living God?' Sin and guilt make us dead and heavy-hearted; but now the blood of Christ is sprinkled upon the conscience, and the sentence of death taken away, then we are made cheerful to serve the living God. Attributes are suited to the case in hand; he is called the living God, because he must be served in a living manner.

4. All the ordinances which God hath appointed are to get and increase this liveliness in us. Wherefore hath God appointed the word? Isa. 55:3, 'Hear and your souls shall live.' It is to promote the life of grace, and that we may have new encouragement to go on in the ways of God. Moses, when he received the law, is said to receive 'the lively oracles of God,' Acts 7:38. So the doctrine of Christ; they are all spirit and life, and serve to beget life in us. As the redemption of the world by Christ, the joys of heaven, the torments of hell, they are all quickening truths, and propounded to us to keep us in life and vigour. The Lord's Supper, why was that appointed? There we come to taste the flesh of Christ, who was given for the life of the world, John 6; that we might sensibly exercise our faith upon Christ, that we might be more sensible of our obligations to him, that we might be the more excited in the diligent pursuit of things to come.

Use 1. Is reproof. David considereth the dulness and deadness of his spirit, which many do not, but go on in a cold track of duties, and never regard the frame of their hearts. It is a good sign to observe our spiritual temper, and accordingly go to God. Most observe their bodies, but very few their souls. If the body be ill at ease or out of order, they complain presently; but love waxeth cold, and their zeal for God and delight in him is abated, yet they never lay it to heart.

Use 2. To exhort us to get and keep this lively frame of heart.



1. Get it, pray for it. Liveliness in obedience doth depend upon God's blessing; unless he put life and keep life in our souls, all cometh to nothing. Come to God upon the account of his glory: Ps. 143:11, 'Quicken me, O Lord, for thy name's sake; for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.' His tender mercies: Ps. 119:156, 'Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord; quicken me according to thy judgments.' Come to him upon the account of Christ: John 10:10, 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly;' and John 7:38, 'He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.' Every new act of faith draweth from Christ some increase of spiritual life.

2. Stir up yourselves: Isa. 64:7, 'There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee;' 2 Tim. 1:6, 'Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee by the putting on of my hands;' Ps. 42:5, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him for the helps of his countenance.' We have liveliness enough in all businesses of secular concernment. Consider what the business is that we are about. It is about our everlasting estate, whether we shall live for ever in heaven or hell; and shall we trifle here? You had life in a way of sin; worldly men are lively. How dishonourable a thing is it to serve the living God with a dead heart? A lukewarm frame is hateful to God: Rev. 3:16, 'Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.' Take heed you do not lose quickening, and that—

[1.] By our corruption, by any heinous sin: Ps. 51:10–12 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me; cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me:

restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit.' The spirit is a tender thing. A wound in the body lets out the life-blood.

[2.] By an inordinate liberty in worldly pleasures: 1 Tim. 5:6, 'But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.' Vain company, vain speeches, and the like, these things shun and avoid, but, Heb. 10:24, 'Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works;' let us follow good examples. We grow formal and slight by imitation. Others profess religion, and yet are dead-hearted and vain, and so are we. The idolaters encouraged one another: Isa. 41:6, 7, 'They helped every one his neighbour, and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage; so the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smoothed with the hammer him that smote the anvil.' We should encourage one another in the way of godliness, and keep up a lively frame of heart towards God, and pray with the Psalmist in the text, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way.'

## SERMON XLIII

**Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.—VER. 38.**

IN these words observe—

1. A request, stablish thy word unto thy servant.
2. A motive to enforce it, who is devoted to thy fear. The motive is taken from the qualifications and disposition of the person who makes the request.

In the request you have—

1. The matter prayed for, stablish thy word.
2. The person for whom, unto thy servant, that is, unto me who am so.

I shall begin with the first of these, the benefit asked, 'Stablish thy word.' David, that had prayed before, 'Stablish me according to thy word,' ver. 28, now saith, 'Stablish thy word unto me.'

By the word is meant the word of promise. Now the promise of God is established when it is confirmed and made good: 2 Cor. 13:1, 'In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established,' that is, accounted valid and firm; and 2 Sam. 7:25, when he speaks of God's promises he prays, 'Stablish it for ever, and do as thou hast said.' Look, as on the one side we are said to establish the law of God when we observe it; for so it runs, Deut. 27:26, 'Cursed be he that confirmeth,' or 'establisheth not all the words of this law to do them.' The law is then confirmed when it hath its force and effect upon us; whereas otherwise, when they observe it not, it is said to be void. That sentence is repeated by the apostle thus: Gal. 3:10, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.' Well, then, the promise is established when it is made good.

Quest. But why doth David pray thus, 'Stablish thy word to me,' since God's word is most certain and stable in itself, so as it cannot be more? 2 Peter 1:19, 'We have a more sure,' or 'a more stable word of prophecy,' as the word signifies. How can the word be more stable than it is?

Ans. I answer—It is sure in regard of God, from whom it comes, and in itself. In regard of the things propounded, it cannot be more or less stable, it cannot be fast and loose; but in regard of us, it may be more or less established. And that two ways—

1. By the inward assurance of the Spirit increasing our faith.

2. By the outward performance of what is promised.

1. By the inward assurance of the Spirit, by which our faith is increased. Great is the weakness of our faith, as appears by our fears, doubts, distrusts; so that we need to be assured more and more.' We need say with tears, as he doth in the Gospel, Mark 9:24, 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief,' and to cry out with the apostles, 'Lord, increase our faith,' Luke 17:5. There is none believeth so but he may yet believe more. And in this sense the word is more established when we are confirmed in the belief of it, and look upon it as a sure ground for faith to rest upon.

2. By actual performance, when the promise is made good to us. Every event which falls out according to the word is a notable testimony of the truth of it, and a seal to confirm and strengthen our faith. Three ways may this be made good:—

[1.] The making good of some promises at one time strengthens our faith in expecting the like favour at another. Christ was angry with his disciples for not remembering the miracle of the loaves, when they fell into a like strait again: Mat. 16:9, 'Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves?' &c. We are to seek upon every difficulty; whereas former experience in the same kind should be a means of establishment to us: 2 Cor. 1:10, 'He hath delivered, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' In teaching a child to spell, we are angry if, when we have showed him a letter

once, twice, and a third time, yet when he meets with it again still he misseth; so God is angry with us when we have had experience of his word in this, that, and the other providence, yet still our doubts return upon us.

[2.] The accomplishment of one promise confirms another; for God, that keepeth touch at one time, will do so at another: 2 Tim. 4:17, 'I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion; and the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me blameless unto his heavenly kingdom.' In such a strait God failed not, and surely he that hath been true hitherto will not fail at last.

[3.] When the word is performed in part, it assureth us of the performance of the whole; it is an earnest given us of all the rest: 2 Cor. 1:10, 'For all the promises of God in him are Yea, and in him Amen.' A Christian hath a great many promises, and they are a-performing daily. God is delivering, comforting, protecting him, speaking peace to his conscience; but the greater part are yet to be performed. Present experiences do assure us of what is to come. Thus, 'stablish thy word,' that is, make it good by the event, that I may learn to trust another time, either for the same or other promises, or accomplishment of thy whole word.

Doct. That it is a matter of great consequence to have the word of God established to us, or to be confirmed in a certain belief of his promises.

David asketh it here as a very necessary thing, 'Stablish thy word unto thy servant.' Give me, Lord, to look upon it as a stable and firm thing. This will appear if you consider the conveniency, necessity, utility, and profit of this establishment.

1. The conveniency and suitableness of it. It is very convenient that we should build strongly upon a strong foundation, that sure truths shall be entertained with a certain faith, and things taken as they are uttered. There is certitudo objecti, a certainty of the object itself; and certitudo subjecti, the certainty of the subject, our being persuaded of the certainty of it. The one warrants the other, and both are necessary to our comfort; that is, as the word is certain in itself, so it should be certain to us. No matter how strong the foundation be, if the building upon that foundation be weak, down it falleth. The word of God is stable in itself, but if we are not persuaded it is so, we are soon shaken with temptations. To stay a ship from being tossed upon the rocks, it is necessary the anchor-hold be good itself, and be fastened upon somewhat that is firm; therefore, Heb. 6:18–20, the apostle speaks first of the stability of the ground, and then of the strength of the anchor. There is a firm rocky ground to build upon, the immutable promises of God; and a solid strong anchor, which is our faith and affiance. As faith without the promises is nothing but groundless and fruitless conceit, so the promises yield us no comfort without faith. 'The promises are Yea and Amen in Christ,' 2 Cor. 1:20; and then presently, 'Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ is God.' It is not sufficient that the promises be established, but we must be established upon them. They are Yea and Amen in Christ; but what is that to us? God may lose the glory of his truth, and we the comfort, if we be not established.

2. The necessity of it will appear if we consider—(1.) How natural unbelief is to us all; and (2.) How weak the faith of most is.

[1.] If we consider how natural unbelief is to us; it is a sin we suck in with our milk. When our first parents sinned against God, his word was not believed, and thereupon the sin was committed, Gen. 3:4. The devil contradicted that which God delivered with his own mouth;

his Nay prevails above God's Yea. 'Ye shall not surely die,' that was that which let in the first sin, and ever since it is very natural to us: Heb. 3:12, 'Take heed lest there be an evil heart of unbelief in you, in departing from the living God.' Unbelief is the special part of the heart's wickedness; partly because we have wronged God, therefore are apt to suspect him; for men are always jealous of those whom they have wronged, and that they cannot mean well to them from whom they have received ill. We have wronged God, and therefore are suspicious of him and of his good-will to sinners. And partly because the truths of God lie cross to our lusts and carnal interest, which maketh us so ready to pick quarrels with him. Ahab would not hear Micaiah, not because he prophesied false, but evil: John 3:20, 'They will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov'd.' I say, such strict rules, such close and quickening truths, as God hath published in the gospel, men could wish they were not true; that there were no heaven, nor hell, nor world to come; and therefore, because it lies so cross to our lusts, our wishes gain upon our understanding and blind us, and we are not apt to believe these things. Who will close with that which makes against him? Men, that are loath the word of God should prove true, are therefore slow of heart to believe it, Luke 24. And partly, because ever since we were born we have been trained up to live by sense; and are affected only with the things we see, hear, and feel; and therefore are little skilled in faith, which is 'the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. 11:1, which carrieth us to things above sense to the concernments of another world. In short, then, for these reasons, because it is natural to us to live by sense, to indulge our own lusts, and to suspect those whom we have wronged, therefore unbelief of God is so rife in the world.

[2.] The necessity of establishment in the word of God will appear if we consider how weak the faith of most is. There are few that entertain the word as a sure and certain truth. There are several

degrees of assent; there is conjecture, opinion, weak faith, and faith that is stronger, and that which comes up to an assurance of understanding, as the apostle calls it. There is conjecture, or a lighter inclination of the mind to the word of God, as possibly or probably true; a suspicious knowledge of things, or bare guess at them, when we go no higher than It may be so, that all this is true which God hath spoken concerning Christ and salvation. There is beyond this opinion, when the mind is more inclined to think it true, when we are so convinced of the truth of it that we are not able reasonably to contradict it; we think it true; but there is still a fear of the contrary, that it is not true, which prevails over us, and taints our practice, and weakens our affections, and withdraws them from things to come. Then beyond this there is faith, or a firm and undoubted persuasion of the truth of God's word, which also hath its latitude. There is weak faith, which hath its incident doubts. And there is beyond this, 'receiving the word in much assurance,' as the expression is, 1 Thes. 1:5. Still we may increase higher in the degree of our assent; for in this life there is never so much but there may be more, there is not so much faith but there may be more. There is something lacking to our faith, and it is not easy to grow up to the riches of the full assurance of understanding. The best have but a fluctuating doubting knowledge of spiritual truths, not a full assurance and persuasion of them. Therefore we need to ask establishment.

3. Consider the utility and profit of it. When once the word is established to us, we shall know how to live and how to die, and upon what terms to maintain comfort and holiness; whereas otherwise men live loosely and carelessly: Heb. 4:2, 'The word profited not, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.' Until the word of God be owned as a divine and infallible truth, it hath no efficacy upon us. When it is received merely by conjecture, as a possible truth, it works but weakly. Ay! but then it profits when we receive the word of God



as the word of God, as a certain truth; when the soul comes to determine, Surely these are truths in which I am deeply concerned, upon which my eternal life or death doth depend. Without this God can have no service, and we no comfort, but are at a great uncertainty of spirit. On the other side, let me tell you that all our coldness in duty, and all our boldness in sinning, it comes from unbelief.

[1.] Our coldness in duty. What is the reason, when God offereth such great things to us as the eternal enjoyment of himself, glory, comfort, and happiness as much as heart can wish, that men are so dead-hearted, lifeless, and careless in the ways of God? when our work is so good, our ways so excellent, what is the reason of all our coldness and carelessness in the profession of religion? We have not a lively sense of eternity; we do not believe God upon his word. If we did, it would put life into us. Saith the apostle, Phil. 3:14, 'This one thing I mind, and I press towards the mark.' Why? 'For the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ.' When we mind our work, seriously and above all other things, not superficially and by the by, when we can see the prize of our high calling, as to run and hold the eye upon the mark, then he presseth onward that he may not lose the garland. So when we feel the rewards of grace, when we are persuaded of them, this puts spirit into us, and encourageth us against all deadness and faintness. Ay! press onward then with a great deal of vehemency and earnestly. So 1 Cor. 15:58, 'Be ye steadfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.' Here is the description of a godly man. How shall we do to keep the heart in such an earnest frame? By a sound belief of the promises; for so it follows, 'Forasmuch as you know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.' If holiness doth not flourish, there is a worm at the root, atheism and unbelief lies at the heart, and the

want of such an assent to those great and glorious promises which God hath made known to us in Christ.

[2.] Our boldness in sinning. Why do men go on securely in ways of disobedience against God? Because they do not know whether the word be true, yea or nay. If a man had heaven and hell in his eye, if he were soundly persuaded of these things, certainly he would not venture the loss of heaven for a trifle; and would not upon such small temptations run the hazard of everlasting torments. You cannot drive an ass, the most stupid creature, into the fire which is burning before his eyes. So if these things were before our eyes we would not be so bold with God and so daring as we are. Temptation to sin must needs prevail with us when we have not faith; for when the temptation is strong and faith weak, where are we? A man will yield to his base lusts; for there is present profit, present pleasure, and we have no undoubted certainty of the rewards of obedience, and of the promises which are to be set against the temptation. But now, when we consider we have so great and precious promises, this will make us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit; we will not easily sin against God, kick against the pricks, and run upon danger laid before our eyes: 'In vain is the snare laid in the sight of a bird.'

Use 1. To reprove us for looking so little after the establishment of the word. There are many that content themselves with a loose profession of the name of Christ, but are not established in a sound belief of the scriptures. Ask them why they are of this and that religion. They have been taught so, been brought up in it; and so they might have been Mahometans upon the same account that they are Christians, if they had been bred there where the name of Mahomet is of more request than the name of Christ. But then there are others that live by guess, and carry on some natural devotion; but their souls were never acquainted with the mystery of grace, never soundly

established in it; they have a conjecture. There are others that can dispute for their religion, that see a reasonableness in the Christian faith, and why they should be of this opinion rather than that. Ay! but their hearts were never subdued to God. Hath the Spirit established divine truths upon thy soul, and wrought these things upon thy heart? hath it convinced thy judgment, awakened thy conscience, changed thy heart, given thee any taste of God's love in Christ, drawn thee out of the world into near and sweet communion with God? Truths are by him established to us, and represented with evidence and power, 1 Cor. 2:4. Alas! all else we can attain to is but cold and fruitless notion, which will not warm the heart; some cursory opinions, that will not hold thy heart under the awe of God, and guide thee in the paths of holiness to eternal life; and therefore rest not in this, that you have some knowledge concerning Christ and privileges by him. But are your hearts established? have you a sense of these truths wrought in you by the Holy Ghost?

Use 2. It exhorteth us to use the means whereby the word may be established.

1. Chiefly observe experiences, how it is accomplished in the course of God's providence, and inward feeling of thy own heart. What answers of prayer have you when you have been wrestling with God and putting his promises in suit at the throne of grace? Every day God is fulfilling one promise or another, to train us up to look for more at his hands. That we may trust him for our inheritance and our final blessing, he first giveth us a proof of his truth in lesser matters. The more you observe the dealings of God with your own souls, and the fulfilling his word to you, the more will your heart be confirmed against atheism, and established in the belief of the divine authority of the scripture. It concerns us much to look to this, that our hearts be firmly settled against atheism, especially when such

errors are abroad, and divisions in the church, and the name of God is blasphemed. Now, by these daily mercies doth God stablish his word, make it good to your souls: Ps. 18:30, 'The word of the Lord is a tried word.' There is more than letters and syllables; God standeth to it, it is 'a tried word.' When you have challenged him you have found the scripture fulfilled upon appeals to God and applications to the throne of grace. When you have been pleading with God; Lord, is not this thy handwriting, the promises thou hast made to thy people? the Lord hath answered this from heaven, and said, Yea, this is my promise. He hath given in an answerable promise.

2. It engageth you to dependence and assurance of faith: Ps. 9:10, 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.' Whosoever hath observed God's dealings will see God is to be trusted, he may be depended upon if he hath said anything in his word—'they that know thy name,' they that have acquainted themselves with God and the course of his dispensations. The promises will not lie by as a dead stock: Ps. 116:1, 2, 'God hath heard my voice and my supplications, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.' This is that which will quicken you to rejoice in God and to a holy thankfulness, when you compare his word with the effects of it, when you see how it is made good: Ps. 56:10, 'In God will I praise his word; in the Lord will I praise his word.' A single mercy is not so much, nor so engaging upon our hearts to thankfulness, as when observing the mercy hath been the fruit of a promise. This hath been the practice of God's saints; Joshua takes notice of it: Josh. 23:14, 'Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you;' 1 Kings 8:56, 'There hath not failed one word of all his good promises, which he hath promised by the hand of Moses his servant.' You will often find the very letter of the promise made good in the course of God's dealings, and if you would but observe his

daily providence, you would be trained up in more waiting upon God for your final blessings.

Secondly, Let us come to the person for whom he prays, 'Stablish thy word;' but to whom? 'To thy servant.' Here note—

Doct. That particular application of general promises is necessary.

This word which he would have to be established was most likely to be a promise of sanctification; for in the former verse he had prayed for mortification and vivification, and now for sanctification. But be, it any other promise, certainly that word which was made to others was likewise made to me, as if he had been specified therein by name. Thus must general truths be taken home by particular application, that they may lie the closer to our hearts. Ps. 27:8, the offer of God's favour is general, 'Seek ye my face;' but the application is particular to himself, 'Lord, I will seek thy face;' David takes it as spoken to him in particular. So Ps. 116:15, 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints;' and then, 'Truly, Lord, I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid.' The comfort concerned all God's children. The life and death of the saints is very precious in the eyes of God; he hath a particular care over them, and tells all their bones. Now, Lord, saith David, let me have the comfort of this promise; I am thy servant. So 1 Tim. 1:15, 'This is a faithful saying,' &c., 'whereof I am chief.' This holy art should we learn of creeping under the covert of a promise, and working ourselves by faith into the comfort of it.

But rather, secondly, you may observe the character that he puts upon himself, Thy servant. David was a king, but at the throne of grace he styles himself God's servant, the fittest title that he could use when he prays for grace. Hence note—

Doct. He that is a servant of God may seek and expect grace from him.

Here I shall show—

1. Who is God's servant.
2. Why we must use this plea when we come to have promises accomplished.

1. Who is God's servant? I answer—He that dedicates himself to God's use, and he that lives under a sense and conscience of his dedication.

[1.] He that dedicates himself to God's use. We are God's servants by covenant and voluntary contract. It is true our service is due to him upon other accounts, but we enter into it by contract. It is due by virtue of creation, for he made us out of nothing; therefore we owe him all that we have, and thus all creatures were made for God's service: Ps. 119:91, 'They continue this day according to thine ordinances; for all are thy servants.' Heaven and earth, and sun and moon, and stars, and beasts, and every creeping thing, and every plant and herb, they all serve God according to the ends for which they were made. But especially men and angels; they were made for God's use immediately. Other things were made ultimately and terminately for God; man immediately for God, Ps. 103:21. The angels are his ministers, and so is man God's servant. And then by the right of redemption; we are bound to serve him as the captive was to serve the buyer; he that bought another out of slavery, all his time and strength belonged to him: 1 Cor. 6:20, 'Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God with your souls and bodies.' But this shows only *de jure* what we ought to be; we ought all to be God's servants, as he created us, and redeemed us by the blood of Christ.

But de facto none are his servants but those who resign and yield up themselves to his use: Rom. 6:13, 'Yield up yourselves to the Lord.' God will have his right and title confirmed by our consent, and therefore he that is a servant of God one time or other hath entered into covenant with God, he hath consented to yield up himself to walk with God in a strict obedience. All that thus yield up themselves to be God's servants they do it with shame; they are ashamed they did no sooner think of their creator, in their youth, at their first coming to the use of reason, and think of him that bought them by his blood: 1 Peter 4:3, 'For the time past of our lives may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles,' &c. They have too long dishonoured God, destroyed their own souls, and kept their creator out of his right. And they do it too with a sense of God's love, in the new title he hath by redemption: 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 'For the love of Christ constrains us,' &c.

[2.] He is one liveth under a sense and conscience of his dedication, not as his own, but God's When you have given up yourselves to God's service, you must not walk as you list, but as your master pleaseth. Aristotle makes it the property of a servant to be one that cannot live as he would, that hath no will of his own, but hath given up himself to be commanded and directed by another, and sometimes contrary to his own inclination. They are rebels and not servants that said 'Our tongues are our own,' Ps. 12:3. Your tongues are not your own to speak what you please, nor your hearts your own to think what you please, nor your hands your own to do what you please. You are God's servants, therefore must be wholly at his will. The angels, that are God's ministers, when they are described, they 'do his pleasure', Ps. 103:21. So your business is to do the will of God; not to please yourself, men or the flesh, but to please God, to do the will of God, without any respect to your own inclinations and worldly interests; and therefore your hearts will rise against sin upon this

account, when you are tempted to do anything that is contrary to the will of God: Oh! I am not my own; these members are Christ's. You look upon everything as God's, to be employed to his service.

2. Those that would have the word to be established, why must they be servants of the Lord?

[1.] God doth not look to the work, but to the qualification of the person. God will not accept a man for one good work, one prayer; but he looks to the qualification of his person. 'The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,' Prov. 28:9. How is that? Not only when it is managed in a careless fashion, when a wicked man prays wickedly. No; let him do his best; for it is said, Prov. 21:27, 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?' At best it is an abomination; God will not accept of a sacrifice at his hands; and therefore the qualification of the person is to be regarded when we pray for a blessing promised, James 5:16. There is the qualification of the prayer; it must be 'fervent, effectual;' a prayer driven with life and motion, that hath spirit and life. Ay! but it must be of 'a righteous person.' As naturalists speak of a jewel which, if put into a dead man's mouth, loseth all its virtue and efficacy, so prayer in the mouth of a wicked carnal man loseth its efficacy with God. When one that had revolted from the Romans sent gifts to the Roman general, he made him this answer, He should first return to his obedience to the state of Rome. So God saith to wicked men, first let them be God's servants, and then they shall have the blessing of his promises.

[2.] It is agreeable to the covenant, for the covenant is mutual: 'I will be your God, and you shall be my people.' All promises relate to a covenant. Now, in every covenant there is ratio dati et accepti—something required as well as something given, for it binds mutually;



therefore if we would have God give us grace, we must yield obedience. Precepts and promises go hand in hand; and therefore they that would have promises performed, they must observe precepts, and mingle resolutions of duty with expectations of mercy. That is the covenant way of dealing with God; there must be a sincere purpose and endeavour to serve God. I am thy servant, therefore stablish thy word to me.

Use. To press you to become God's servants. I might bring motives both from the time past, present, and to come. (1.) From the time past. You are obliged to be so. You are his creatures; you have life, being, and all things from him. We cannot receive a small kindness from man but it doth produce respect; I am your servant. Shall a kindness from God less effect us, who made us, and gives us life, breath, and all things? We take no notice of what comes from an invisible hand. Here is the wonder, that the great God, who hath no need of us, so often provoked by us, that is of such excellent majesty, so far above us, should take notice of us. Therefore, if God made us, keeps us, and maintains us from day to day, and abaseth himself to behold us, to look after us, this should engage us. (2.) And then from what is present. The honour that is put upon you; it is a great advancement to be God's servant. The meanest offices about princes are accounted honourable. Jesus Christ himself as mediator he hath this title put upon him, 'My righteous servant,' Isa. 53:11; and the angels they are your fellow-servants, Ps. 103:21; they are called 'ministers of God.' Likewise for the present you have free access to God: God's servants may stand in his presence, and they have liberty to ask anything they need of. The Queen of Sheba said concerning Solomon in 1 Kings 10:8, 'Happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee and hear thy wisdom,' Much more may it be said concerning God's servants, blessed are those that stand in his presence, that have such free leave to hold communion with God; to

come, and have assurance of welcome whenever they come. (3.) And for the time to come. God's service will issue itself into everlasting blessedness; God's servants have excellent wages: John 12:26, 'If any man serve me, he shall be there where I am, and my Father will honour him.' Christ and his Father will study what honour they can put upon him. Therefore be God's servants that you may please him for the present, and comfortably wait for his everlasting blessing. Thus I have gone over the first thing, namely the request, 'Stablish thy word unto thy servant.'

Secondly, The motive and argument, 'Who is devoted to thy fear.'

The word may be rendered either which, or who, as relating either to thy word or thy servant.

1. Thy word; for in the original Hebrew the posture of the verse is thus, 'Stablish to thy servant thy word, which is to the fearing of thee;' that is, given that thou mayest be feared, there being in the word of God the greatest arguments and inducements to fear and reverence and obey him. The word of God was appointed to this use, to plant the fear of God in our hearts, and to increase our reverence of God. Not that we may play the wanton with promises, and feed our lusts with them. I rather take our own translation as more accommodate, and it hath such a sense as that, Ps. 109:4, 'But I give myself unto prayer.' In the original it is, 'But I prayer;' and 'Stablish thy word to thy servant, who is to thy fear.' Our translators add, to make the sense more full, 'addicted,' 'devoted to thy fear,' that is, that makes it his business, care, and desire to stand in the fear of God.

2. Now this is added as a true note and description of God's servants, as being a main thing in religion: Ps. 111:10, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,' the first in point of order, and it is the first thing when we begin to be wise, to think of God, to have awful

thoughts of God; it is a chief point of wisdom, the great thing that makes us wise to salvation. And it is added as an argument of prayer: Neh. 1:11, 'O Lord, let thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name.' The more any is given to the fear of God, the more assurance they have of God's love, and readiness to hear them at the throne of grace. The point is this—

Doct. That man is indeed God's servant who is devoted to his fear.

There may be weaknesses and failings, but for the main he is swayed by the fear of God.

1. What it is to fear God.

2. Why this is a sure note of God's servant, because it removes all the lets of obedience.

1. What it is to fear God. There is a servile and a filial fear; a fear of wrath, which the worst may have: James 2:19, 'The devils believe and tremble;' and a fear of offending, which the best must have: Prov. 28:14, 'Blessed is he that feareth alway;' a reverent disposition of heart towards God as our sovereign lord and master, yea, as our father in Jesus Christ.

For the first of these:—

[1.] A fear of wrath. Every fear of wrath is not sinful; it is a duty rather than a sin. All God's children are bound to have a tender sense of God's wrath or displeasure against sin, to make them awful and serious in the spiritual life; as in Heb. 12:27, 'Let us serve God with reverence and godly fear.' Mark, upon that account and consideration, as he is 'a consuming fire;' that should have an influence upon our godly fear; and Mat. 10:28, 'Fear not them that

can but kill the body, but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.' The words do not only contain a description of the person who ought to be feared, but the ground and reason why he is to be feared; and therefore it is not simply the fear of wrath that is sinful, but it is the servility and slavishness of it. Now, what is the servility and slavishness of the fear of wrath? Partly when our own smart and terror is feared more than the displeasing of God; and they have a mind to sin but are afraid of hell; and it is fear accompanied with hatred. Servile fear, though it keep us from some sins, as a wolf may be scared from the prey, yet keeps its devouring nature. It is accompanied with hatred of God: all that fear God they hate him; and indeed they could wish there were no God, none to call them to account; they could wish he were not so just and holy as he is. And so here lies the evil of it, not so much fear of wrath, for that is a grace rightly conversant about its object, but as it tends to this hatred of God. And partly too servility lies in this, as it makes us shy of God, and run away from him rather than draw near to him, as Adam ran into the bushes to hide himself. Holy fear is an awe of God upon the soul, but that keeps us in a holy communion with him: 'I will put my fear into their hearts, and they shall not depart from me;' but that fear which makes us fly from God is slavish. And partly as it hath torment and perplexity in it, and so hindereth us in God's service: 'Fear hath torment in it.' The fear of wrath, that is a duty; but slavish fear is such a fear of wrath which makes us hate God and shun his presence, and afraid more of wronging ourselves than wronging of God; and such a fear that hath torment and perplexity in it, that cannot serve God so cheerfully.

[2.] There is a filial fear, a fear of reverence. This fear of God was in Christ as mediator, Isa. 11:1, 2. Among other graces there reckoned up which do belong to 'Jehovah the branch,' to Christ Jesus, this is one, 'The fear of the Lord.' Christ as man had a reverent affection to

his Father whom he served, and this fear it continueth to all eternity in the blessed spirits that are in heaven. The saints and angels have this kind of fear, a dread of the holy God, and a reverent and awful respect to his majesty. It is an essential respect which passeth between the creature and the creator, and can never be abolished. Now, this fear of reverence consisteth in a high esteem of God, of his majesty, glory, power, and in the sense and continual thoughts of his presence; and then a loathness to sin against God, or to offend in his sight, to do anything that is unseemly when God is a looker-on. What! can a man sin freely that lives in the sight of the holy God, when he hath a deep sense of his excellency imprinted on his heart? This is that fear which is the note of God's servants.

2. This must needs be the note of God's servants, because it is the great principle that both hindereth us from sin and quickeneth us to duty. The fear of God is one of the radical and essential graces which belong to a Christian; it is a mighty restraint from sin. The beasts were made to serve man, and how are they held in subjection and obedience to man? 'The dread of you,' saith God, 'shall be upon every beast of the earth,' Gen. 9:2. So we are made for the service of God. Now, how are we kept in subjection to God? When the fear of God is upon our heart, that will not suffer us freely to do anything that is displeasing to God: Exod. 20:20, 'God is come to prove you, that his fear may be before your faces, that you sin not.' It is a great remedy against all temptation of gain, and worldly profit, and temporal convenience. Look, as that man that had a fear of the king upon his heart: 2 Sam. 18:12, 'Why didst thou not smite him to the ground?' saith Joab; and the man answered, 'Though I should receive a thousand shekels, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son;' just such a fear hath a child of God of his heavenly king: No; though I should have never so much offered me to tempt me from my duty; no, I dare not, the Lord hath charged me to the

contrary. Or, as when the Rechabites were tempted to drink wine, pots were brought before them to inflame their appetite: No; we dare not. These passages express the workings of heart in one that fears God; though temptation be present, and never so much convenience thereby, yet how can they do this wickedness and sin against God?

Use. It informeth us who are God's servants; those that have most of this fear of God planted in their hearts: Neh. 7:2, 'He was a faithful man, and feared God above many.' And then that they express it in their conversation. God will not take it planted in our hearts, if we do not obey him in those things that are contrary to our interests and natural affections. When God tried Abraham that was to offer his Isaac, Gen. 22, 'Now I know that thou fearest me, since thou hast not withheld thine only son,' &c. Why? was Abraham unknown to God before that time? As Peter told Christ, 'Lord, thou knowest all things.' Cannot God see the inward springs and motions of our souls, and what affections are there? Could not God tell what was in Abraham? But now, I acknowledge. For God will not acknowledge it in this sense until we express it. They are the true servants of God that have his fear planted in their hearts, and express it upon all occasions.

## **SERMON XLIV**

**Turn away my reproach which I fear; for thy judgments are good.—VER. 39.**

IN these words you have—

1. A request, take away my reproach.
2. A reason to enforce it, for thy judgments are good.

First, For the request, 'Turn away,' roll from upon me; so it signifies. He was clothed with reproach; now roll from me my reproach. Some think he means God's condemnatory sentence, which would turn to his reproach, or some remarkable rebuke from God because of his sin. Rather, I think, the calumnies of his enemies; and he calls it 'my reproach,' either as deserved by himself, or as personally lighted upon him, the reproach which was like to be his lot and portion in the world through the malice of his enemies: 'The reproach which I fear,' that is, which I have cause to expect, and am sensible of the sad consequences of.

Secondly, For the reason by which this is enforced, 'For thy judgments are good.' There are different opinions about the formality of this argument. Some take the reason thus: Let me not suffer reproach for adhering to thy word, thy word which is so good. But David doth not speak here of suffering reproach for righteousness' sake, but such reproach as was likely to befall him because of his own infirmities and failings. Reproaches for righteousness' sake are to be rejoiced in. But he saith, This 'I fear;' and therefore I suppose this doth not hit the reason, neither the other sense, Why should I be looked upon as an evil-doer as long as I keep thy law and observe thy statutes? others judge badly of me, but I appeal to thy good judgment. Others, by judgments, understand God's dealings: Thou dost not deal with men according to their desert; thy dispensations are kind and gracious. Rather thus: by judgments are meant the ways, statutes, and ordinances of God, called judgments, because all our words, works, thoughts, are to be judged according to the sentence of the word. Now these, it is pity they should suffer in my reproach and ignominy; this is that I fear more than anything else that can happen to me. I think the reason will better run thus: Lord, there is in thy law, word, covenant, many

promises to encourage thy people, and therefore rules to provide for the due honour and credit of thy people. Take it so.

I shall, with respect to the necessities of the people of God, insist a little upon the former clause, and observe this point:—

That reproaches are a usual, but yet a great and grievous, affliction to the children of God. They are usual, for David saith, 'my reproach.' Even this holy man could not escape the censures of his enemies; and they are grievous, for he saith, 'which I fear.'

First, That they are usual. David often complains of it in this psalm, and mentions it as one great evil to God, ver. 22, 'Remove from me reproach and contempt, for I have kept thy testimonies;' and again, ver. 42, 'So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me, for I trust in thy word;' and ver. 69, 'The proud have forged a lie against me.' God may let loose a barking Shimei upon a holy David, and therefore doth he so often complain of reproaches. So elsewhere: Ps. 31:13, 'For I have heard the slander of many.' Sundry sorts of persons made him their butt, upon which they spent and let fly the arrows of censure and reproach: Ps. 35:15, 'The abjects gathered themselves together against me, they did tear me, and ceased not.' Tear me, meaning in his name; that was rent and torn pieces with their reproaches; the abjects gathered themselves, &c. Base dust will many times be flying in the faces of the children of God; and Jeremiah tells us, 'I have heard the defaming of many;' and Job and other servants of God, yea, our Lord himself was reviled; he 'endured the contradiction of sinners,' many a bitter reproach, even of the highest crimes against either table. There were objected to him blasphemy and sedition, the highest crime against the first, and the highest crime against the second table. The Son of God, that was so meek, innocent, just, and did so much good in every place, yet he met



with odious aspersions; therefore we cannot say that they are faulty because they are aspersed, since this hath been the portion of the most eminent godly persons. And after that we are told, Ps. 64:3, 4, 'They whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words, that they may shoot in secret at the perfect.' Perfection meets with envy, and envy vents itself by detraction; and when men cannot reach the height of others by a holy imitation, then by odious imputations they seek to make them as vile, low, and base as themselves. Thus it is a usual affliction.

Secondly, It is a grievous affliction; for the man of God, that was after God's own heart, he saith, 'The reproach which I so feared.' It is called persecution, Gal. 4:29; compare with Gen. 21:9, and you shall see it was mocking and reproach. The scourge of the tongue is one of the basest persecutions that the children of God are tried withal; and they are called 'cruel mockings,' Heb. 11:36. There is as much cruelty and as deep a wound many times made by the tongue of reproach as by the fist of wickedness.

To confirm it by reasons. Reproach must needs be grievous, because it is against nature, and against grace.

1. It is against nature. Contempt is a heavy thing to bear, and as honour is more grateful to some persons, so reproach is more grievous than many ordinary crosses. Many would lose their goods cheerfully, yet are grieved with the loss of their names. According to the constitution and frame of men's spirits so they are affected, some with shame more than with fear. There seems to be excellency and gallantry in sufferings which are honourable, and many can bear that; but the best spirits are deeply affected with shame, and disgraceful punishment is more dreadful than a painful one. Jesus Christ, that had all the innocent affections of human nature, and

upon occasion showed them, he took notice of mockings and reproaches: Ps. 22:7, 'All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head.' A good name is more precious to some than life; and possibly that may be the reason why these two are coupled together, Eccles. 7:1, 'A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.' The coupling of these two sentences together seems to intimate this, that men had rather die than lose their names. If a man die, his memory may be fragrant, he may leave his name behind him; but it is more hateful to have their names and credit mangled than their flesh with sharp swords. Now it is grievous to nature; there is somewhat of corruption in it. Now God knows how to strike in the right vein. The godly are not so mortified to their credit in the world many times, when they are mortified to other interests. And therefore God would try them in this way, and exercise them, that he may humble them, and fit them more for his own use. All that I have spoken is but to show it is a thing grievous to nature.

2. It must needs be grievous because grace concurs; as the flood was the more violent, and did overspread the world, when not only the mouth of the great deep was opened below, but the windows of heaven above; then the floods did swell, and overspread the whole world. I bring it to this purpose; when the windows of heaven are opened above, when grace looks upon it as an affliction as well as nature, then the afflictions must needs be the more grievous. Now certainly grace concurs to the sense of our affliction, for next to a good conscience there is not a greater blessing than a good name holily got. You may observe, usually he that is prodigal of his credit certainly will not be very tender of his conscience. Grace teacheth us to value a good name, partly because it is God's gift, a blessing adopted and taken into the covenant, as other such like blessings are. Promises are frequent, especially in the Old Testament, where

heaven is sparingly mentioned. A good name is promised as 'the reward of the righteous, and the name of the wicked shall rot;' it is threatened as a punishment of the wicked; for a good name is a shadow of eternity. When a man dies, his name he leaves behind him, which is a pledge of our living after death. Therefore the Old Testament abounds with promises of this kind: he leaves a good name behind him, as spices when broken and dissolved leave an excellent scent. And partly too because grace gives us a right judgment of all things. Now, it is represented in scripture as better than riches, Prov. 22:1. It is better, as in other respects, so in this; it is a motive more pure and sublime than wealth, and in the operations of it it comes next to grace. A dreggy soul is for that which is more base, but grace teacheth us to value things. So Eccles. 7:1, 'A good name is better than precious ointment.' Aromatical ointments are things of great use and esteem among the Jews; they are counted a chief part of their treasures: and so a good name is better than precious ointment; that is, it is better than other riches, for this was a great part of their riches. And partly too another reason why grace teacheth us to prize it, because of the great inconveniences which attend the loss of a good name, and the misrepresentation of the people of God to the world. The glory of God is much interested in the credit of his servants. When they pollute and shame themselves, the Lord is polluted in them: Ezek. 13:19, 'Will they pollute me among my people;' and Jer. 34:16, 'Ye have polluted my name.' Christ, that will hereafter be admired in his saints, will now be glorified in them. The shame of our miscarriages, real or supposed, redounds to God and religion itself. And therefore, when people are possessed and filled with prejudices against religious persons, they are possessed and filled with prejudices against the will of God and the unquestionable interests of Christ Jesus; and the world, that hates God, Christ, and religion, will presently say, These are your professors, and this is your profession! Therefore, since the credit of

religion lieth much in it, grace teacheth us to value it. Besides, too, their safety lies in it; for by defaming the worshippers of Christ they make way for greater persecutions; and Satan is usually first a liar, and then a murderer, John 8:44; and when their slanders abound, troubles will not long be kept out. As heretofore they invested the primitive Christians with bears' skins, and then baited them as bears, so they represent them to the world as a vile and infamous sort of men, and then the persecution is the better countenanced. First they smite with the tongue, and then with the fist of wickedness; and therefore their safety lies very much in this. And as their safety, so grace teacheth us to value it upon other accounts—their usefulness. Nature desires a good name, but it is for their own conveniences. But the children of God, if they desire a good name, it is to honour God; and that is the difference between vainglory or a desire of the good opinion of others. If it terminate in self-respects, it is vainglory; but if the heart be pure and right in order to God, then it comes from grace. A blemished instrument will be of little use. Most would refuse to take their meat from a leprous hand. It is Satan's policy, when he cannot discourage instruments from the work of God, then he seeks to blemish them and blast them. The apostle tells us that those which are called to public office, they should be very careful of their credit, that they may promote their work; for he puts down this as one of their qualifications: 1 Tim. 3:7, 'He must have a good report of them that are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.' Interpreters differ a little how διαβόλος, which we translate devil, is to be interpreted. Either it signifies devil or slanderer; both senses are good; lest he fall into the snare of the devil, or the snare of the slanderer. The devil hath his spies that watch over us, and they have set their snares, and watch for your halting, that so the service may be blemished, and the gospel obstructed and hindered. Well, then, grace prizeth a good name because of the consequences, and because the Lord's honour and our safety and service are concerned in it.

Use 1. First, Here is advice to the person reproached. O Christians! acknowledge God in the affliction, if this be your lot and portion. David goes to God to stop it there; it is best stopped with God: 'Turn away my reproach.' It is a great and grievous affliction, but in all things God hath an aim. Look, what is said of afflictions in general may be applied to this particular of reproaches. Now what is God's aim and end in afflictions? In general, 'to try, purge, and make white,' Dan. 11:35; or, as it is Deut. 8:16, 'To humble thee, and prove thee, and do thee good at the latter end.' Let us take that method; here is God's end:—

First, To humble thee. Carnal men may shoot at rovers, but many times we find ourselves pricked at heart. Slanders may revive the sense of guilt. They may intend harm, but you should receive good by this as by every affliction. Plutarch, in his excellent treatise of profiting by a man's enemies, illustrates it by this comparison of Jason, who had an imposthume let out by the dart of his enemy. They may fling darts at random, and intend harm, but you shall get good by it. Surely there is some special cause when the Lord permits this, when volleys of reproaches shall follow one after another; therefore he suffers others to judge you, to awaken you to self-judging. Mind this, and you will be no losers by reproaches. Well, enter into your own hearts, search them thoroughly; see what it is God aims at, whether there be any way of wickedness in you that hitherto you have not discovered; and when you come to see this sink of sin, then your enemies do but help to humble you. Many times the voice of a slanderer may do that which the voice of a preacher cannot do. And the truth is, there is such a wantonness, such a presumptuous headiness in the professors of religion, that the word cannot reclaim them, they are so radicated in certain sins; and therefore God will follow you with sharp reproaches of his enemies, and doth at this time, to call you to a more serious judging

yourselves, to see your factious headiness, which certainly doth predominate among God's professing people.

There are many sins to which this sharp kind of affliction is proper, and therefore God gives out this grievous dispensation to lay open his people to bitter reproaches and slanders. I will tell you some of the sins. My business is not now to state what is the great sin that God is judging among his people, but to help every one in particular to look to ourselves, for that I do not conceive to be so fit to be spoken here.

1. Pride. There is a twofold pride—pride in mind, which is called self-conceit, and pride in affections, which is called vainglory. Now there is no such effectual cure as reproaches for either of these.

[1.] To speak of the pride in mind, self-conceit. We are very apt to be puffed up for our doing and suffering for God—poor empty bladders are soon puffed up—and think ourselves somebody, if there be but a little self-denial; as Peter said, 'Master, we have left all and followed thee.' He was conceited of what he had left for Christ. What had he left? A net, a fisher-boat; it was a great all indeed! Mat. 19:27. We are easily puffed up if we suffer a little for God, and the Lord intrencheth us in our worldly conveniences, for self-conceit may grow out of self-denial. Too often we find it so. Pride is a sin that grows out of mortification of other sins; it lives in us while we live in the body; therefore, 1 John 2:16, it is called 'pride of life.' And some compare it to a shirt; that garment is last put off. It is the most inward and nearest to the soul, and out of the conquest of other sins there ariseth pride. Now, if we have been too self-conceited, the Lord will humble us, either by permitting us to fall into such scandals as may remember us of our frailty, and what unworthy weak creatures we are in ourselves; sometimes by taking off the restraints of his grace

and of his Spirit, and permitting us to fall. Austin is bold in saying it is profitable for proud men to fall sometimes into open sin, that they may know and understand themselves. He speaks it upon the occasion of Peter, when he was boasting of his own strength, 'Though all men leave thee, yet will not I.' How foully did he fall! Ay! but at other times God useth a more merciful dispensation, for he doth not let his people fall into those grievous falls but upon great provocation. But usually at other times he lets loose the tongues of virulent men to lessen us in our own opinion and in the opinion of the world. Now, how innocent soever we be of the crimes charged upon us, yet in all these cases we must look upward and inward. Upward; this is not without God; he is at the end of causes; he could blast these tongues, and stay and stop them at his pleasure; the Lord can 'keep us from the strife of tongues,' Ps. 31:20. But now, when he permits this, his hand must be owned; look upward: Micah 7:9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him.' At such a time God spits in the faces of his people, and puts us to shame; and therefore we should look upward and see the hand of God in all this. And look inward; there you will see such a sink of sin as deserves this and much more; and therefore a sense of our sinfulness in other things should make us more submissive to the Lord's correcting hand. We must see the hand of God; for if we do not look to that we will be drawn to sin, into reviling for reviling, and exasperation for exasperation. Many times our graces do us as much hurt as our sins. Self-conceit the Lord will mortify one way or other.

[2.] For vainglory, the other sort of pride, valuing esteem too much, and our credit in the world, and pleasing ourselves in the opinion others have of us. We would usurp God's throne and reign in the hearts of men, therefore we are so touchy. Having set a high value upon ourselves, we are troubled when others will not come up to our price. Pride is one of the oldest enemies that ever God had; it was

born in heaven in the breasts of the fallen angels, but God tumbled them presently out of heaven, as soon as pride got into the heart. Now, when his children harbour it, the Lord hath a quarrel with them; and therefore, for giving entertainment to pride, he will lay us low enough: 2 Cor. 12:7, 'Lest I should be exalted above measure, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me.' There is a great deal of do what this thorn in the flesh is. Some will have it to be some trouble or sickness. Most probably so, but it takes in many afflictive evils; for, ver. 10, he mentioneth reproaches. Paul was too apt to be proud. The Lord made him an eminent instrument; by his faith he had abundance of revelations. But God will prick the bladder; he doth it with thorns; and he calls it his infirmity, necessity, reproach. Infirmity, by that I mean some reigning sickness. But reproach was one ingredient. Now, lest we should be puffed up by vain conceit, the Lord humbles us with infirmities, necessities, reproaches.

2. Another sin for which God humbles us is careless walking. When we are negligent, and do not take notice of the carnality that grows upon us, and the fleshly frame and temper of heart which breaks out into our lives, the Lord suffers others to reproach; then they gather up our filth, that we may see what cause we have to take our ways to heart. Every man that would live strictly had need either of faithful friends or watchful enemies; either faithful friends to admonish him, or watchful enemies to censure him; they show us the spots in our garments that are to be washed off. Many times a friend is blinded with love, and grows as partial to us as we are to ourselves, will suffer sin upon us and not tell us of it; then the Lord sets spies upon us to watch for our halting, Jer. 20:10; and therefore we need go to God and pray: Ps. 27:11, 'Lord, lead me in a plain path because of my observers.' They lie in wait and seek to take us tripping in aught they can. We can no more be without watchful enemies than without



faithful friends. How ignorant should a man be of himself if others did not put him in, mind sometimes of his failings! Therefore God makes use of virulent persons in the world as a rod to thrash the dust out of our garments.

3. To humble us for our censuring. For if we have not been so tender of others' credit, the Lord makes us see the bitterness of the affliction in our own case, by giving us the like measure that we have meted unto others, Mat. 7:1, 2, that is, we shall find others as hardly think of us as we have of them. Good thoughts and speeches of other men are the best preservative of our own good names. God will take care of them that are careful not to judge and censure. And therefore it is no great matter whether the report be true or false; but a Christian is to examine, Have not we drawn it upon ourselves by slandering others? for God usually payeth us home in our own coin. He that is much given to censuring seldom or never escapes great censures himself. It is said in the Psalms, 'Let his own words grieve him,' that is, fall upon him. How do our own words fall upon us? Why, the Lord punisheth us for our censuring of others. Oh! then, humble thyself before God for the reproaches thou hast cast upon others: Eccles. 7:21, 'Take no heed to all the words spoken against thee, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee,' that is, speaking evil against thee. Hard sayings and speeches of others against us may put us in mind of God's just hand, of measuring to us as we have measured unto others; and therefore we should be the more patient if they wrong us; it is but in the like kind that we have wronged others. God will humble us for our censuring, which is so natural and rife, especially with younger, weak, and more unmortified persons.

Secondly, The Lord doth it, as to humble us, so to try us.

1. The first thing he will try in you by such a grievous affliction and such volleys of reproaches is your faith, when all the world is set to condemn you. What faith?

[1.] Our faith in the great day of accounts, that is one great object of faith; and when the world is set to condemn us, our faith is tried, to see if we can rest with the vindication we shall have in the day of our Lord. So much you may see, 1 Cor. 4:3–5, 'But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness; and then shall every man have praise of God.' Every man that deserves it, and is qualified for it, shall have praise with God. 'Ελάχιστον, it was a very small thing to be judged of man's day, because he expected God's day for the clearing of all things here in the world. Sin and error often get the major vote. Tollite impios was the cry of the rabble against Christians. If there was any trouble it was for the Christians' sake. Take away the ungodly, meaning the Christians, because they denied the heathen gods. Now, what was their comfort? The day of the manifestation of all things. So when we are looked upon as the pests of mankind, yet when we can comfort ourselves, there will come a day of the manifestation of the sons of God, that is enough, the great day of judgment is at hand, so this will set all things right again.

[2.] To try our faith in more particular promises. The Lord hath promised to provide for the health and credit of his people; so far he hath promised for their safety, and their daily bread for their maintenance, and any earthly blessing that is good for us. Now the Lord will see if we can trust him with our credit as well as for other things: Ps. 119:42, 'So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me; for I trust in thy word.' I say, the Lord hath in his covenant undertaken to preserve a Christian in all his interests and

concernments, so far as shall be for his glory and our good, and so far we receive it. And a Christian, when he gives up himself to God, gives up everything he hath to God in a way of consecration to God's use. God is the guardian of my body and soul; I give up my estate and life that he may watch over me night and day, and I give up my name and credit: Ps. 31:20, 'Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues;' that the Lord may take a charge of our names as well as our persons and estates. Now, the Lord requires a trust in us according to the extent of the covenant, that is to say, a waiting, a confidence, that our lives are not in man's power, that he can turn the hearts of men, and give you favour in their eyes, when it is for his glory and your good: Ps. 37:5–7, 'Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him; commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.' There is the trust that is required. Oh! many times we seem to lose our estimation amongst men, and to be buried under calumnies and reproaches; but it will not be long. Your person and cause may be obscured, it may have a winter night of trouble; but a morning of resurrection, both of persons and names, will come; it will be brought forth as the noon-day. The Lord is able to do this; the integrity of your hearts will be made known, and you will be absolved by God. Our Lord Jesus was a pattern to us of this. Christ, when foul crimes were laid to his charge by his slanderers—they had charged him with compliance with Satan, with blasphemy and sedition—what doth he do? The apostle will tell you: 1 Peter 2:23, 'He committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.' There is the faith of Christ; and therefore God will try this faith, whether we can with confidence and willingness deliver ourselves to the will of our heavenly Father and righteous Judge; whether we can resign up ourselves to him, to be disgraced or honoured as he shall think fit. When we commit and submit, perfectly resign up ourselves to the will of God, in confidence of his righteousness and faithfulness in Christ, then we behave ourselves as Christians.

[3.] God will try our faith in the eternal recompenses, whether we do so believe the glory of heaven, the glory which shall be revealed in us in the other world, that we can be contented to be humbled and prepared for it by the reproaches of the present world: Mat. 5:11, 12, 'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.' Why? 'Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.' Oh! it is enough we shall have glory hereafter. Your time is now to be tried with dishonour, reproach, contempt, but hereafter to be honoured. And the heirs of promise are described to be those who, 'by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.' A Christian is not destitute of natural affections; he prizeth honour, but he prizeth it at the lowest rate; he looks for the glory, honour, and immortality that is in the other world, not in the fleshly vain respects of this world; and therefore now we are tried whether it be enough to us that we shall have glory hereafter, and here we are willing to take what the world will afford us. Thus God will try our faith.

2. God will try our mortification and deadness to worldly credit. The heart is never sincere with God until it be so. Hypocrites are proud, self-conceited, they must be honoured among men. Now this is such an evil spirit, that Christ makes it incapable of faith; for, John 5:44, 'How can ye believe, that seek for glory one of another?' when we must have glory one from another, else our hearts are exceedingly troubled. Oh! it shows we are not so dead, at least as we ought to be, to credit in the world, to have the glory that comes from God only, his image implanted in us, the testimony of his love to our souls all clear between God and our souls; and he is not upright whose peace and tranquillity of spirit doth depend upon man's speeches and judgment rather than God's, 'For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth,' 2 Cor. 10:18. Men

cannot defend thee if God will condemn thee; they cannot condemn thee if God acquits thee. They that run a race regard not what the standers-by say, but the agonothetes, the great judge of the sports, he that was to give them the garland, what he would determine and decide in the case. So it is in your running, working, and striving; no matter what the world saith; their applause will not shelter you from God's judgment, nor will their condemnations or reproach expose you to God's wrath. Look to the Judge of all things; and we should be content with that, 'He is approved whom the Lord approves;' 2 Cor. 1:12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience.' What is the great matter of joy to him? The good word of men? No; he hath studied to approve himself to God, therefore should not be troubled overmuch. Peace of conscience is better than the applause of the world; certainly a man is not fit to have so divine a plant grow in his soul till he come to live in his privilege. He lives not to opinion, but lives to God's approbation.

3. Another thing God will try is our patience. We should prevent reproaches as much as we can, but by a holy conversation may bear them when we cannot avoid them: Ps. 109:4, 'For my love they are my adversaries, but I give myself unto prayer.' That was David's exercise, the revenge he took upon them, to pray to God for them. The Lord will try whether we have this meek humble patience, 2 Sam. 16:7. When Shimei went about railing to the peril of his life, 'Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial,' and reproached him for being treacherous to the house of Saul, and Abishai would have taken away his head; 'No,' saith David, 'let him alone; God hath bid him curse.' A mad dog that biteth another makes him as mad as himself. Now it should not be so with Christians; if they bark or bite at us, yet we should possess our souls with patience. It is a time of reproach and rebuke, a time wherein God will humble his people; therefore we should expostulate the case with the Lord,

and humble ourselves before him, and see what is the matter; God hath disposed this by his providence. We would revenge ourselves of those that reproach us if it were in our power; but David had meekness and patience that would not permit it. God will discover the patience of his servants, say the apostles: 1 Cor. 4:13, 'Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat; though we are set forth as the filth of the world, and are the off-scouring of all things unto this day;' the word is, the sweepings of the city, that are fit to be carried out of the city, to be swept away, unfit to live among men in civil societies. Christians, there must be a season for the trial of our graces. Now God makes this season for the trial of patience. Such a time as this discovers the strength of grace.

4. Another thing God would have to be tried is our uprightness, whether we can hold on our way, 'through good report and bad report, in honour and dishonour,' as the apostle speaks, 2 Cor. 6:8; still approve ourselves faithful servants of Christ. If you search into the records of time, you shall find many have been discouraged in Christianity because of reproaches that have been cast upon them, for the devil works much upon stomach and spleen. When Tertullian was reproached by certain priests at Rome, he turned Montanist. Now God will try our uprightness. Look, as the moon shines and holds on her course though the dogs bark, so we should hold on our course. Let men talk their pleasure, yet we should abide faithful with God: Ps. 119:22, 'Remove from me reproach and contempt, for I have kept thy testimonies.' David was not unsettled by contempt and reproach, but still kept God's testimonies and adhered to his ways. Some can be religious no longer than they can be so with honour. When reproaches come, when their secular interests are in danger, then they fall off, questioning the ways of God, and unsettling their hearts; that is, to take a revenge upon God himself. Hypocrites take pet, like servants that run away when their master strikes them; but a

good servant will take a buffet patiently, and go about his work still. So when the Lord buffets us by wicked men, still we must follow our work, and go on with God.

Thirdly, The Lord doth it to do you good, to make you better. Reproaches are like soap, that seems to defile the linen, it cleanseth. There is nothing so bad but we may make a good use of it, and a Christian may gain some advantage by it. Or as dung, which seems to stain the grass, but it makes the ground fruitful, and the grass spring up with a fresher verdure. So reproaches are a necessary help to make us more humble, heavenly—to make us walk with a holy awe. This holy revenge we should take upon our enemies, to make us more strict and watchful. The way is, not to contend for esteem, but to grow better, more serious, more faithful in our lives; for this is the way,  $\varphi\mu\omicron\upsilon\nu$ , to muzzle the mouths of adversaries, as the mouth of a dog or wild beast is, 1 Peter 2:15. Passionate returns do but increase sin, but a holy conversation will silence all; and therefore you should confute calumnies, you bind up their mouths thereby. In short, an innocent, meek, unblamable, profitable life will certainly have its due esteem in the consciences of men, do what men can. Therefore, do you go on, and be you the more strict, and then these reproaches will do you good. This is the first use: advice to us what to do in case we be reproached.

Use 2. To those that either devise or receive the reproach: both are very faulty and sinful.

1. First, You that devise reproaches.

[1.] You hazard the repute of your own sincerity: James 1:16, 'If a man seems to be religious, and bridles not his tongue, that man's religion is in vain.' Such men, that are seldom at home, seldom look to the state of their own hearts. Alas! if they were acquainted with

themselves, or their own failings, they would see themselves the worst people in the world. Paul can see himself worse than Judas—I am 'the chief of sinners'—because he hath a greater feeling of his own case. Now, he that is much in judging is seldom within. If a man had a catalogue of his own faults, he would not be so ready to blast others, but say, 'I am the chief of sinners.' Hypocrites have nothing in them but empty shows and appearances. It is a cheap zeal to let fly (and yet this is the religion of a great many) at the miscarriages and faults of others. No; you should rather study your own.

[2.] You rob them of a most precious treasure; for if that of Solomon be true, Prov. 22:1, 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches;' they are the worst thieves that rob a man of his good name. A thief that pilfers and steals anything from you, he is ashamed when found; and should not you be ashamed, that rob a man of a more excellent treasure?

[3.] You offend God, and draw public hatred upon yourselves; for censurers are always looked upon as the pests of the world. It is the devil's business, his proper work; he is called 'the accuser of the brethren,' Rev. 12:10. The devil doth not commit adultery, break the Sabbath, dishonour parents; but he will slander, and accuse, and speak evil. The other are not commandments suited to his nature, but this is a commandment that may suit with angelical nature. We are not to accuse another wrongfully.

Object. But must we in no case, you will say, speak evil of others? I answer—

Sol. 1. Be sure that it be not a downright slander. Now, it is hard to avoid that. If the evil you speak be without cause, then it is against truth; if it be for a light and slender cause, then it is against charity; if it be for things indifferent, or for lesser failings, the indiscretions and



weaknesses of Christians, all this is against that charity that should pass especially between the disciples of Christ: James 4:11, 'speak not evil of one another, brethren.' It is worse in Christians always to be whispering and speaking evil one of another; you gratify the triumphs of hell. In things doubtful, you should judge the best: in things hidden and secret, we cannot take cognisance of them, and we know not the aims and intents of the heart; that is God's work, 1 Cor. 4:5; and it is the devil's work, when the practice be good and fair, to suspect them of hypocrisy. Besides, too, if there be some grievous fault, you do not know what were their temptations, how it may be alleviated by the temptation; still you must 'consider yourselves, lest you also be tempted,' Gal. 6:1; and you do not know whether they have repented of it. The devil is a slanderer. Why? He doth accuse the children of God of what they are guilty of, and they give him too much cause to accuse them. Ay! but after repentance, after they are justified by God, and quitted by the grace of God; so he is a slanderer. So after they have repented, you are insisting on those faults; it is a great evil.

Sol. 2. Speak not of him, but to him. When men are absent it is not fit they should be judged, for then they are not able to make a defence; then it is backbiting. When you thus speak of them, you exchange a duty for a sin, admonition for reproach. It is an unquestionable duty to admonish one another, but it is an unquestionable sin to speak evil one of another.

Sol. 3. If of him, it should be done with tenderness and grief; when they are incorrigible, when they are like to pervert others and dishonour the gospel, or for the manifest glory of God. Oh! if we would but lay restraints upon ourselves in this kind, and never speak of others, but when manifestly the glory of God calls for it. And then it should be with grief: Phil. 3:19, 'Of whom I have told you often,

and now weeping,' saith the apostle. There are a crew of heretics—it is supposed he means the Gnostics—filthy and impure persons, that had debauched the gospel to a licentious life; yet the apostle speaks of them weeping; and therefore we should be very tender of speaking of them. Not out of idleness and for want of other talk; that is tattle, forbidden in many places of scripture; not out of hatred and revenge, for that is malice; there may be malice where the thing you speak is truth; not to please others, that is flattery. But if ever you speak of them (and it should be with these cautions), out of zeal for the glory of God and the good of the church. If men did consider what restraints are laid upon them, they would not so easily fall upon censuring, reproaching, and speaking evil of others. This to those that devise slanders and reproaches.

2. Secondly, To those that receive them. He is a slanderer that wrongs his neighbour's credit, by upholding an evil report against a man. It is hard to say which is worse, railing or receiving: Ps. 15:3, a citizen of Sion is described to be one 'that taketh not up a reproach against his neighbour;' and you shall see, on the contrary, Prov. 17:4, 'A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips, and a liar giveth heed to a naughty tongue.' He is a liar that receives a lie when brought to him, as well as he that brought it; if you love the lie, though you do not devise it. The Lord will curse all them that love lies, as if you did imagine them. All that are acquainted with the matter are accountable to God; you are responsible for your ear, as they for their tongue. It is good to have a healing tongue, to heal that which others wound: Prov. 12:18, 'The tongue of the wise is health,' it is healing; and therefore we should labour to show forth this Christian meekness; as not to devise slanders against others, so not to cherish them, and uphold them against others.

Use 3. If this be a usual and grievous evil, it puts us upon seeking comforts against reproaches. Now, what are the comforts we should seek against reproaches?

1. The witness of a good conscience, for then this will be matter of great joy and great peace to you: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'This is my rejoicing, the testimony of my conscience,' &c. If men reproach you, yet let not your hearts reproach you, Job 27:6. The heart hath a reproaching, condemning power. Conscience is register, witness, and judge; and that which troubles our quiet are these heart-smitings and heart-reproaches. Let any other man in the world be your enemy rather than your own conscience be an enemy. Certainly, where conscience is a friend, if you be innocent, you need not care for the reproaches of others. If they speak against you as faulty, they do but speak against another, whom the slanderer takes to be thee, and in time you will out-wrestle the reproach. Look, as the hair will grow again as long as the roots remain, so though the razor of censure and reproach brings on baldness, the hair will grow again.

2. Another comfort against reproaches is the approbation of God; that should satisfy against all the censures of the world. You have the greatest, best, and wisest on your side, if you have God on your side. The world decries those that profess strictness to God's ways as hypocrites; but you are hypocrites indeed that are troubled at this, if you value man's approbation rather than God's. No; you should be of that temper: Rom. 8:33, 34, 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.' If the Lord will acquit you, no matter what men say. The world's filth may be God's jewels. Many times a contempt doth but manifest God's esteem, and give us a further sense of it. They cannot impose upon God; they cannot burden their cause before the Lord; and therefore, if the Lord hath covered your filth, it is no matter though they rake in it: Ps. 32:1,

'Blessed is the man whose sin is covered,' &c. The Lord will not ask their opinion, their vote and suffrage, whether he shall condemn or acquit you; but he will go according to the laws of his own covenant, and therefore the approbation of God should be enough to you.

3. The consideration of those promises that concern the vindicating our name from contempt. God is wont to scatter the reproaches of his servants as the sun gets from within the cloud, to bring forth their righteousness as the noon-day.

4. Heaven will make amends for all the dishonour that men put upon you. Though the proud scorn you, yet if you keep God's statutes, and go on waiting upon him for eternal life, great will be your glory in heaven.

## SERMON XLV

**Behold, I have longed after thy precepts;  
quicken, me in thy righteousness.—VER.**

**40.**

IN the close of the former verse David had given this commendation of the statutes of God, that they were good. Now, to show that he did indeed account them so, he allegeth his desires after them, 'Behold I have longed,' &c. In the words you have—(1.) A narrative; (2.) A request. The one is used as the reason of the other.

First, In the narrative he expresseth his sincere desire of conforming his heart and ways to the laws of God. Where—(1.) The matter of his plea, 'I have longed after thy precepts.' Not to know them only, but to do them; not to satisfy curiosity, but to understand and obey the will

of God, and to make it the rule of his life and actions. Then (2.) The sincerity of it; that is intimated in the word behold. There is *ecce admirantis*, the behold of admiration, and *ecce demonstrantis*, the behold of demonstration. This last is here to be understood. We must look upon David as appealing to God, as offering himself unto his trial and approbation, who is the best witness and judge of the hearts of men, who knows all things, and cannot be put off with shows, O Lord, he speaks thus to God, 'Behold I have longed after thy precepts.' Now this is spoken here, either as a reason of his own asking, Behold, I seek it not out of custom, or to speak words of course, my soul is in this matter; or as a reason of God's granting; he urgeth his sincere affection to obedience as an argument likely to prevail with God: Lord, I have an ardent desire to serve thee; and certainly this is a great argument with God, for he delights to crown his own work; when he hath given the affection, he will give the deed, and give the performance. Look, as Paul urgeth others to pray for him, 'Pray for me, for I have a good conscience, willing to live honestly,' Heb. 13:18, so David here speaks of himself to God, 'Lord, I have longed after thy precepts;' it is my desire that I may be put into the readiest, fullest way of compliance with thy will.

Secondly, Here is his request. There we have—(1.) The thing prayed for, quicken me; he prays for renewing, exciting grace. (2.) The ground of confidence, In thy righteousness. He had argued before from the disposition of the subject, now he argues from the quality of the donor, 'In thy righteousness.' The law of God is sometimes called righteousness, and so some expound it in that sense, 'Quicken me in thy righteousness;' that is, in the way wherein thou wouldest have me to walk. I think rather it is to be applied not to the righteousness he hath required, but the righteousness that is in God himself. So Ps. 5:8, 'Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness.' Now the righteousness of God is put for the whole perfection of the divine essence; for his

justice, in rendering every one their due, according to his covenant; or for his holiness, for his requiring, approving, delighting in the obedience of the creature; and for his mercy, for giving out grace to men; and for his veracity and faithfulness, in making good his promise, which is a branch of his gospel justice or righteousness; as thou art faithful in making good thy promises, and never wanting to those that make use of thy word, so, Lord, quicken me.

Three points:—

1. To love and long for a holy and perfect and entire subjection to the will of God is a good frame of heart.
2. Those that do indeed long for holiness will see a need of new quickening.
3. Those that would have quickening must seek to God, who hath promised to satisfy them that desire grace to walk with him.

Doct. 1. To love and long for a holy and perfect and entire subjection to the will of God is a good frame of heart.

This may be confirmed by these considerations:—

1. All natures have a propension unto their perfect estate; as fire to go upward, where its place is; and heavy bodies to move downward, where is their seat and rest. Plants have a virtue in their seed which is ever working to produce their flower; beasts have an appetite by which their nature is nourished and preserved; and man hath a desire to prepare and fit him for that which is good and proper for him. The Psalmist tells us that God 'openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing,' Ps. 145:16. There is an instinct in every living thing which leads them towards the sustaining and

perfecting of that nature which they have. That which is called inclination in the creatures without life, attraction of nourishment in plants, and appetite in the beasts, is in man desire. And so now proportionably the new creature, the saints, they have an appetite suitable to their nature: 1 Peter 2:2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby.' Appetite still followeth life, and prepares men for receiving things good for them: Ps. 10:17, 'Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou hast prepared their heart; thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.' A desire of relief vented in prayer prepares and fits us to receive those blessings which are good for us. And therefore, as all natures have a propension to their perfect estate, so those that are new creatures long and vehemently tend towards holiness.

2. Desires set upon holiness are an affection properly exercised, and upon its due object. Desire it is an earnest reaching forth of the soul after good absent and not yet attained. The object of it is something good, and the more truly good it is the more is our desire justified. There are certain bastard goods of a base and transitory nature, as pleasure, profit: we may easily overlash and exceed in these things. But on holiness, which is more high and noble, and is truly good, and of greater vicinity and nearness to our chiefest good than those other things are, we cannot exceed; there the faculty is rightly placed. When we are hasty and passionate for these other things, the heart is corrupted, it is hard to escape sin: Prov. 28:20, 'He that makes haste to be rich cannot be innocent;' and he that loves pleasure is in danger of not loving God, or loving it more than God, 2 Tim. 3:4. But now in holiness there is no such snare: a man cannot be holy enough, nor like enough to God; and therefore here we may freely let out our affections to the full. When our desires are freely let out to other things, they are like a member out of joint, as when the arms hang backward; but here they are in their proper place; this is that which

cannot be loved beyond what it doth deserve. A Christian should set no manner of bounds to himself in holiness, for he is to be 'holy in all manner of conversation,' 1 Peter 1:15, and to be 'perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect,' Mat 5:48. And then desire is not only after that which is good, but after a good absent. Desire ariseth from a sense of vacuity and emptiness. Emptiness is the cause of appetite, and therefore it is compared to hunger and thirst: Mat. 5:6, 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.' So it is in desiring holiness we have not yet attained, Phil. 3:13. There is an indigence and emptiness; we are not already perfect; we want more than we have, and our enjoyments are little in comparison of our expectations; and therefore we should make a swifter progress towards the mark, and with more earnestness of soul should press after that sinless estate we expect. That little we have doth but quicken us to inquire after more, not cloy but provoke the appetite. As a man hath a better stomach sometimes when he doth begin to eat, so when we begin with God, and have tasted of holiness, and tasted of comfort, being brought into a sense of obedience and subjection to God, we should desire more; for certainly he is not good that doth not desire to be better. So that David might well say, 'I have longed after thy precepts.'

3. Consider the nature of these desires; they are the genuine birth and offspring of the soul, motions of the heart, freest from constraint, and so do best discover the temper of it, and show that it is not tainted and biassed with secular and worldly delights. No man can be constrained to will that which he doth not love. Practices may be overruled. Ill men dare not act so much evil as they desire, for fear of shame, punishment, and other by-ends; and good men do not act so much good as they do desire, because of that weak and imperfect state wherein they are. Paul was better at willing than at doing: Rom. 7:18, 'To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is



good I find not.' And other of the saints of God, though they could not plead their exact performance, and their full and effectual compliance with the will of God, yet have pleaded their desires: Isa. 26:8, 'The desire of our soul is to thy name;' Neh. 1:11, 'We desire to fear thy name.' And Peter appeals to Christ's omniscieny, 'Lord, thou knowest that I love thee,' John 21:17. The temper and constitution of their hearts, and the strength of grace, is seen more in desiring many times than in doing. These are the pulses by which you may feel the state of your souls, when there are longing and vehement desires of your souls after God's precepts.

4. Consider the use and necessity of these desires, still the point will be justified. The natural use of desire is to engage us to act, and to keep us up in an earnest prosecution of that which is good for us, notwithstanding the oppositions and discouragements which come between desire and fruition. For all good being hard to come by, unless desires be strongly fixed, men are soon put out of the humour, and so nothing would be done to any purpose in the world. Surely holiness, that is so difficult and distasteful to flesh and blood, would be but little looked after, if there were not strength of desires to keep it up. Therefore is this affection, that we may encounter difficulties and oppositions. As Neh. 4:6, when there were difficulties and straits, it is said, 'They built the wall, for the people had a mind to work;' that is, their hearts were set upon it. So if we had a mind to any excellent thing, it is this mind that keeps us up in the midst of all difficulties and labours. All excellent things are hard to come by; it is so in earthly matters, much more in spiritual. The Lord will have it so, to make us prize them more, for things soon got are little esteemed; as riotous heirs, which know not how to get an estate, lavishly spend it. A man is chary of what is hardly gotten. Jacob prized Rachel the more because he was forced to serve for her so long. So we shall prize heavenly things the more when they cost us a

great deal of diligence and labour to get them. Now, sluggish desires soon fail, but vehement longings keep the heart awork.

5. Consider the issue of these desires. As they come from a good cause, which is the new nature and a new life, for appetite follows life, so they tend to a good effect, are sure of a good accomplishment and satisfaction. God is wont to give spiritual things to those that desire them; there the rule is, 'Ask and have.' It is not so in carnal things: many that seek and hunt after them with all the strength and labour of their souls, at length are miserably disappointed; but all the promises run for satisfaction to a hungry, thirsty, earnest and longing soul, Mat. 5:6. Those that are hungry, and have a strong desire upon them, he will fill, Luke 1:51; and 'open thy mouth wide and I will fill it,' Ps. 81:10; they that open unto him as the thirsty land for the rain. God, that gives velle, to will, will give posse, to do; first the desire, and then the satisfaction; and therefore, where there is this strength of desire, though there may be some failing in other things in our endeavours and performances, yet the Lord will accept it.

6. It argues some nearness to complete fruition, or to full satisfaction in heaven, when we begin to be more earnest after holiness than we were before, and after more of God and his grace and image to be set up in our souls. The more we desire holiness, the more ripe for heaven. This is a rule. The nearer we are to any good thing our hearts are set upon, the more impatient in the want of it; as natural motions are swifter in the end than in the beginning, though violent motions are swifter in the beginning; while the impression of the stone lasts it is swift, but afterwards it abates. So when the soul beats so strongly after God and holiness and larger measures of grace, it is a sign we are ripening apace for heaven. Paul, when he was grown aged in Christianity, then he saith, Rom. 7:24, 'Who shall deliver me from

this body of death?' As what we translate in the Psalms, 'Oh that salvation were come out of Sion!' It is in the Hebrew, 'Who shall give salvation?' So here; it is an Hebraism, Who shall? that is, Oh, that I were delivered! He had many afflictions; he was in perils often, scourged, whipped, persecuted; but he doth not say, Oh, that I could get rid of this troublesome life of affliction! but it was the body of death, the remainders of corruption, was most burdensome to him. The children of God their pulses beat strongly when they are upon the confines of eternity and their full and final consummation. These men begin to ripen for their heavenly state into which God will translate them.

Use 1. For conviction of several sorts of persons that are far from this temper and frame of heart. To begin with the most notorious.

1. Some desire sin with a passionate earnestness: Job 15:16, 'He drinketh iniquity like water.' As a thirsty beast in those hot countries would drink in water, so did they drink in sin. Most wicked men are mad when their lusts are set a-working; and there are some whose constant frame of heart it is, who make haste, who march furiously, as if they were afraid of coming to hell too late; bear down conscience, word, and all before them; that set themselves to do evil with both hands earnestly; that have a strong desire after sin, and are carried out with as impatient longing after sin as the children of God, such eminent ones of God, after holiness.

2. Some have no desire to the ways of God at all: Job 21:14, 'They say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.' The hearts of many say so, though their tongues do not. They are those which shut out the light, that cannot endure a searching ministry, lest it should trouble their lusts, disturb the devil's kingdom; that banish the thoughts of God out of their hearts, lest it

revive the sense of their obligation to duty; that set conscience a-challenging God's right in their souls; that keep off from the light.

3. There are some that are insatiable in worldly things, but have no savour of these heavenly and holy things; they are thirsty for the earth, but 'God is not in all their thoughts,' Ps. 10:4; a little grace will serve their turn, and think there is more ado than needs about heaven and heavenly things. Alas! the very contrary is true; a little of the world will serve their turn here below. If men had not a mind to increase their temptations and snares about a frail and temporal life, why do they make so much ado, when many times they are taken away before they have roasted what they have got in hunting? God takes them away, but their eternal estate is little looked after. Riches qualify us not, but holiness doth qualify us for heaven, and it is our ornament before God and his holy angels. And woe be to us if our poor souls be thrust out naked and unclothed in the other world! Can we hunger and hanker after these lying vanities, and have no hungering and thirsting after grace? A little time will wear out the distinction of rich and poor, high and low; but the distinction of holy and good will continue to eternity. Think of that time when not only the world, but the lust, will pass away. The lust of the world may be gone before we are out of the world, as in sickness and pains; but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever. When we are sick and dying we have some kind of notions and apprehensions of these things; then we can long and wish we had served God more strictly, loved him more strongly, obeyed him more faithfully. We must have these thoughts while we are living.

4. Many desire happiness, but not holiness; comfort, without grace; they would be eased of their present smart, and freed from sin, but not subdued to God. David saith, 'Behold I have longed after thy precepts;' not merely after the comfort of the promises, without

regard to duty. The prophet tells us, Hosea 10:11, that 'Ephraim was like a heifer that was taught, that would tread out the corn, but would not endure the yoke, and break the clods.' In ploughing and harrowing there was very hard work, but no profit; but in treading out the corn (for as we thresh out our corn, so they trode it out by the feet of oxen), the mouth of the ox was not to be muzzled, that there might be a great deal of privilege and profit with it. So Ephraim is like a heifer that is taught. They taught the oxen to tread out the corn; but we will not endure the yoke; that is, we are all for privileges, but neglect obedience. There is so such great difficulty about the end; indeed, we are careless about it; all the business is, we stick at the means: Mat. 6:33, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.' By 'the kingdom of God' is meant, the royal privileges and immunities of the gospel state; and by his 'righteousness' is meant the subjection, the service God requires of us. Now it is good when we seek both, but we must not seek one without the other; God and the world would sooner agree. If God would bestow the privileges of his kingdom, and dispense with the duties, God might have customers enough for comfort, pardon, heaven, happiness. No man is so senseless as not to desire these things in some measure; but they will not come to God's price, they do not desire these things upon God's terms. The hearts of the saints are as earnestly after sanctification when they are acquainted with God, and brought under the power of grace, that holiness may be increased in them; as Rom. 7:24, Oh, that I were delivered from sin! Ps. 119:5, 'Oh, that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!' Not only for the happy part of religion, but they are longing how they may please God, and comply with their manifold obligations to God, and brought to a more perfect conformity to God. Thus the hearts of the saints work.

5. There are many pretenders to a fair respect to God's precepts; they are as much for holiness as for pardon and grace, when it is nothing

so.

[1.] They say they desire to obey God in all things; but can they seriously and sincerely appeal to God for the sincerity and truth of what they say; for so doth David here when he comes to God, 'Behold, I have longed for thy precepts;' or as Peter appeals to Christ, John 21:17, 'Lord, thou knowest that I love thee;' that is to say, when they have revived the sense of the nature of God, and of his all-seeing eye upon their hearts, when they have a due sense of God upon their souls; otherwise they deal deceitfully. Alas! an evil conscience is afraid; it cannot offer itself thus to God when they are serious and think of what they say; they cannot endure to think of his trial, as an eye hurt seeks for a cover to hide it from the light. So when a sense of God is lessened; they may talk presumptuous expressions of their own sincerity; but when they are most serious, and have revived the sense of God upon their hearts, and look upon him as an all-seeing God that searcheth the heart, they cannot say then, 'I have longed after thy precepts.'

[2.] They not only say so, but they think so, that they desire holiness as much as others, when indeed it is no such matter. The deceit lies in this, because they take a wish for a desire, a velleity for a volition.

Quest. What is the difference between a wish and a desire?

Ans. Very great.

1. They that have only a wish for holiness, they love holiness in the abstract and in the general notion, which they hate in the effect; they do not know what is included in holiness and close-walking with God; as John 6:34, 'Evermore give us of this bread of life.' But when Christ told them what it was to have this bread of life, then they were offended. So the Israelites, when they considered holiness and the

service of God in the abstract, Oh! we will serve the Lord, say they, saith Joshua, 'You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a jealous God,' Josh. 24:18, 19. Holiness in the abstract and notion is amiable, and is apprehended as a necessary thing; but now, when it comes to the point of entering in at the strait gate, walking in the narrow way of watching and striving against sin, of rowing against the stream of flesh and blood, of constant communion with God, and diligent attendance upon his holy worship, then they will do nothing. When they take up their duty by the lump, they are well pleased with it, and it is easy to give up to God in the general, but particulars we stick at. Therefore here is the fault in these wishes and velleities, that they do not sufficiently poise their duty.

2. These wishes are hasty and not serious. The commendation of spiritual things, and the representation of their absolute necessity, may produce strange motions for the present; but there is a ground of suspicion, because people all of a sudden become so vehement. The seed that fell into the stony ground forthwith sprang up, Mat. 13:5. Oh! but it needs much wrestling and care to cherish and raise up these serious and fixed desires, and this constant bent of heart towards God. Free-will pangs of natural devotion are soon spent; they are like the morning dew, it suddenly falls, and suddenly dries up. Deut. 5:29, when the people were frightened into a sense of religion, say they, 'All that the Lord hath spoken will we do.' 'They have well said,' saith God, it is a good resolution; 'But oh! that there were such a heart in them that they would fear me always.' Many times there are certain desires and resolutions that have a mortal sincerity in them—that is, we do not dissemble for the present—but they have not a bottom of grace, supernatural sincerity to bear them up.

3. They are not constant desires, but as they are soon up, so soon down. Our Lord Jesus saith, Mat. 5:6, 'Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness;' not only shall be, but are blessed for the present. Mark, it is in the Greek, They that 'are hungering and thirsting;' these participles, as all grammarians know, note a continued act. The fire on the altar was never to go out, Lev. 6:12. There are certain unfixed desires and inconstant motions which for a time are very passionate; as water, seething hot over the fire; take it off, it returns to its natural temper, and it is colder afterwards; so the soul returns to its bias and old bent again towards worldly things. Therefore there must be a constant desire kept up. Such as enjoy the grace of God will still need and desire more. This is the constant temper of their souls; they are always desiring and longing after God's precepts, and more grace to keep his will.

4. In those desires which they seem to have after holiness, here is the defect, they are not laborious. He that longs for God's precepts will do his utmost endeavour that he may yield uniform obedience to God. The scripture placeth much upon the will. Macarius, an ancient practical writer, puts this question, Who are those that have a will to God and heavenly things, and a will to the waters of life? What demonstrations can there be of a will? Nothing but constant labour. If there be such a will as to set you awork, and a desire which makes you diligent. Lazy prayers and feeble endeavours, they do not argue any great strength of desire. Alas! when a man asketh grace indifferently and coldly, and is almost at an even point whether God hears him or no, and doth not seek after that grace, and excite his soul, this man hath not a desire, because it is not laborious. If it be not an operative desire, it is but a velleity; a will it is not. All their prayers are but the ejaculations of speculative fancy, not the products of true affection, for that would be industrious: Prov. 21:25, 'The desire of the slothful killeth, for his hands refuse to labour.' They do



not manifest the life and strength of love in their endeavours that they seem to have in their prayers. Cold prayer they may put up for grace that God may make them better; and they wish it were better with them, and that the Lord would bring them to a greater conformity; but these are not laborious desires. Volens sed nolens, they would, but they will not; that is to say, Oh, that I were at such a place! and never travel the way to get there. So, Would I had learned such a lesson! yet like a lazy boy they set not themselves in good earnest to do it. They seem to will or wish; therefore they are but wouldings, not willings. They do not in good earnest set themselves to get that grace. There is not such an invincible resolution to get through, and a serious industry that they may attain those things they seem to long for.

5. These wishes and desires which are in carnal men are not permanent, that overcome the desire of other things; they will not absolutely set about it to be done whatever it cost them: but such desires as are sincere overcome all earthly desires and delights whatever. They would have grace, but yet would live as they do. It is not such a desire as to control other things, but is controlled by them. The desire of grace is an underling, and mastered by the desire of pleasures or profits of the world, and other delights. Many have a desire, but it is easily subdued, it is not prevalent. Alas! there may a faint desire be stirred up by enlightened conscience, and not by a fruit of a renewed will. A dictate of conscience must be distinguished from a desire of the heart. Illuminated conscience tells them they must grow more holy and heavenly, and wish they were so; but the heart is not perfectly subdued to God. They are directed by their interest; they make not this the main and great interest of their lives. David, when he expresseth his desires, mentions it thus: Ps. 27:4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life;' that is, I will

make this my business, the chiefest matter of my care. But now, they that care not whether they have it, yea or nay, this cannot be a desire: Phil. 2:12, we are bid to 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling.' We must carry on the business of godliness with a great deal of solicitude; but their affections sway them more to other things.

## **SERMON XLVI**

### **Behold I have longed after thy precepts, &c.—VER. 40.**

I COME now to a second use, and that is—

Use 2. To press us to long after holiness and subjection to God.

Two motives:—

First, You shall have these desires granted. For a man to have his will, and whatsoever he desires, what a happiness is that! If his soul be set upon holy things, he shall have what he desires, the Lord will not be wanting: Prov. 10:24, 'The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him; but the desire of the righteous shall be granted.' The desires of the righteous are suitable to the constitution and frame of their heart. He will grant the desires of their souls, Ps. 10:17. A man that makes God his heart's delight shall have his heart's desire: Ps. 37:4, 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desire of thy heart;' his business is to maintain communion with God, and his desires will not miscarry.

Secondly, When they are granted it shall do you no hurt: Prov. 11:23, 'The desire of the righteous is only good, but the expectation of the wicked is wrath.' It is the greatest judgment to wicked men when God gives them a heart to desire a full affluence of earthly comforts. Better to be denied in mercy, than to have our requests granted in anger. But grace will do us no hurt; it will not increase our snares and temptations, as other things do; and therefore can never be given in anger, but always in love. Well, then—(1.) Fix your desires; (2.) See they do not abate in you.

1. Fix your desires and enlarge them to the full. A carnal man may be a shame to a godly man, because he is carried out so earnestly, and with such uniform respect to earthly things: 1 Cor. 12:31, 'Covet earnestly the best gifts;' this is a holy covetousness, and a good diversion from that great sin. As the covetous learn all the arts of thriving, are always 'joining house to house, and field to field,' Isa. 5:8, so should we add faith to faith, and obedience to obedience. Our enjoyments are better, and therefore it should not be followed with a slacker hand. The more a covetous man hath in the world, the more he desires still. Should not we 'forget the things that are behind, and reach forth to the things that are before us'? Still here the taste increaseth the appetite, like sea-water, that wets the palate, but inflames the appetite. Now, shall not we be carried out with a holy covetousness thus to God? See what help and methods of increase they use, how their desire carrieth them on in unwearied diligence: 'They rise early, sit up late, eat the bread of sorrows,' Ps. 127:2; and all to heap up a little pelf to themselves; neglect no occasion of gain: and shall not we make it the business of our lives, and be projecting still how we may grow in grace, and increase in the love of God, and ripen for the heavenly state, and grow more like God every day? You know how sparing they are, and how apprehensive of their losses. Oh! should not the decays of religion go as near us? and should not

we be careful that we do not waste that grace we have received, and that we increase it more and more, and that it thrive upon our hands?

2. Watch against the abatement of your desires, for they are of great use to you in the spiritual life. If a man lose his appetite, the body pineth and languisheth, and strength decayeth. What appetite is to the body, that desire is to the soul; it fitteth us to take in our supplies, and putteth us upon action and diligence; it is the vigorous bent of the soul. Therefore see that it doth not decay. It is said, Rev. 2:4, of the church of Ephesus, that she had 'lost her first love,' and then presently 'left her first works.' Now your desire decayeth when your prayers are less fervent, for prayer is the presenting our desires to God, or vent given to spiritual groans. Therefore keep up your desires: Ps. 27:4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that I will seek after.' When the desires are fixed, endeavours are engaged; our desires must be pursued resolutely. But what shall we do to awaken these earnest longings in our souls, and those desires after holiness?

[1.] Go to God, for he giveth both to will and to do, Phil. 2:13. All is from God; the will is from God, and the deed from God. The will; I bring that to show how you should beg that he would stir up those earnest desires in you, because all affections are but the vigorous motions of the will. Desire is but passionate will, or the will effectually and powerfully excited or stirred up to some absent good. Now the appetite is from God as well as the meat. Desire of grace is an affection above nature, and must be planted in us by the Spirit of God. God gives the desire, and he satisfies it. He 'draws,' then we 'run after him,' Cant. 1:4. He puts this desire in our hearts, then we are carried on with an earnest pursuit after grace.

[2.] Would you have and keep up ardent desires? Do as they do that would keep in the fire, cherish the sparks and blow them up to a flame. There is no man that lives under the means of grace, and under the discoveries of God and religion, but hath his good moods and very lively motions; the waters are stirred many times. Take hold of this advantage, 'Strengthen the things that remain and are ready to die,' Rev. 3:2, and blow up these sparks into a flame. God hath left us enkindling means—prayer, meditation, and the word. Observe where the bellows blows hardest, and ply that course. The more supernatural things are, there needs more diligence to preserve them. A strange plant needs more care than a native of the soil. Worldly desires, like a nettle, breed of their own accord, but spiritual desires need a great deal of cultivating.

[3.] Improve your tastes: 1 Peter 2:3, 'If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious;' and Col. 1:6, 'Since ye knew the grace of God in truth.' When you have got any taste of the worth of these spiritual things, they do not cloy but awaken appetite. Fancy and imagination cannot awaken it so much as this taste. When you have tasted how good and sweet it is to live in a state of conformity, this will make you long for more: Ps. 63:1, 'My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee.' David had been acquainted with the pleasures of the sanctuary, therefore longs for them more. He that hath tasted honey is more affected with it than he that hath only read of it. The Gauls, when they had tasted of the wine of Italy, nothing would keep them from pressing into the country. So when we have tasted of the clusters of Canaan, the first-fruits of the Spirit, this should encourage and whet our appetite.

[4.] Watch over other desires, such as would dull and blunt the edge of the spirit. As iron drives out iron, so one desire drives out another. If we are taken with other things, Christ loseth his sweetness and

relish. Vain worldly desires extinguish those that are spiritual and heavenly: they lose their fervour when prostituted to base objects; your prayers are more flat and cold, for your desires are manifested by prayer and industry. Now your desires will flag and abate when you let out your hearts to the world; therefore you must watch lest the carnal savour and carnal minding increaseth upon you, for then the spiritual minding is quite hindered, impeached, and interrupted: Rom. 8:5, 'For they that after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the spirit the things of the spirit.' When outward things would steal away your hearts and affections from God, remember your first choice: 'Whom have I in heaven but thee?' &c., Ps. 73:25.

[5.] Renew your desires every time you come to God. When you come to the word, come with an appetite; prepare your stomachs always for God's food. They see more of Christ in an ordinance that come most unworthy in their own sense. John 7:37, saith Christ, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.' You shall have Benjamin's portion, and more plentifully filled, when you come with a strong appetite and a holy longing after God and his grace. Christ takes it best when you come with most enlarged desires and raised expectations. Did God ever fail a thirsty soul? Luke 22:15, 'With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I die.' Christ himself hungered and thirsted for us, he longed to give us pledges of his love; and shall not we say, With desire have I desired to taste of thy feast and eat of thy supper? Christ longs to give, and shall not we long to take? Certainly where there is this earnest working of heart towards God, and this desire, the Lord will fill it. The gaping of young ravens, God satisfies it; the Psalmist concludes from thence, Ps. 145:19, 'He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry and will save them.' Naturalists observe the raven exposeth her young ones, and they are merely fed

by providence; but when they gape, the Lord satisfieth them with that food which is convenient for them: much more will he fulfil the desires of the humble.

[6.] Consider your wants, and the fulness that is in Christ, and his readiness to impart unto you.

(1.) Your wants. I speak not now of a total want. Indeed, if those that are under a total want of soul could be brought to consider their condition, the work of conversion would not stick so long as it doth. But I speak now of such a want as remains in the saints after they have begun with God, and been put in a way of obedience. It is not enough that the soul is once come to Christ, but it is the business of our lives; we must be always coming: 1 Peter 2:4, 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious, to whom coming as unto a living stone.' If you have tasted, then come to him for more. They must be frequently renewing the acts of their faith, and stirring up their desires, else there will be no growth of grace, no opposing corruption; for all our strength is in him; there is still something lacking to our faith, and all the graces of the Spirit that are in us.

(2.) Consider what a fulness there is in Christ. This encouraged the prodigal, that in his father's house there is bread enough. So should this encourage us, and awaken our desires; there is enough in Christ if I will but go and take it, and receive from this ever-flowing fountain of grace that God hath set up in our nature: John 1:16, 'Of his fulness have we all received.' Christ hath not only plenitudinem vasis, the fulness of a vessel, but fontis, the fulness of a fountain. The fulness of a vessel, that may be lessened; the more we take from it the less liquor is in it; but the more we take from a fountain, still there is the same overflowing fulness. Such a fulness is in Christ; therefore it is an encouragement to us to repair to him and enlarge

our desires. Look, as it is with beggars in the streets, if they see a poor man meanly clad, they let him alone, but when they see a man of quality and fashion they rouse up themselves and besiege him with importunate entreaties and clamours, and will not let him go until he hath left something with them. Thus should we do. Christ hath enough and to spare; he hath the Spirit without measure; therefore give him not over until he bestow something upon you. He containeth more than we can receive; whatever we get he is not lessened; but, as the sea, though we take never so much water out of it, it remains in the same fulness, so all the saints may have supply for their wants without any deficiency in Christ. The sun hath not less light, though it communicate it freely to the inferior world. Christ is not spent for giving; he hath enough to comfort and quicken us; he needs not our fulness, but emptiness. The prophet provided oil enough to help the widow; she only provided empty vessels. We may be too full for Christ, but cannot be too empty. We may be too full of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency. Christ brings all-sufficiency to the covenant, and we bring all-necessity. Therefore, since there is such an overflowing fulness in him, we must still repair to him that we may receive more.

(3.) Consider his readiness to give it you, therefore come with hungering and thirsting after him: John 6:27, 'Labour for the meat that endureth for ever.' Mind the graces of the Spirit, come to Christ for these things. He was sent into the world, and commissioned for this end and purpose. All the fulness in Christ is for our use. As the sun hath light not for itself but for the comfort of the world, and a fountain hath water not for itself, but for the use of man; so Christ the head is the seat of sense and motion, not for himself, but for his whole body; he is our storehouse for the supply of our wants; and he is clothed, empowered, and invested with offices to do us good. Oh, therefore enlarge your desires! In other things you desire to be full,



why not of grace? Hypocrites are satisfied with a taste; they may taste the good word. Temporaries are contented with a taste; a little religion they must have. Ay! but it is for the honour of Christ that we should be complete in him, and filled with all the fulness of God; and this is his grief when his grace runs waste. Look, as when breasts are full, there is a great pleasure in having them drawn, or children to have them sucking; and the Lord hath as great a desire to impart his holiness as we to receive it. Therefore come to him that we may have grace for grace, that is, for grace's sake. Thus much for the first point, David's appeal to God, 'Lord, I have longed after thy precepts.'

Doct. 2. Those that indeed long for holiness will see a need of new quickening.

So David, 'Quicken me in thy righteousness.' A man would have thought he had been in a lively frame then; yet 'Quicken me in thy righteousness;' excite and enliven me to all acts of obedience.

Here I shall inquire—

1. What is this quickening.
2. Why they that long for God's precepts, and a more perfect and ready subjection to God, are thus earnest for quickening.

First, What is this quickening? I shall not speak at large, for it often occurs in this psalm. It is used in scripture for two things:—

1. For regeneration, or the first infusion of the life of grace, Eph. 2:1, 5. Then we have divine qualities put into us, that do incline and enable us to live unto God.
2. It is put for the vitality and the vigour of grace, when the spiritual life is in good plight. Deadness of heart is apt to creep upon us,

therefore we need renewed excitations and quickenings, that we may serve our God with cheerfulness, liveliness, and zeal. Christians should not only be living but lively: 1 Peter 2:5, 'Ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house. And we read of living grace and lively grace, 1 Peter 1:3. And Christ came into the world that we might not only 'have life,' but 'have it more abundantly,' John 10:10; that is, that we might not only be living, but lively. So that quickening is the actuation of the spiritual life, either in a way of comfort or grace. There may be life where there is not this vigour and this vitality. This quickening is mainly seen in the most operative, and the two necessary graces of the soul to which the gospel is sometimes reduced, and they are faith and love. These are the graces wherein life consists; and as these are acted and excited to God, so we are lively, and when these decay we are dead. When faith is dead all spiritual activity is lost: James 2:26, 'For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.' If men want faith they cannot do anything with any life. So when love is dead, or love grows cold, Mat. 24:12, or when men have any abatement in their love, all languisheth and grows dead in the soul, Rev. 2:4, 5. But on the contrary, it is said we live by faith, Gal. 2:20. Grace is kept in good plight when faith is strong and kept up in any vigour; and Gal. 5:6, 'Faith, which worketh by love.'

Well, this quickening (that I may most sensibly demonstrate it) depends upon these two things:—

[1.] The vitality of grace; that depends upon the degree and measure of our faith. For to speak nothing as to the mystical use, as it is a means of our function of life, but to speak only now as to its moral use, as it acts by the sight of invisible things, keep faith alive, and all is alive in the soul: Heb. 11:1. 'Faith is the evidence of things not seen;' it doth make things absent and things not seen to act as if they

were present, therefore it must needs be a very enlivening thing. Without faith our notions of God, Christ, heaven, and hell are never practical and lively in operation; for this is the evidence of things not seen, and this convinceth us of all spiritual and unseen things, to make them have a force and operation upon the soul. We do but hear, read, and discourse literally until faith puts life into our apprehensions and thoughts of them; for faith will affect us as if we did see the invisible God, and will put the same affections into us as if Christ were crucified before our eyes, Gal. 3:1. What is the reason the mystery of redemption is a wild story to some, lively to others? Faith affects the heart as if he were crucified before our eyes, and his life dropped out from him by degrees. So faith makes us hug and embrace them as if we were in the midst of the glory of the blessed ones. Take it only in its moral use, it is an enlivening thing; and as faith is kept up in any vigour, so the spiritual life is kept up.

[2.] For love. When we have a fresh and warm sense of the love of God upon our souls, we are quickened to do for him answerably to such a love; and our souls reason, What, hath God done so great things for us in Christ, and we do nothing for God again? Then we see we cannot do anything too much. Love hath a law upon the soul that stirs up lively and zealous motions towards God: 2 Cor. 5:14, 'The love of Christ constraineth us;' 1 John 5:3, 'His commandments are not grievous.' Then everything goes on pleasantly, and runs upon its wheels.

Secondly, Why will they that long after God's precepts see a need of quickening?

1. Because of the diseases incident to the renewed estate. There is a constant weakness by reason of indwelling corruption: 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit,' Gal. 5:17; they cannot serve God with that

purity and liberty they desire. Then there are frequent indispositions of soul; sometimes they feel a slowness and loathness and dulness in their souls. Good men may yet be 'slow of heart' to heavenly things, Luke 24:25. Look, as the physician saith weariness that comes of its own accord is a sign of some disease upon us, laziness in duty comes from a remiss will. Sometimes too they find great deadness, that they cannot follow their work so closely, and with that life and earnestness. And sometimes they are in bonds, sometimes in straits, that they cannot enlarge and dilate themselves towards God: Ps. 119:32, 'When thou shalt enlarge my heart, I will run the ways of thy commandments.' Now they that mind their work, they will be sensible of this, and call upon God to quicken them. David complains of the dulness and deadness of his spirit; but many do not, but go on in a cold track of duties, and never regard the frame of their hearts. But now a good man observes the temper of his soul. Most observe their bodies, but few their souls. If their body be ill at ease and out of order, they complain presently; but love waxeth cold, zeal for God and delight in God abateth, men grow weary in well-doing, grow flat, have this remiss will, this deadness and slowness of soul in the love of God, they can satisfy themselves in this frame and temper.

2. Because, too, without this supervening and quickening grace, they can never serve God cheerfully, nor do anything to purpose in the heavenly life; our general work of obedience goes on slowly: Ps. 119:88, 'Quicken me, so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth,' then I shall do good to purpose. But religion is an irksome thing when we are dead-hearted. For particular duties, it is not enough to pray, but it must be with life: Ps. 80:18, 'Quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.' It is not enough to hear, but to hear with life, Mat. 13:15. It is a judgment to be dull of hearing.

3. As it is uncomfortable to themselves to act without quickening grace, so it is a thing very hateful with God, a cold lukewarm temper: Rev. 3:16, 'I will spew thee out of my mouth,' This dull and stupid profession is contrary to God and hateful to God, and such as content themselves with this dead profession, God will spew them out of his mouth. And it is contrary to all the provision God hath made for us. Christ is set up as a fountain of grace in our nature: John 10:10, 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.' The Lord hath justified us by his grace, sprinkled our hearts that we might serve the living God, serve him in a living manner; for titles given to God imply the qualification in hand, Heb. 9:14; and he hath sanctified us, planted grace in our hearts on purpose to maintain the life given us, that there might be a lively hope. And all hearing is for life, Isa. 55:3; we come to lively oracles that we may be quickened. The joys of heaven, redemption by Christ, hell's torments, these doctrines are all quickening truths. And the Lord hath given his flesh, not only to God for a sacrifice, but to us for food that we may live, John 6:51. Therefore to be cold is odious to God.

Use 1. For caution.

1. Let us take heed we lose not quickening through our own default, that we lose not this enlivening grace. We may lose it by any heinous sin of ours, for by grieving the Spirit we bring on deadness upon the heart, Ps. 51:10–12. When David sinned heinously, he begs the Lord to quicken him, and restore his free spirit and the joy of his salvation. The spirit is a tender thing. Every heinous sin is as a wound in the body, which lets out the life-blood, and so we contract a deadness upon ourselves.

2. Take heed of immoderate liberty, or vanities of the world, or pleasures of the flesh, if you would not lose this quickening. The apostle tells us, 1 Tim. 5:6, 'The woman that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.' Pleasures have a strange infatuation; they bring a brawn and deadness upon the heart, and hinder the sprightliness of spiritual and heavenly affections: Ps. 119:37, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way.' These two prayers joined together speak thus much: if you be too busy about vanity, it will bring on a brawn and deadness, and so you need to go to God for quickening. And Christ tells his disciples, Luke 21:34, 'Take heed of being overcharged,' &c. The soul is mightily distempered by too free a liberty of the delights of the flesh; for sufeiting and drunkenness must not be taken there in the gross notion.

3. Let us take heed that we do not lose it by our slothfulness and negligence in the spiritual life: Isa. 64:7, 'There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.' As in a watch one wheel protrudes and thrusts forward another, so when we are diligent all is lively in the soul, but when we are not active and serious in a godly course all goes to rack. An instrument, though it be never so much in tune, yet laid by and hung up, it grows out of order. Wells are sweeter for draining; our graces, if we keep them not awork, lose their vitality; if we do not stir up the grace of God, 2 Tim. 1:6, they are quite quenched; when we grow careless, and neglectful of our souls, we lose this activity of grace.

4. Vain and dead-hearted company and converse are a very great means to damp the spirit and quench the motions of the heavenly life. We should 'provoke one another to good works,' Heb. 10:24. There is great provocation in good examples; but we grow lazy, formal, slight by imitation. Others profess knowledge, yet are vain,

dead-hearted; so are we, we have adopted it into our manners, and leaven one another by this means. There should be a holy contention who should be most forward in the ways of godliness, and excel in our heavenly calling; this keeps Christians lively. Saul, when he was among the prophets, he prophesied; but when we converse with dead-hearted company, it breeds a great damp. You read in Isa. 41:6, 7, how the idolaters encouraged one another—it was when the isles were to wait for the Messiah—that they should not faint, but get up their idols again, after Christ had got a little footing among them; and shall not the children of God encourage, and keep up the life of zeal one in another?

Use 2. Exhortation. It presseth you to divers duties.

1. To see a need of quickening. Though life received gives power to act, yet that power must be excited by God. No creature doth subsist and act of itself. All things live, move, and have their being in God. There is a concurrence necessary to all created things, much more to the new creature: partly because of the internal indisposition of the subject in which it is—alas! grace in the heart is but like fire in wet wood—partly by reason of external impediments; Satan is ready to cast a damp upon the soul, so that the Lord's grace is still necessary for us.

2. Ask it of God. All life was at first in him originally, and it is an emanation from him. The apostle proves Christ's Godhead from this, because 'in him was life,' John 1:4. But is this a good argument? Doth that prove therefore he was God? May we not say of the meanest worm, in it is life? But he means originally; he was the fountain of life, and still he keeps it in his own hands, and conveys it to all creatures every moment, even to the lowest worm: John 5:26, 'For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life

in himself.' The power of quickening and keeping of life belongs to God. He hath it originally from himself, he gives it to others, 1 Tim. 6:13. He that quickeneth all things, worms, men, that gives life to them, is God.

3. Accept this grace in and through Jesus Christ, who hath purchased it for us, who, gave his 'flesh to be meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed,' John 6:55; who rose again that we should 'walk in newness of life,' Rom. 6:4; who ascended to pour out the spirit upon us, John 7:38, 39, Therefore, when we find deadness spiritually, look to receive this life from Christ.

4. Rouse up yourselves. There are considerations and arguments to quicken us. Certainly a man hath power and faculty to work truths upon himself, to stir up the gift and grace that is in us, 2 Tim. 1:6. We must not think grace works necessarily as fire burns, whether we will or not that this will enliven us; but we must rouse and stir up ourselves, as Ps. 42:5. There are many considerations by which we may awaken our own soul; from the love of God, from the hopes of glory; by which Christians should stir and keep their spirits awake and alive towards God and heavenly things.

Use 3. If quickening be so necessary, it presseth us to see whenever we have received anything of the vitality of grace. Sense, appetite, and activity, we may know it by these things: When there is a sense of sin indwelling as a burden—life is strong then when it would expel its enemy, Rom. 7:24—when there is an appetite after Christ and his graces and comforts. When there is a greater activity, a bursting and breaking forth towards religious duties, it is a sign grace is strong in the heart; for the Spirit is to be a fountain of living waters always breaking out, John 7:38. When we are more fruitful towards God, when it is ready to discover itself for the glory of God, then the



heavenly life is kept in good plight. For these things we should be thankful to God, for he it is that awakeneth you.

## SERMON XLVII

**Let thy mercies come also to me, O Lord,  
even thy salvation, according to thy word.**

**—VER. 41.**

IN this verse you have the man of God in straits, and begging for deliverance. In this prayer and address to God you may observe—

1. The cause and fountain of all, thy mercies.
2. The effect or thing asked, salvation.
3. The warrant or ground of his expectation, according to thy word.
4. The effectual application of the benefit asked, come also unto me. The sum of the verse may be given you in this point.

Doct. That the salvation of God is the fruit of his mercy, and effectually dispensed and applied to his people according to his word. There is a twofold salvation—temporal and eternal.

1. Temporal salvation is deliverance from temporal dangers: Exod. 14:13, 'Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.'
2. Eternal deliverance from hell and wrath, together with that positive blessedness which is called eternal life: Heb. 5:9, 'And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation to all them

that obey him.' The text is applicable to both, though possibly the former principally intended.

First, I shall apply it to salvation temporal, or deliverance out of trouble. There observe—

1. The cause of it, 'Thy mercies.' God's children often fall into such straits that nothing but mercy can help them out. All deliverance is the fruit of mercy pitying our misery, but some deliverance especially is the fruit of mercy pardoning our sin, I shall give you some special cases, both as to danger and sin.

[1.] In all cases as to danger, it is mercy which appears, partly because God's great argument to move him is the misery of his people. It is his great argument: Deut. 32:36, 'The Lord will repent for his people;' when he seeth that all their power is gone, and none shut up and left, no manner of defence, but exposed as a prey to those that have a mind to wrong them. It is the only argument: Ps. 79:8, 'Let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us, for we are brought very low.' Mercy relents towards a sinful people, when they are a wasted people. Partly because when there are no other means to help, mercy unexpectedly findeth out means for us. We are at an utter loss in ourselves; God finds out means of relief for us: Ps. 57:3, 'He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up, Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and truth.' When we want help on earth, faith seeketh for help from heaven, and mercy chooseth means for us when we cannot pitch upon anything that may do us good. In these cases doth mercy discover itself as to danger.

[2.] More eminently in special cases, when their sins have evidently brought them into those straits. Many afflictions are the strokes of God's immediate hand, or the common effects of his providence

permitting the malice of men for our trial and exercise; but some are the proper effects of our own sins. We run ourselves into inconveniences by our folly, and even then mercy findeth a way of escape for us. Two ways may our sin be said to bring our trouble upon us—meritoriè et effectivè.

(1.) Meritoriè, when some judgment treadeth upon the heels of some foregoing sin and provocation; as David, when he had offended in the matter of Uriah, see Ps. 3 title, 'A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son,' and the two first verses, 'Lord, how are they increased that trouble me? Many are they that rise up against me; many there be that say of my soul, There is no help for him in God, Selah.' David was deserted of his own subjects, chased from his palace and royal seat by his own son, Absalom. He had defiled Uriah's wife secretly, and his wives were defiled in the face of all Israel, and he driven to wander up and down for safety. God will make all that behold the scandalous sins of his people see what it is to provoke him to wrath. See how he complains, ver. 1, 'Lord, how are they increased that trouble me? Many are they that rise up against me.' You shall find in 2 Sam. 15:12, 'The people increaseth continually with Absalom;' a multitude against him, and the rest durst not be for him, their hearts were hovering. And in another place, 2 Sam. 17:11, all Israel gathered to him from Dan to Beersheba. In what a sorry plight was David when all was against him, and the world thought God was against him! for so it followeth, ver. 2, 'Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God, Selah.' The world counted the case desperate, and insulted over him, now God hath left him; but they mistook fatherly correction for vindicative justice. This was a sad condition; but David goeth to God to fetch him off; though he had drawn this judgment upon himself, yet he deals with him for relief: in such cases mercy is seen. That pit must be very deep when the line of grace doth not go to the bottom of

it. In the face of the temptation David maintaineth his confidence in God: see ver. 3, 'But thou, O Lord, art my shield, my glory, and the lifter-up of my head.' God is counter-comfort to all his troubles. He was in danger, God was his shield; his kingdom was at stake, God was his glory: he was under sorrow and shame, God would lift up his head; to the unarmed a shield, to the disgraced glory, to the dejected an encourager or the lifter-up of his head. Thus when his case was thought desperate doth mercy work for him.

(2.) Effectivè, when we ourselves run into the snare, and be holden with the cords of our own vanity: Prov. 5:22, 'His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins;' when we have been playing about the cockatrice's hole, and have brought mischief upon ourselves. Sometimes God's children have been guilty of this; they have been the cause of their own troubles; as David, when his unbelief drove him to Gath, where he was in danger of his life, and escaped by his dissembling: Ps. 34, entitled, 'A Prayer of David when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed.' And Josiah put himself on a war against Pharaoh Necho, and other such instances. Then if they be saved, it is certainly mercy.

Again, observe, it is not mercy, but mercies; the expression is plural

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[1.] To note the plenty and perfection of this attribute in God. God is very merciful to poor creatures. See in how many notions God's mercy is represented to us. A distinct consideration of them yieldeth an advantage in believing; for though they express the same thing, yet every notion begetteth a fresh thought, by which mercy is more taken abroad in the view of conscience. This is that pouring out God's name spoken of Cant. 1:3, 'Thy name is as ointment poured forth.'

Ointment in the box doth not yield such a fragraney as when it is poured out. God hath proclaimed his name: Exod. 34:6, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth.' God hath given this description of himself, and the saints often take notice of it: Ps. 103:8, 'The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of great kindness;' Joel 2:13, 'Turn to the Lord your God, for he is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil;' Jonah 4:2, 'I knew that thou wert a gracious God, slow to anger, and of great kindness;' and in divers other places. What doth the Spirit of God aim at in this express enumeration and accumulation of names of mercy, but to give us a help in meditation, and to enlarge our apprehensions of God's mercy?

(1.) The first notion is mercy, which is an attribute whereby God inclineth to favour them that are in misery: it is a name God hath taken with respect to us; the love of God first falleth upon himself. God loveth himself, but he is not merciful to himself; mercy respects creatures in misery. Justice seeks a fit object; mercy, a fit occasion. Justice looketh to what is deserved; mercy, to what is wanted and needed.

(2.) The next notion is grace, which noteth the free bounty of God, and excludeth all means on the creature's part. Grace doth all gratis, freely, though there be no precedent debt or obligation, or hope of recompense, whereby anything can accrue to God. His external motive is our misery, his internal motive his own grace. Angels, that never sinned, are saved merely out of grace. Men, that were once miserable, are saved, not only out of grace, but out of mercy.

(3.) The next notion is long-suffering or slowness to anger. The Lord is not easily overcome by the wrongs or sins of the creature. He doth

not only pity our misery—that is mercy, and do us good for nothing—that is grace, but beareth long with our infirmities—that is slowness to anger. Certainly he is easily appeased, and is hardly drawn to punish. Men are ready to anger, slow to mercy, quickly inflamed, and hardly appeased; but it is quite the contrary with God. It is good to observe the difference between God and man. Man cannot make anything of a sudden, but destroyeth it in an instant. When men are to make anything, they are long about it, as building a house is a long work; but plucking it down and undermining it is done in a short time. But God is quick in making, slow in destroying; he made the world in six days. He could have done it in a moment, were it not that he would give us a pattern of labour and order in all things. Now it hath continued for six thousand years, and upwards, as some account. Such is his long-suffering. How many of us has God borne with for ten, twenty, thirty years, from childhood to grey hairs, from the cradle to the grave! The angels were not endured in their sinful state, but immediately cast into hell.

(4.) Kindness and bounty; he is plenteous in goodness. God is good and doth good; his communications to the creature are free and full, as the sun giveth out light and the fountain water. Thus you see reason why mercies are plurally expressed.

[2.] The frequency of it: Lam. 3:23, 'His mercies are new every morning;' that is, renewed; those that concern the body and soul: not only merciful in saving once or twice, but every day pardoneth our new sins, and giveth to his repenting children new comforts. There is a throne of grace open every day, not once a year, Heb. 4:16, as it was to the high priest under the law. The golden sceptre is daily held out, the fountain is ever open, not stopped up nor drawn dry. God keepeth not terms, but keepeth a court of audience; and every day we

may come and sue out our pardon, and take out the comforts we stand in need of.

[3.] The variety of our necessities, both by reason of misery and sin; so that not mercy, but mercies, will do us good. We have not one sin, but many; not one misery, but many; therefore mercies are needful to us.

(1.) Our miseries are many, danger waylayeth us on every side; therefore the mercy of God is said to compass us about: Ps. 32:10, 'He that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about.' On which side soever temptation and trouble maketh the assault, mercy is ready to make the defence: 'Many are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all,' Ps. 34:19. Their troubles are many, from God's own hand, Satan's temptations, malice of the wicked world; therefore 'Let thy mercies come to me.'

(2.) Our sins, so many provocations, transgressions from the womb, Isa. 48:8. After grace received we have our failings; there remains much venom and evil of sin: Ps. 51:1, 'Have mercy upon me according to the greatness of thy mercy; according to the multitude of thy tender mercy blot out my transgressions;' where great sins, great mercies; many sins, many mercies. In that one fact how many ways did he sin? No great sin can be committed alone, but one evil act draweth on another, as links in a chain: adultery, blood; and this by a king, whose duty it was to punish it in others. The more above the stroke of man's justice, the more liable to God's. This when he had many wives of his own. A crime committed out of want is not so heinous as that committed out of wantonness. He took the poor man's one ewe lamb, when he had many flocks and herds. This was done not suddenly and in the heat of passion, but in cool blood, plotting his opportunities, abusing Uriah, his simplicity and sincerity,

to his own destruction. His honesty in not returning to his house should have been a check upon David. He maketh him drunk; drew Joab into the conspiracy and confederacy of his guilt; many perished with Uriah in the attempt upon Rabbah.

[4.] The many favours to be bestowed upon us, as food, clothing, protection, liberty in our service, and after all eternal life; therefore mercies, which giveth us 'all things necessary to life and godliness,' 2 Peter 1:3.

2. The effect, 'thy salvation,' brought about in God's way, and upon God's terms. In temporal safety we must wait for God's salvation, such as God giveth, God alloweth. Better be miserable than be saved upon other terms. Many would be safe from troubles, but they would take their own way, and so turn aside to crooked paths. Those martyrs spoken of in the Hebrews, chap. 11:35, 'would not accept deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection;' to wince under trouble, and fling off the burden ere it be taken off by God without any sin of ours; otherwise we break prison, get out by the window, not by the door. We must take up our cross as long as God will please to have us bear it. David saith, 'Thy salvation.'

3. The warrant and ground of his expectation, 'According to thy word.' God's mercy is to be expected according to the tenor of the promise. How is that?

[1.] No temporal blessing is absolutely to be expected, for God hath reserved the liberty of trying and chastising his children in outward things. The covenant is to be understood with the exception of the cross, and we can have no temporal benefit by it but as it is useful for us: Ps. 89:32, 33, 'I will visit their transgression with a rod, and their iniquity with stripes: nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not



utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.' God will use medicinal discipline, though not satisfy his justice upon them.

[2.] The qualification of the promise must be regarded by those that would have benefit by it. God's covenant is made with his people; it is a mutual stipulation. Many would have comfort; we plead promises of safety with God, but forget promises of obedience to him; as Ephraim would tread out the corn, but not break the clods, Hosea 10:11. There was food: Deut. 25:4, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox which treadeth out the corn.' We mind our own interest more than God's honour.

[3.] A word of promise calleth for faith and trust. Whatever contrariety appeareth in God's providence, God's word must bear up our hearts; it is as a pawn till the deliverance come. God's mercy is the same still; his word calleth for trust. The more we trust and hope in his mercy the better for us: Ps. 13:5, 'I have trusted in thy mercy; my soul shall rejoice in thy salvation;' Ps. 33:22, 'Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, as we hope in thee;' and Ps. 32:10, 'He that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about.' The more clear is your claim when you trust yourselves with him. He is a merciful God, and his word saith he will take care for them that fear him.

[4.] All this trust must be set awork in prayer; so doth David, and so saith the word: Ps. 50:15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify my name;' Jer. 29:11, 12, 'I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord; thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you;' Ezek. 36:37, 'Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.'

4. The effectual application, 'Let thy mercies come also unto me.'

[1.] He beggeth application: 'unto me also.' God is every day scattering his mercies abroad in the world, and David would not be left out of God's care and blessed provision, but have his share also. Esau's words are applicable upon this occasion: Gen. 27:38, 'Hast thou but one blessing, O my Father? Bless me, even me also.' When the earth is full of his goodness, beg your share. God is the Father of mercies; he hath not the less for bestowing, as the sun hath not less light for us because others enjoy it with us. God doth not waste by giving.

[2.] He beggeth an effectual application, 'Let thy mercies come unto me.' The way was blocked up with sins and difficulties, yet mercy could clear all, and find access to him, or make out its way. Let it come to me, that is, let it be performed or come to pass, as it is rendered, Judges 13:12, 'Now let thy words come to pass to us;' Heb. —Let it come; here let it come home to me, for my comfort and deliverance. David elsewhere saith, Ps. 23:6, 'Mercy and goodness shall follow me all my days;' go after him, find him out in his wanderings. So Ps. 116:12, 'What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me?' They found their way to him though shut up with sins and dangers. Thus we see how to plead with God for temporal salvation; we must make grace, and nothing but grace, the ground of our hope, and this according to the tenor of the word.

Secondly, As it is applicable to eternal salvation; and then—

1. The ground of all is mercy, or pity of the creatures' misery. The Lord is not moved to bestow grace upon sinners for any goodness that he findeth in them, or could foresee in them, for he findeth none, and could foresee nothing but what was the fruit of his own grace: Rom. 11:35, 'Who hath given him first, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?' It is the honour of God to begin all

things, as the river oweth all to the fountain, the fountain nothing to the river; as none can give him first, so none can be profitable unto him, for he needeth nothing: Acts 17:25, 'Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.' Nay, we deserve the contrary, to be cast into utter darkness: Ezek. 36:21, 22, 'I do not this for your sakes: I had pity for my name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen;' 1 Peter 1:3, 'Of his abundant goodness he hath begotten us to a lively hope.' We have not a right notion of mercy unless we admire the plenty of it: Eph. 2:4, 'God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, when we were dead in trespasses and sins, hath quickened us with Christ.' There need many mercies from first to last for the saving of a poor sinner; their natural misery is great: Ezek. 16:6, 'When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live.' Their actual sins many: Jer. 14:7, 'Our iniquities testify against us.' The way of their recovery by Christ is mysterious: John 3:16, 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' The course taken for satisfying wronged justice; the application involveth many mercies. The renewing of their natures: Titus 3:5, 'According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.' The preserving of inherent grace against temptations, forgiving many sins after conversion: Isa. 55:7, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon;' Prov. 24:16, 'The righteous fall seven times a day, and riseth up again.' The great eternal good things to be bestowed on them: Jude 21, 'Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.' So that from first to last there is nothing but a concatenation of mercies.

2. The effect, salvation. This properly deserveth to be called so. We are saved but in part before, then from all evils, from the greatest evil, hell. Before we are saved, but we may be troubled again. Now no more sorrow, when all opposition is broken, and God is all in all, and the church presented as a prey snatched out of the teeth of lions; all former things are done away.

3. This dispensed according to the word. Now what doth the word say? When a sinner repenteth, all the iniquities which he hath committed shall be forgotten. There is abuse of mercy noted: Deut. 29:19, 'If he shall bless himself and say, I shall have peace though I walk in the imagination of my heart;' I may go on in sin and cry God a mercy, and there is an end. No; mercy issueth out itself for salvation of men according to the word; these are conclusions contrary to grace: Jude 4, 'There are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness.' The principle is true, but the conclusion is false. Certainly God is merciful, there is no end nor measure nor bank nor bottom in his mercy; but throughout the whole scriptures mercy is only promised to the penitent, and those that come to God by Christ. Take mercy according to the word, according to the analogy of faith, and there is not a more powerful incentive of duty: Ps. 130:5, 'There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared;' Titus 2:11, 12, 'The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;' Rom. 12:1, 'I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.' This is true divinity. The flesh deviseth another doctrine. Let us sin that grace may abound, to make a carnal pillow of God's mercy, that they may sleep securely in sin, yea, a dungcart to carry away their filth.

God is merciful, but to those that count sin a burden and misery; God is slow to anger, but yet angry when provoked: abused patience kindleth into fury, as water, when the mouth of the fountain or course of the river is stopped, breaketh out with more violence. God hath his arrows of displeasure to shoot at the wicked. You must not fancy a God all honey, all sweetness; he is 'the father of mercies,' but so that he is also 'a God of vengeance:' Ps. 68:19–21, 'Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation, Selah. He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. But God shall wound the hairy scalp of his enemies.' The mercy of God is large and free, if men do not make themselves incapable by their impenitency.

4. We must beg—(1.) The application of these: 'to me also:' 'We have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful kings,' 1 Kings 20:31. Now we would feel it: 1 Tim. 1:15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' Wind in ourselves within the covert of a promise, enter at the back-door of a promise; there comes virtue from Christ if but touched. The woman came behind him and touched the hem of his garment; so we must seek the application of this virtue. (2.) Effectual application, 'Let it come unto me.' Mercy cometh unto us, or we shall never come unto it, 1 Peter 1:10. The grace that cometh to us, χάρις ἐρχομένην, the grace which is brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, God's grace, is brought home to our doors; we seek not after it, but it seeketh after us. Salvation has gone forth, saith the prophet, to find out lost sinners: 'Wisdom hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the high places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither,' Prov. 9:3, 4. God sends the gospel up and down the world to offer his grace to men; it worketh out its way.

Use. Here is encouragement and direction to poor creatures how to obtain God's mercy for their comfort.

1. Encouragement. Mercy doth all with God; it is the first cause, that setteth every thing awork.

[1.] Mercy is natural to God: 2 Cor. 1:3, 'Father of mercies.' God is not merciful by accident, but by nature; the sun doth not more naturally shine, nor fire more naturally burn, nor water more naturally flow, than God doth naturally show mercy.

[2.] It is pleasing to him: Micah 7:18, 'Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.' Judgment is called 'his strange work,' Isa. 28:21, 'That he may do his work, his strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act.' Primitive acts he is forced to, but he rejoiceth to do good, as live honey droppeth of its own accord.

[3.] It is plentiful in God; he is rich in mercy, abundant in goodness and truth. Thy sins are like a spark of fire that falleth into the ocean; it is quenched presently. So are all thy sins in the ocean of God's mercy; there is not more water in the sea than there is mercy in God.

[4.] It is the great wonder of the divine nature. Everything in God is wonderful, especially his pardoning mercy. It is no such great wonder in God that he stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain, since he is omnipotent; that he formed the earth or the waters, since he is strong; that he distinguished times, adorned the heavens with so many stars, decked the earth with such variety of plants and herbs, since he is wise; that he hath set bounds to the sea, governeth the waters, since he is Lord of all; that he made man a living creature, since he is the fountain of life; but that he can be merciful to sinners,

infinitely merciful when infinitely just. There is a conflict in the attributes about us, but 'mercy rejoiceth over judgment,' James 2:13; that he is so gracious and condescending, when his first covenant seemed to bind him to destroy us; that he that hateth sin is so ready to forgive it, pardoneth it so often, and punisheth it so seldom.

[5.] He is communicative; it is 'over all his works,' Ps. 145:9. Not a creature but subsisteth by God's mercy; he loveth man and beast, Ps. 36:6; and 1 Tim. 4:10, 'He is the saviour of all men, especially of those that believe.' The whole earth is full of his goodness: Lord, show it to me also. 'He heareth the cry of the ravens.'

2. To direct us how to sue for it in a broken-hearted manner. There are two extremes—self-confidence and desperation. Self-confidence challengeth a debt, and despair shutteth out hopes of mercy. A proud Pharisee pleads his works, Luke 18:11. Cain saith, Gen. 4:13, 'My punishment is greater that I can bear.' The middle between both is the penitent publican: Luke 18:13, 'He stood afar off, and would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner.' Go to him; that which with men is the worst plea, with God is the best.

## **SERMON XLVIII**

**So shall I have wherewith to answer him  
that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy  
word.—VER. 42.**

IN the former verse we saw the man of God begging for deliverance; or temporal salvation, from the mercies of God according to his word. Salvation belongeth to the Lord, and his mercy can pardon great sins, and fetch us off from great extremities, and that according to the word of God. He had boasted of this. There is his request; here is his argument, from the use and fruit of his deliverance; he should have something to reply to the scoffs and mocks of wicked men, who insulted over him in his distress and calamity. He had spoken of great things or the promise, and now desireth the promise to be made good, that he might have an answer ready against their reproaches, 'So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me.'

But hath a child of God nothing to answer to a wicked man before salvation cometh? Ans. Yes; a child of God could answer them of the principles of faith; but they must have instances of sense. He could say that his 'God is in heaven, and doth whatsoever he pleaseth;' that he is 'the shield of his help, and sword of his excellency,' Deut. 33:29. Weapons offensive and defensive enough yet left; but the business is not what is an answer in itself, but what answer will satisfy them? for they that have no faith must be taught by sense. When we urge principles of faith, unless their senses hear, feel, see, they will not regard them. Then their mouths are stopped when God doth own his people from heaven. They count faith a foolish persuasion, hope a vain expectation, and inward supports and comforts fantastical impressions; as if men did feed themselves with the wind. But God's



salvation would answer for him, and some sensible providences be a real confutation.

Observe three things:—

1. The ground of David's comfort, I trust in thy word.
2. The enemy's insultation thereupon, intimated in these words, him that reproacheth me. They scoffed at his trust in God, as if he would not bear him out in his strictness.
3. The request of the Psalmist, that God would confute and stop their mouths by making good his promises to him, so shall I have wherewith to answer him. Points:—

Doct. 1. It is our duty to trust God upon his word.

Doct. 2. Those that do so must look to be reproached for it.

Doct. 3. God making good his promises confuteth their reproaches and insultations.

Doct. 4. God will therefore make them good, and his people may expect and beg deliverance to that end.

Doct. 1. It is our duty to trust God upon his word. The act of trust is spoken of with respect to a twofold object—the word and God; the one more properly noteth the warrant of faith, the other the object. Both are mentioned together, John 17:20, 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.' In other places sometimes one is mentioned, sometimes the other; trusting in God and trusting in the word of God; but whenever the one is mentioned the other is included. To trust in God without his word is a foolish and groundless presumption, and the word

without God is but a dead letter. It is not the conveyances merely that a man liveth upon, but the lands conveyed by them.

First, What is this trusting in God?

Ans. An exercise of faith, whereby, looking upon God in Christ through the promises, we depend upon him for whatsoever we stand in need of, and so are encouraged to go on cheerfully in the ways wherein he hath appointed us to walk. It is a fruit of faith, and supposeth it planted in the heart, for an act cannot be without a habit. I suppose a man to have this grace before I require the exercise of it. And it looketh upon God in Christ as the fountain of blessings, for otherwise God, to the fallen creature, is not an object of trust, but horror; as 'the devils believe and tremble,' James 2:19; and that may be the reason why the sons of men are said to 'put their trust under the shadow of his wings:' Ps. 36:7, 'How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men shall put their trust under the shadow of thy wings;' and Ps. 57:1, 'My soul trusteth in thee, yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.' In which there is supposed to be an allusion not only to the feathers of a hen spread over the chickens, but the out-stretched wings of the cherubim over the mercy-seat, which was a type of Christ, who is therefore called ἱλαστήριον, a propitiation, as also the mercy-seat, Heb. 5:8, with Rom. 3:24, 'Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.' The mercy-seat, or God offering himself to be reconciled in Christ, is an open sanctuary for distressed souls to fly unto. This doth draw our hearts to him through the promises. These are the holdfast which we have upon God, the sacred bands which he has taken upon himself, the rule and warrant of faith which shows how far God is to be trusted. Our necessities lead us to the promises, and

the promises to Christ, and Christ to God, as the fountain of grace; and therefore we put these bonds in suit; we turn them into prayers; and then we have free leave to challenge him upon his word: Ps. 119:99, 'Remember thy word unto thy servant, wherein thou hast caused me to hope.' Therefore, to bear up our hearts, God hath not only promised us, in the general, that he will 'never fail us nor forsake us,' Heb. 13:5, 'And all things shall work together for good,' Rom. 8:28; that he will be with us in fire and water, Isa. 43:2, and that he will be 'a sun and a shield, and give us grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold,' Ps. 84:11; but also, in particular, hath multiplied and suited his promises to all our necessities, that when we come to the throne of grace we may have a promise ready. A general intimation is not so clear a ground of hope as a particular and express promise: the more of these we have, the more explicit are our thoughts about God's protection, and the more are our hearts fortified and borne up in praying to him and waiting upon him. *Chirographa tua injiciebat tibi, Domine*—whose are these? Lay up his words in thy heart, Job 22:22. The more of these the more arguments in prayer. We depend upon him for all that we stand in need of. Herein is the nature of trust seen, in dependence and reliance upon God, that he will supply our wants in a way most conducive to his glory and our good. Now, this depending on God must be done at all times, especially in a time of straits and difficulties. At all times: Ps. 62:8, 'Trust in the Lord at all times.' It is an act never out of season, but especially in a time of fears, misery, and distress: Ps. 56:3, 'At what time I am afraid, I will put my trust in thee.' In prosperity and adversity we are to depend upon God, and to make use of him in all conditions: Ps. 91:9, 'Thou shalt make the Most High thy refuge, and my God thine habitation.' A refuge is a place of retreat and safety in a time of war, and a habitation the place of our abode in a time of peace. Whatever our condition be, our dependence must be on God. When all things are prosperous, God

must be owned as the fountain of our blessings, all our comforts taken out of his hand, and that we hold all by his mercy and bountiful providence. Because of our forfeiture by sin, and the uncertainty of these outward comforts, and the continual necessity of his providential influence and support, the heart must still be exercised in the acknowledgment of God and his gracious hand over us; and so the heart is not enticed by our outward comforts, but raised by them. Indeed, in some cases, it is harder to trust God with means than without. When there are visible means of supply, the heart is prone to carnal confidence. Good Paul was in danger: 2 Cor. 1:9, 'We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead.' But then in adversity, when kept bare and low, then is a time to show trust; how hard soever our condition be, grounds of confidence are not lost: Zeph. 3:12, 'I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.' Every man thinketh trusting in God easy when things go well with him; but indeed he trusteth in other things; he eateth his own meat, and weareth his own apparel, only God carrieth the name of it. But now, when we are without all comfort and encouragement from the creatures, as David, when he was left alone, 'Refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul: I cried unto thee, O Lord, and said, Thou art my refuge and portion in the land of the living,' Ps. 142:4, 5. When men fail, God never faileth; when riches take wing, and worldly friends forsake us, then is a time for trust and dependence upon God. It is the end of providence that we should have the less comfort in the creature that we may have all in God. Now we are to depend on God for whatsoever we stand in need of, as at all times, so for all things, temporal and spiritual mercies; for God will withhold no good thing from us. He hath undertaken not only to give us heaven and happiness in the next world, but to carry us thither with comfort, 'that we may serve him without fear all the days of our lives,' Luke

1:75. His providence concerneth the outward and inward man, and so do his promises. A whole believer is in covenant with God, body and soul, and he will take care of both. But all the difficulty is how we ought to depend on him for temporal supplies.

1. It is certain that we ought not to set God a task to provide meat for our lusts: Ps. 78:18, 'And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lusts.' Carnal affections and hopes do but make trouble for ourselves. Though it be the ordinary practice of God's free grace and fatherly cares to provide things comfortable and necessary for his children, whilst he hath work for them to do, yet he never undertook to maintain us at such a rate, to give us so much by the year, such portions for our children, and supplies for our families. We must leave to the great Shepherd of the sheep to choose our pastures, bare or large; and he that will depend upon God must be sure to empty his heart of covetous desires, and be contented with our lot, if we would cast ourselves upon his providence: Heb. 13:5, 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' We do but ensnare and perplex our own thoughts while we would reconcile the promises with our lusts, and crave more than ever God meaneth to give.

2. It is as certain that we ought not to be faithless and full of cares about these outward supplies: Mat. 6:23, 'Take no thought what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or wherewithal ye shall be clothed;' because, if we had no promises, there is a common bounty and goodness of God which is over all his, works, and reacheth to the preservation of the smallest worm, decketh the lilies, feedeth the ravens and the fowls of the air; and certainly more noble creatures, such as men are, may expect their share in this common bounty; how much more when there is a covenant wherein God hath promised to

be a father to us, and temporal blessings are adopted and taken into the covenant as well as other blessings. Will not he give that to children which he gives to enemies, to beasts and fowls of the air? You would count him a barbarous and unnatural father that feeds his dogs and hawks, and lets his children die of hunger; and can we without blasphemy think so of God?

3. As we ought not, on the one hand, to think God will supply our lusts, nor, on the other hand, distrust his care of necessaries, so we cannot be absolutely confident of particular success in temporal things; for they are not absolutely promised, but with exception of the cross, and as God shall see them good for us. God reserved in the covenant a liberty both of showing his justice and his wisdom; his justice, in scourging his sinning people: Ps. 89:32, 'He will visit their iniquity with rods, and their transgression with scourges.' The world shall know God doth not allow sins in his own children. Sin is as odious to God in them as others, yea, more; and therefore they feel the smart of it. The liberty of his wisdom: Ps. 84:11, 'The Lord God is a sun and a shield: the Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly;' Ps. 34:9, 10, 'O fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him: the young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that fear the Lord shall not want any good thing.' They may want many comforts, but no good thing. Good is not determined by our fancies, but God's wisdom. Well, then, we cannot expect a certain tenure of temporal happiness; there is great danger in fixing a deceitful hope; much of the subtlety of Satan is to be seen in it, who maketh an advantage of our disappointments, and abuseth our rash confidence into a snare and temptation to atheism and the misbelief of other truths.

4. The dependence we exercise about these things lieth in committing ourselves to God's power, and referring ourselves to

God's will. He is so able that he can secure us in his work, so good, that we should not trouble ourselves about his will, but refer it to him without hesitancy, which, if we could bring our hearts to it, it would ease us of many burdensome thoughts and troublesome cares: 1 Peter 4:19, 'Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator;' Prov. 16:3, 'Commit thy ways unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.' Put yourselves into God's hands, so trusting him with the issue of our affairs, though we know not how it will fall: 1 Chron. 19:13, 'Let the Lord do what is good in his sight;' 1 Tim. 4:10, 'Therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the saviour of all men, especially of those that believe;' and so are encouraged to go on cheerfully with their duty. Trust in God is not idle expectation or a devout sloth, but such a dependence as giveth life to our service, that we may go on cheerfully, without disquiet in our work, and in ways wherein he hath appointed us to walk. The law gives protection to those that travel on the road, not in byways: 'He shall keep thee in all thy ways:' in viis, non in præcipitiis. Otherwise you seek to draw God into a fellowship of your guilt, and do 'make him serve with your iniquities,' Isa. 43:24—he was doubly censured among the heathen that took a lamp from the altar to steal by—to make God's providence subservient to the devil's interest: 1 Peter 4:19, 'Commit your souls to God in well-doing.' God never undertook to protect us in the devil's service.

Secondly, Reasons why it is our duty.

1. Trust, as it implieth recourse to God in our necessities, is necessarily required in the fundamental article of the covenant, in the choice of God for your God. Nature teacheth men in their distress to run to their gods: Jonah 1:5, 'The mariners cried every man to his

god.' It immediately results from the owning of a God, that we should trust him with our safety; much more when taught thus to do, and how to do so in the word.

2. Else there can be no converse with God. Truth is the ground of commerce between man and man; so our dependence, which is built upon God's fidelity, is the ground of commerce between God and us. Man fell from God by distrust, by having a jealousy of him; and still the evil heart of unbelief doth lead us off from God: Heb. 3:12, 'Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.' But the more we believe him, the more we keep with him. God doth not give present payment, nor govern the world by sense; therefore faith is necessary: 2 Cor. 5:7, 'For we walk by faith, not by sight.' Sight is for heaven, faith for the present dispensation. We are now under sense, and that will mislead us. Reason is either refined by faith, or depressed by sense.

3. Consider whose word it is. God's word is the signification of his will who is merciful, able, true. (1.) There is benignity and goodness, by which he is willing to help poor creatures, though we can be of no use and profit to him. The hen receiveth no benefit by the chickens, only her trouble of providing for them is increased; but they are her own brood, therefore she leadeth them up and down that they may find a sustenance: so doth God to the creatures. We are the work of his hands. therefore he pitieth us, and is willing to save us; and not only so, but carried us in the womb of his decree from all eternity. (2.) His truth and fidelity is laid at pawn with the creature in the promises: Ps. 138:2, 'Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.' He standeth much on his truth, is punctual in his promises. It is a great disgrace done to God if we do not trust him upon his word; we 'make him a liar:' 1 John 5:10, 'He that believeth not God hath made him a liar,' and so not God. (3.) He is able to make it good; his



word never yet found difficulty: 'He spake the word, and it was done.' There is the same power that goeth still along with his word. If he say he will do this, who can let? Therefore, none that ever yet trusted in God were disappointed: Ps. 22:5, 'They trusted in thee, and were not confounded.'

#### 4. From the benefits of this trust.

[1.] This fixeth and establisheth the heart against all fears, which so often prove a snare to us: Ps. 112:7, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' Ill news and cross accidents falling out in the world do not dismay him, because he looketh higher, because he hath set God against men, the covenant against providences, eternal things against temporal; he is not fearless, yet his heart is established and fixed.

[2.] It allayeth our sorrows, and maketh us cheerful in the midst of all difficulties and discouragements: Ps. 13:5, 'I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation;' so Ps. 52:8, 'I am like a green olive-tree, for I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.' As some trees are green in winter; this will make a man flourish notwithstanding opposition, and all the bitter cold blasts of trouble and worldly distress.

[3.] It quiets the heart as to murmurings and unquiet agitations of spirit, to wait God's leisure. When there was a storm in David's spirit, he allayeth it thus: Ps. 42:5, 'Why art thou disquieted, O my soul? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him.' On the contrary, murmuring, impatience, and vexation is the fruit of distrust: Ps. 106:24, 25, 'They believed not his word, and murmured in their tents.' They that distrust God's promise fall a quarrelling with his providence. Did we believe that the wise God is still carrying on all things for our good, we would submit to his will.

[4.] It banisheth and removeth far from us distracting cares and fears; these are a great sin, a reproach to our heavenly Father: Mat. 6:25, 'Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, nor what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on;' and ver. 32, 'After all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.' As if your children, when you are able to maintain them, should distrust your allowance, and beg their bread from door to door. We are forecasting many things, take God's work out of his hands, and are anxious in inquiring what we shall eat, what we shall drink, what shall become of such a business and affair. Now, how shall we be eased of these tormenting thoughts? Prov. 16:3, 'Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established;' 2 Chron. 20:20, 'Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established.'

[5.] It keepeth us from warping and turning aside to crooked paths. As long as we are persuaded that God will maintain us by honest and lawful means, we are kept upright with God; but an unbelieving person makes haste; right or wrong, he will be his own carver. Men, if they have not faith enough to trust God in an ordinary course of providence, think God is a bad pay-master, and therefore take up with present things: Zeph. 3:2, 'She obeyed not my voice, she trusted not in the Lord;' that was the reason of her corruption, oppression, and deceit; this was the reason why they rose up against Moses, and would go back to Egypt; they would not believe God could maintain them in the wilderness. Warping and declining from God cometh from want of faith.

The first use is to persuade us to trust in God upon his word. I will direct you—

1. As to the means.

## 2. The nature of this trust.

### 1. As to the means. If you would do so—

[1.] Know him: Ps. 9:10, 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.' If God were better known, he would be better trusted: 2 Tim. 1:12, 'I know whom I have believed.'

[2.] Get a covenant interest in him. If our interest be clouded, how can we put promises in suit? But when it is clear, you may draw comfortable conclusions thence: Ps. 31:14, 'I trusted in thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my God;' Ps. 23:1, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;' he will provide for his own: Lam. 3:24, 'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.'

[3.] Walk closely with him: Micah 3:11, 'The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money; yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? None evil shall come upon us.' God will shake them as Paul did the viper. Shame, fear, and doubts do always follow sin. Will a man trust him whom he hath provoked? Doubts are the fumes of sin, like vapours that come from off a foul stomach. If we mean to make good and keep a friend, we will be careful to please him. A good conversation breedeth a good conscience, and a good conscience trust in God.

[4.] Observe experiences, when he maketh good his word: Ps. 18:30, 'As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried; he is a buckler to all them that trust in him.' All these providences are confirmations that feed and nourish faith: Ps. 56:10, 11, 'In God will I praise his word; in the Lord will I praise his word: in God have I put my trust; I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.'

2. As to the nature of this trust. Let me commend to you—

[1.] The adventure of faith: Luke 5:5, 'At thy word we will let down the net.' At thy command; when we cannot apply the promise, venture for the command's sake; see what God will do for you, and what believing comes to.

[2.] The waiting of faith, when expectation is not answered, and you find not at first what you wait for; yet do not give God the lie, but resolve to keep the promise as a pawn till the blessing promised cometh: Isa. 28:16, 'He that believeth maketh not haste.' It is carnal affection must have present satisfaction: greedy and impatient longings argue a disease. Revenge must have it by and by; covetousness waxeth rich in a day; ambition would rise presently; lusts are earnest and ravenous; like diseased stomachs, must have green trash.

[3.] The obstinacy and resolution of faith. Resolve to die holding the horns of the altar; you will not be put off; as she cried so much the more, and the woman of Canaan turned discouragements into arguments: Job 13:15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.'

[4.] The submission and resignation of faith: Mat. 6:33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, and all these things shall be added to you.' Set your hearts upon the highest interest, make sure of heaven, and refer other things to God; be at a point of indifferency for temporal supplies.

[5.] The prudence of faith. Settle your mind against present necessities, and for future contingencies leave them to God's providence: Mat. 6:34, 'Sufficient for each day is the evil thereof.' Children, that have to allay present hunger, do not cark how to bring

the year about; they leave that to their father. Manna was to be gathered daily; when it was kept till the morning, it putrified.

[6.] The obedience of faith. Mind duty, and let God take care of success. Let God alone with the issues of things, otherwise we take the work out of his hands. A Christian's care should be what he should be, not what shall become of him: Phil. 4:6, 'Be careful for nothing;' and 1 Peter 5:7, 'But cast your care on him, for he careth for you.' There is a care of duties and a care of events. God is more solicitous for you than you for yourselves.

Use 2. Do we thus trust in the Lord? All will pretend to trust in God, but there is little of this true trusting in him in the world.

1. If we trust God we shall be often with him in prayer, Ps. 62:8, 'Trust in the Lord at all times; pour out your hearts before him;' 2 Sam. 22:2-4, 'The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, the God of my rock; in him will I trust; he is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my Saviour; thou savest me from violence; I will call on the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from mine enemies.' We act our trust at the throne of grace; encourage ourselves in God.

2. It will quiet and fix the heart, free it of cares, fears, and anxious thoughts: Phil. 4:6, 7, 'Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Jesus Christ;' Ps. 94:19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.'

3. A care to please, for dependence begets observance. They that have all from God will not easily break with him.

Doct. 2. Those that do trust in God must look to be reproached for it by carnal men.

1. There are two sorts of men in the world ever since the beginning—contrary seeds: Gen. 3:15, 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.' Some born of the flesh, some of the spirit; the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; some that live by sense, some by faith: ever it will be so. And there is an enmity between these two, and this enmity vented by reproach: Gal. 4:29, 'But as he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even so it is now;' that persecution was by bitter mockings. So Ishmael: Gen. 21:9, 'Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.'

2. The occasion, from their low condition; hence they will take liberty to mock at their interest in God, and to shame them from their confidence, as if the promise of God were of none effect. Carnal men measure all things by a carnal interest; and therefore the life of those that live by faith is ridiculous to them; those that trust in a promise are exercised with delay and distress: Heb. 6:12, 'Be ye followers of them who, through faith and patience, have inherited the promises.' Here is matter for faith and patience. Now, they that know no arm but flesh, no security but a temporal interest, no happiness but in the things of this life, have them in derision that look elsewhere.

Use 1. Not to count it strange when it is our lot to be exercised with reproaches because of our trust; so was Christ: Ps. 22:6–8, 'I am a worm, and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people: all they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, and shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him;' Mat. 27:39–43, 'And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and

saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself; if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross,' &c. If Christ Jesus was mocked for his trust, we should bear it the more patiently. So the people of God: 1 Tim. 4:10, 'Therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God.' It is no new thing for the adversaries of religion to scorn such as trust in God, and rely upon his promises; therefore bear it the, more patiently. (1.) Whether they be upbraidings of our trust: Mat. 27:43, 'He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he will have him, for he said, I am the Son of God;' Job 4:6, 'Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways?' (2.) Or insultings over our low and comfortless condition. Men will tread down the hedge where they find it low. The Psalmist complaineth, Ps. 69:26, 'They speak to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded;' pour in vinegar and salt where they find a wound, and add affliction to the afflicted. You will hear bitter words. Christ himself was thus exercised: Mat. 27:29, 'Hail, King of the Jews.' To be mocked and scorned we must expect, and that men will insult. (3.) Or whether they be perverse applications of providence. Thus Shimei insulted over David in his distress: 2 Sam. 16:7, 8, 'Come out, thou bloody man, thou man of Belial; the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul,' &c. So men will say, This is for your rebellion, &c.

Use 2. Since there are two parties in the world, they that trust and they that reproach them for their trust, consider in what number you are. It is needful to be far from the disposition of the seed of the serpent, and not to have your tongues set on fire of hell, to be far from the disposition of those that are governed by sense and carnal interests. (1.) It is unmannerly to insult over any in distress, and to reproach them with their condition. Places blasted with lightning were accounted sacred amongst the heathens, because the hand of

God had touched them; so you should not speak to the grief of those whom God hath wounded, but pity them, and pray for them, if they are fallen into God's hands. (2.) It is unchristian to reproach those that trust in God. It is easy to know them. Who are they that pray, that plead promises, that carry not on their hopes by present likelihoods? Though they have their faults, they are, for the main, strict, holy, charitable. (3.) It is dangerous to offend any of Christ's little ones, and to grieve their spirits.

Doct. 3. That these reproaches are grievous to God's children, and go near their hearts; therefore David desires God to appear for him, that he may have somewhat to answer them that reproached him.

1. Man's nature cannot endure reproach, especially a scornful reproach: every man thinketh himself worthy of some regard.

2. Religion increaseth the sense of it, as the flood increased when the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, Gen. 7:11. When the deep below and the heaven above combined, the flood was greater; so when grace and nature join, it is very grievous. David said, Ps. 42:10, 'It was a sword in my bones when they said, Where is now thy God?' These were cutting words to David's heart.

[1.] It is a dishonour to God, and they are sensible of that, as well as a misery to themselves. It is a dishonour to his power, as if he could not help; to his love, as if he would not; to his truth, as if he would fail in the needful time, or were fickle and inconstant, as if he would desert his friends in misery; to his holiness, as if he favoured wicked men in their evil courses, and formal dead-hearted services: Ps. 50:21, 'These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.' How can a soul that loveth God endure this, that the power of God should be lessened or



his truth questioned? Rabshakeh said, 'What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?' Isa. 36:4, compared with 18, 19, 20, 'Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying. The Lord shall deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the heathens delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who are they amongst all the gods that have delivered their land out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?' As if the living God had no more power than dumb idols. Therefore Hezekiah goeth and spreads the letter before the Lord. You touch a godly man to the quick when you strike at God's honour; they have a tender sense and feeling of this.

[2.] It reflects upon the ways of God, to bring them out of request. You thought you were one of God's darlings, you thought nobody served God but you; this is your godly profession, your fasting and prayer; what need such niceness? Thus they count his way folly, his life madness.

[3.] These reproaches strike at the life of faith, and therefore go very near the hearts of God's children. Trust and confidence in God is the life of their souls: Ps. 3:2, 'There is no help for him in God'. Such temptations are very catching, when he seemeth opposite to them. Now our unbelief puts in to make the temptation stronger. There is some visible pretence for what is said, Where are the promises thou talkest of? Where the promises and the deliverance? What have thy prayers brought from heaven? Thou hast called and none answered, cried and none hath pity on thee. What profit in serving the Lord? And then what followeth after this open objection? Unbelief cometh; and whispereth in our ears, Do you think those things true the word speaketh?

Well, then, open your hearts to God, as Hezekiah did Rabshakeh's letter; tell him of these 'cruel mockings,' as they are called, Heb. 11:36. It is the manner of saints so to do: Ps. 115:2, 'Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?' and Joel 2:17, on the fasting day 'let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar; and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?'

Doct. 4. God making good his promises, confuteth these reproaches and insultations. When deliverance cometh their mouths are stopped: Job 5:16, 'The poor hath hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth;' Ps. 107:42, 'The righteous shall see it, and iniquity shall stop her mouth,' then when 'he sets the poor on high from affliction, and maketh them families like a flock.' In both these places it is not said, God stoppeth their mouths, or the saints stop their mouths, but they stop their own mouths; then we need not answer our adversaries, they answer themselves; they have not a word to say, and all their pride and insultation is defeated and silenced.

Use 1. Prayer is necessary. Desire God to appear and right himself, that he may confute the perverse thoughts of men, and wrong applications of his providence, that carnal men may see your hope and confidence in God is not in vain. You may beg deliverance on this ground, that the mouth of iniquity may be stopped.

Use 2. Wait. Carnal men reproach God's people with their trust, when in their distress he stays a little, when they have humbled themselves for their sins, and sought reconciliation with God as his word prescribeth, and are sufficiently weaned from carnal props, and

have learned to depend on him; the wicked shall find himself mistaken about the godly, whose ways he counted folly.

## SERMON XLIX

### **And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.—VER. 43.**

IN the first verse of this portion David had begged for deliverance according to the word; this he backeth with several arguments. His first argument was from his enemies, who would else reproach him for his trust. He now enforceth that request from another argument, lest his case and condition should make him afraid, or his disappointments ashamed to own his faith in God's promises, and so his mouth be shut up from speaking of God and his word, for the edification of others and the confutation of the wicked. Here observe

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1. His request, and take not the word of truth out of my mouth.
2. The profession of his faith, repeated by way of argument and reasons, for I have hoped in thy judgments.
  1. For his request. You may wonder why he beggeth that the word of truth may not be taken out of his mouth. Rather you would think he should ask that it might be kept in his heart. But you must consider that confession of truth is very necessary, and in a time of dangers and distresses very difficult. The proper seat of the word of truth is the heart; it must abide there. But when the heart is full, the tongue will speak: 'I have believed, and therefore have I spoken,' Ps. 116:10.

The word is first in the heart, and then in the mouth; therefore David saith, 'Take it not out of my mouth.' And pray, mark, he doth not only deprecate the evil itself, but the degree and extremity of it, 'Take it not utterly out of my mouth.' God's children may not have liberty to speak for him, or if liberty, not such a courage as is necessary. Therefore, though he should or had failed in being ashamed to profess his hope, yet he desireth he might not wholly want either an occasion or a heart so to do; that he might not wholly want an occasion, having no relief and comfort by the promises, nor an heart, as being altogether dismayed or disconsolate.

2. The profession of his faith is renewed, 'For I have hoped in thy judgments.' The word משפטים, judgments, signifieth either the law, or the execution of the sentence thereof.

[1.] The law, or whole word of God, so that I have hoped in thy judgments is no more but 'in thy word do I hope,' as it is Ps. 130:5, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.'

[2.] Answerable execution, when the promise or threatening is fulfilled.

(1.) When the promise is fulfilled, that is judgment in a sense; when God accomplisheth what he hath promised for our salvation and deliverance. Thus God is said to judge for his people when he righteth and saveth them according to his word: Lam. 3:59, 'O Lord, thou hast seen my wrong; judge thou my cause.'

(2.) But the more usual notion of judgment is the execution of the threatening on wicked men, which being a benefit to God's faithful servants, and done in their favour, David might well be said to hope for it. Their judgment is our obtaining the promise. Points:—

Doct. 1. It is not enough to believe the word in our hearts, but we must confess it with our mouths.

Doct. 2. Such trials may befall God's children that the word of truth may seem to be taken out of their mouths.

Doct. 3. At such a time God must be dealt withal, as much concerned in it. David saith to the Lord, 'Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth.'

Doct. 4. If it please God to desert us in some passage of our trial, we must not give him over, but deal with him not to forsake us utterly.

Doct. 5. They will not utterly be overcome in their trials who hope in God's judgments.

Doct. 1. It is not enough to believe the word in our hearts, but we must confess it with our mouths. So it is expressly said, Rom. 10:9, 10, 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved; for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.' There is the whole sum of Christianity, and it is reduced to these two points—believing with the heart, and confessing with the mouth; an entertaining of Christ in the heart with a true and lively faith, and a confessing of Christ with the mouth in spite of all persecution and danger. So in the first solemn proposal of the gospel: Mark 16:16, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned;' where not only belief is required, but open profession; for that end serveth baptism, which is a badge and bond—a badge to distinguish the worshippers of Christ from others, and a bond to bind us to open profession of the name of Christ, and practice of the duties included therein. So Heb. 3:1, Jesus Christ is

called 'the great high priest and apostle of our profession.' The Christian religion is a confession, not a thing to be smothered and kept in secret, or confined to the heart, but to be openly brought forth, and avowed in word and deed to the glory of Christ. If a man should content himself to own God in his heart, what would become of the Church of God, and all his ordinances, and the assemblies of his people, among whom we make this open confession?

1. This confession is necessary as well as the inward belief, because God hath required it by an express law, which law is confirmed by a sanction of great weight and moment, the greatest promises on the one hand, and the greatest penalties and threatenings on the other. That there is an express law for confession, besides what hath been said already, see 1 Peter 3:15, 'Sanctify the Lord God of hosts in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear;' where they are required not only to revere God in their hearts, but to be ready to own him with their mouths, and to give a testimony of him when it should be demanded; yea, that sanctifying God in their hearts is required in order to the testimony given with their mouths, that having due and awful thoughts of God they may not be ashamed to own him before men. Now this is backed with the greatest promises, and on the other side with the severest threatenings. God hath promised no less than salvation to those that confess him: Mat. 10:32, 'Whosoever will confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.' Father, this is one of mine. He will do them more honour than possibly they can do him; and Rom. 10:10, 'With the mouth confession is made to salvation.' *Salvi esse non possumus, saith Austin, nisi ad salutem proximorum etiam ore profiteamur fidem*—we cannot be saved unless we profess the faith that we have. On the other side, the neglect of profession, either out of shame or fear, is threatened with

the greatest penalties; Mark 8:38, 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with his glorious angels.' Then, when all shadows flee away, and we would crouch for a little favour, that Christ should be ashamed of us, These were Christians but cowardly and dastardly ones: I cannot own them to be of my flock and kingdom,—oh, how will our faces gather blackness! The same is Luke 9:26, 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.' So for fear: 2 Tim. 2:11, 'If we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he will deny us.' So that you see it is not a matter of small moment whether we confess or no, but a thing expressly enjoined by God, and that upon terms of life and death.

2. This confession is of great use, as conducing much to the glory of God and the good of others.

[1.] The glory of God, which should be the great scope and end of our lives and actions, is much concerned in our confessing or not confessing what we believe. When we boldly avow the truth, it is a sign we are not ashamed of our master: Phil. 1:20, 'According to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death.' Ministry or martyrdom, he calls this a magnifying of Christ; whereas flinching, concealing, halving the truth, denying confession, is called a being ashamed of Christ: Luke 9:26, 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words;' as if his name were a thing base, unworthy, not to be owned.

[2.] The good of others and their edification is concerned in our confessing not confessing. No man is born for himself, and therefore is not only to work out his own salvation, but as much as in him lieth to procure the salvation of others, and to bring God and his truth into request with them; therefore not only to believe with the heart—that concerneth himself, but to confess with the mouth—that concerneth the good of others. When we own the truth, though it cost us dear, that tendeth to the furtherance of the gospel: Phil. 1:12, 13, 'For I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places,' &c. But when we dissemble, that is a scandal and a stumbling-block to others, whom we justify and harden in a false way; as Peter, fearing them of the circumcision, dissembled, and 'the Jews dissembled with him, insomuch that Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation,' Gal. 2:12, 13. Men of public fame and favour, when they are not men of courage and of self-denying spirits, their temporising may do a great deal of hurt, and, like a torrent, or stream, carry others with them. Oh, let us beware of this! Zuinglius saith, *Ad aras Jovis et Veneris adorare, et sub antichristo fidem occultare, idem est*—as well worship before the altars of Jupiter and Venus, as hide our faith under antichrist. Fear and weakness excuseth not. The fearful and unbelieving are put with murderers and sorcerers and idolaters, and sent together to the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, Rev. 21:8.

Use 1. To reprove them that think it to be enough to own the truth in their hearts, without confessing it with their mouths. This libertinism prevailed at Corinth, where they thought they might be present at idols' feasts, as long as in their consciences they knew that an idol was nothing. The apostle argueth against them, 2 Cor. 6, and concludes his argument thus: 2 Cor. 7:1, 'Having therefore these



promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.' To pretend to serve God in my heart, whosoever thinks so mocketh God and deceiveth himself. He that warreth with the enemies of his prince, and is as forward in battle as any of the rest, can he say, I reserve the king my heart and affections? Or when a woman prostituteth her body to another, will the husband be content with such an excuse, that she reserveth her heart for him? God is not a God of half of a man: he made the whole body and soul, and will be served with both; he bought both: 1 Cor. 6:20, 'Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your bodies and in your spirits, which are God's.' Therefore you should not only love him in your hearts, but openly plead for him and maintain his quarrel. The devil asketh but Christ's knee: Mark 4:9, 'Fall down and worship me.' What! were all the martyrs of God rash, inconsiderate, that suffered so many things rather than lose their liberty in God's service? Would we be content God should deal with us as we deal by him, glorify their souls only, love their souls, but punish their bodies eternally?

2. Them that, though not tainted with this libertine principle, yet are afraid or ashamed to own the truth.

[1.] Some afraid because of troubles and persecution. Hath Christ endured so much for us, and shall we be afraid to own his truth? God forbid! If I would fear, whom should I be afraid of? Mat. 10:28, 'Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.' Whom should a child fear, his father or the servants of his house? So, whom should we fear, God or man, a prison or hell?

2. Ashamed in peace and out of trouble, ashamed to own Christ in such company, or to speak of God and his word. O Christians! shall

we be ashamed to speak for him that was not ashamed to die for us, or count religion a disgrace which is our glory? Would a father take it well that his son should be ashamed of him? Are we ashamed of the gospel, the great charter of our hopes, the seeds of the new life, the power of God to salvation?' Rom. 1:16, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, which is the power of God to salvation.' Oh, shake off this baseness! John 5:44, 'How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that comes from God only?'

Use 2. To exhort us to confess with the mouth, and to own the truths we are persuaded of. And here I shall handle the case of profession.

1. How far it is necessary. It is a matter intricate and perplexed, and therefore I care not to comprise all cases, but to the most notable I shall speak.

2. As to the manner how this profession is to be made.

1. How far we are bound to profess.

[1.] The affirmative.

[2.] The negative.

[1.] The affirmative.

(1.) It is certain that the great truths must be owned and publicly professed, or else Christ would not have a visible people in the world, distinct from pagans and heathens. Our baptism bindeth us to this profession, and to all practices consonant and agreeable with it: Rom. 10:10, 'With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.' To own Christ as

the Saviour of the world, evidenced by his resurrection from the dead.

(2.) It is certain we must do nothing to contradict the truth in the smallest matters: 2 Cor. 13:8, 'We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.' Nothing contrary to the glory of God, or the prejudice of the least truth, whatever it costs us.

(3.) In lesser truths, when they are ventilated and brought forth upon the stage, and God crieth out, Who is on my side, who? we ought not to give up ourselves to an indifferency, to hide our profession for any danger: 2 Peter 1:12, 'Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.' The church of God is out of repair sometimes in one point, sometimes in another; the orthodoxy of the generality of men is usually an age too short in things now afoot; they go wrong, or forbear to give help to the church, because the god of this world hath blinded their eyes. Fight Christ, fight antichrist, they are resolved to be lookers-on.

(4.) When our non-profession shall be interpreted to be a denial. Thus Daniel, chap. 6:10, opened his casement, which looked towards Jerusalem, and prayed three times a day as he was wont. We must rather suffer than deny the truth by interpretation, when such practices are urged as cross a principle, and we comply.

(5.) When others are scandalised by our non-profession, or not owning the truths of Christ; that is, not only with the scandal of offence or contristation, but with the scandal of seduction, in danger to sin; and to run into error by our not appearing for God, the interest of truth should prevail above our ease and private content.

(6.) When an account of my faith is demanded, and I am called forth to give testimony for Christ, especially by magistrates: Mat. 10:18, 'Ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles: 1 Peter 3:15, 'Be always ready to give an answer to every one that asketh a reason of the hope that is in you,' provided it be not in scorn: Prov. 26:4, 5, 'Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.' Answer and answer not; not out of curiosity, as Herod questioned Christ many things, but he answered him nothing, Luke 23:9; or to be a snare, Isa. 36:21, 'They held their peace, and answered him not a word, for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not, nor parley with Rabshakeh. In such cases you must not 'cast pearls before swine, lest they turn again and rend you,' Mat. 7:6.

(7.) When impulses are great, and fair opportunities are offered in God's providence: Acts 17:16, 'While Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.' It is an intimation from God that then it is seasonable to interpose for his glory.

[2.] Negatively, which is to be forborne.

(1.) Till you be fully persuaded in your own mind of the truth which you would profess, for otherwise we shall appear with a various and doubtful face to the world, changing and wavering according to the uncertainty of our own thoughts, and so make the profession of religion ridiculous. We often see cause to suspect what before we were strongly conceited of. There is a certain credulity and lightness of believing which men are subject to. Now when this breaks out into sudden profession, men run through all sects and religions, and so blast and blemish their own service, therefore what is contrary to the

received sense, especially of the godly, ought to be weighed and weighed again before we appear to the world to be otherwise minded.

(2.) When the profession of a lesser truth proves an offence to the weak, and a disturbance to the church, and a hindrance of some greater benefit. All private opinions must give way to the great law of edification: Rom. 14:22, 'Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God.' We must not perplex weak souls with doubtful disputations, till they be established in greater things; neither must the peace of the church be troubled with nice debates, but all things must give way to the profit and general edification.

(3.) When the unseasonable venting of things will do more hurt than good, and the sway of the times and strong tide and current of prejudices running down against us hinder all probability of doing good, then our profession now may deprive us of a more useful profession another time: Prov. 29:11, 'A fool uttereth all his mind, but he that is wise keepeth it in till afterward.' Paul was at Ephesus two years before he spake against Diana, Acts 19:10; only intimated in general terms that they were no gods that were made with hands. When we cannot effect the good things we desire, nor in that holy manner we would, we must not obstruct our future service, but commend the cause to God, and wait further opportunity to do good.

## 2. The manner how to make profession.

[1.] Knowledge must be at the bottom of profession. Some will run before they can go, leap into opinions and practices before they see the reasons of them; and then no wonder they are as children, 'carried about with every wind of doctrine,' Eph. 4:14. Wherefore, that which we profess we must do it knowingly, that we may be able to render a reason of all that we do profess.

[2.] Gracious wisdom to espy the due occasion when God is glorified and our neighbour edified. Rash, arrogant, and presumptuous spirits are heady, high-minded, disgrace religion more than honour it.

[3.] With boldness to do it freely and without fear of men: Acts 4:13, 'When they saw the boldness of Peter and John,' &c.; ver. 29, 'Grant to thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word;' and 1 Tim. 3:13, 'They that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus;' Acts 9:27, 'Barnabas declared unto them how he had preached boldly to them at Damascus in the name of Jesus;' ver. 29, 'He spake boldly in the name of Jesus;' Acts 14:3, 'Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord;' Acts 13:46, 'Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold.' Fear and shame argueth diffidence of the truth which we profess, or else a distrust of the God from whom it cometh, or at least the unsoundness of the professing party, that he hath a naughty conscience, or a great deal of fleshly fear unmortified. As he cannot walk stoutly that has a stone in his shoe, so he that hath sin in his conscience. *Obmutescit facundia si ægra sit conscientia*, saith Ambrose—a bad conscience stoppeth the mouth.

[4.] With sincerity, without dissimulation and guile. Profession without answerable duty is like leaves without fruit. Words must come from the heart. To be talking of God when they lie under the guilt of known sins. James 2:16, 'If one say unto the poor, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?' Ps. 50:16, 17, 'Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant into thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my word behind thee?'

[5.] With meekness and reverence: Peter 3:15, 'Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;' not in a passionate, froward, arrogant way, but with meekness of spirit, without all show of passion, and with sober and respectful language.

[6.] The general end is the glory of God and the edification of our neighbour; and the means to this end is the fear of God, which keeps us out of all faulty extremes: Eccles. 7:16, 17, 'Be not righteous over-much, neither make thyself over-wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not over-much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?' Some drive all things to extremity, hot like gunpowder; others freeze into a compliance and timeserving. When the heart is seasoned by the fear of God, and we are guided by reasons of conscience rather than interest, and we constantly wait upon God for direction, then will God guide us.

Doct. 2. Such trials may befall God's children that the word of truth may seem to be taken out of their mouths.

This may come to pass two ways:—

1. They may not have liberty to own it; as Acts 4:18, 19, 'They commanded them not to speak at all, nor to teach in the name of Jesus: and they said, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you or unto God, judge ye.' The magistrate's command is a silencing of them, shutting of their mouths; only here cometh a question whether ministers forbidden by magistrates should desist from preaching? If we say they ought, it seems to be against the apostle's reply; if we say not, we shall seem to deny obedience to secular and politic powers, who ought to be satisfied in the persons that exercise a public ministry in their dominions, and so lay a foundation for public disturbance and disorder. For answer—We

must distinguish between persons employed to preach the gospel; some immediately called by Christ himself, others mediately called by men; some fallible and obnoxious to errors and many failings, which render them unworthy of such a calling; others infallibly guided and assisted. These latter, without flat disobedience and injury to Christ, could not own any command contrary to the precedent authority of Christ, being the only men of that order that could witness these things. It is true 'a necessity is laid upon us' of preaching the gospel, 1 Cor. 9:16, so as not voluntarily to relinquish our station, but we may be forced to give way to the greater force. Some are silenced by authority and opposition of men, a dispensation God often permitteth for despising the truth and playing the wanton with an opportunity of open profession. When men dally with the light, God removeth their candlestick, and the door is shut upon them.

2. They may not have courage to own the word of truth for fear of danger, because of many adversaries. There is a great deal of this unmortified fleshly fear in the best, and may be tongue-tied when God's glory is concerned, and awed by the menaces and insults of evil men, or discouraged, that they dare not trust God with events, and are out of all hope of success: Ezek. 3:26, 'I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, and thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them for a reprover, for they are a rebellious house.' By these and many other ways they may be discouraged from speaking of God and his truth. But now, when such a case falleth out, what shall we do? That in the third point.

Doct. 3. At such a time God must be dealt withal about it upon two grounds:—



1. Because God hath a great hand in the judgment. In the outward case, want of liberty, nothing falleth out without his providence; he seeth fit sometimes to exercise his people with unreasonable men, for 'all have not faith,' 2 Thes. 3:2, that obstruct and hinder the course of the gospel; some that be like Elymas the sorcerer, 'enemies to all goodness,' Acts 13:10. And this in ecclesia constituta, in the bosom of the church, where orthodox faith is professed, where magistrates be Christians, and should be nursing fathers to the church. In Abraham's family, which Paul makes the pattern of our estate to the end of the world: Gal. 4:29, 'But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even so it is now.' These may prevail many times to the great discouragement of the faithful. God may suffer it to be so for the punishing and trying of his people: Acts 19:9, 'But when divers were hardened and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.' Then, as to the inward case, he may justly desert us in the time of trial, when we should give a testimony for him, and take the word of truth out of our mouths. All these speeches: 'Hide not thy commandments from me,' ver. 19; 'Incline not mine heart to covetousness,' ver. 26; and here, 'Take not thy word out of my mouth,' and many such like, relate to God's judicial sentence, in what he doth as a judge. Upon our evil deserving he withdraweth his grace, and then we are delivered over to our own fears and baseness of spirit. Besides our own fault there is judicial tradition on God's part, which takes away the heart and courage of men: Job 12:24, 'He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness, where there is no way.' Now none can suspend God's sentence but God himself. If he shut who can open? therefore he is to dealt with.

2. God only can give us a remedy by his grace and power; therefore our great business lieth with him, in regard of the power of his providence, by which he can remove rubs and oppositions: 2 Thes. 3:1, 'Pray for us, that the word of God may have a free course,' ἵνα ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ τρέχη—that it may run as chariot wheels on smooth ground, without rubs and oppositions. There are many times mountains in the way, potent oppositions and strongly combined interests, that hinder the liberty of the word; but God can smoothe them into a plain: Zech. 4:7, 'Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.' Opposition seemeth insuperable. That great mountain that obstructed the work of God was the court of Persia, instigated and set on by the Samaritan faction—a great mountain indeed; but as great as it is, God can thresh it into dust, when it hindereth his interest. As to the inward case, it is God that giveth a spirit of courage and fortitude, and 'a mouth and wisdom which all the adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist,' Luke 21:15; he will give it us in that hour what we shall say. So God encourageth Moses when he pleadeth his slowness of speech: 'Who hath made man's mouth, or who maketh the dumb or deaf, or the seeing or the blind? Have not I the Lord?' Exod. 4:10, 11. Whatever inclination of heart there be in the creature, it is God must give a spirit and a presence, by the continual influence of his grace. He frees the heart from fears, and ordereth the tongue; for the power of the tongue is no more in our hands than the affections of the heart: Prov. 16:1, 'The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord,' παρρησία, is the gift of God, that we own him and his truth.

Use. Let, then, every person be dealing with God about this case, every single private person for himself; and for public persons the prayers of others are necessary; it is a common case, wherein all are concerned: Col. 4:3, 'Praying for us, that God would open to us a

door of utterance to speak the mystery of Christ;' Eph. 6:19, 'Pray for me that utterance may be given me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.' They that are sensible of the weight of the ministerial charge and their own many infirmities, and how much it concerns us to own all the truths of God in their season, let us beg of God this boldness, and set others a-begging for us.

1. Humbly confessing our ill-deservings. It is a sign God is angry when he suffereth his gospel to be obstructed, much more when the mouths of his ministers are shut up that they shall not plead for his interest and truths. It is a notable sign of his departure that he is not much concerned in the progress of the gospel. God's raising spirits is a hopeful presage. Oh, therefore, let us humble ourselves before the Lord!

2. Earnestly; for it is a case that concerneth us deeply, because upon our trial we should be strict and precise: Phil. 1:20, 'My hope and expectation is that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness' own Christ. It would be sad if the gospel should suffer loss by us. Alas! what a torment to us will the thought of it be, that we have dishonoured God, and wronged souls, and strengthened the hands of the wicked! Origen, who had exhorted others to martyrdom, having himself bowed under the persecution, could never more open his mouth to preach the gospel, though often requested to it; only one day, having taken for his text Ps. 50:16, 'Unto the wicked he saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?' he wept very much, and could speak no more. Oh, therefore, it is no slight thing!

3. Deal with God believingly; pray in faith. There are two considerations in the text which may fortify us:—

[1.] Because it is a word of truth.

[2.] There are judgments to be executed on the hinderers of the word of truth.

[1.] It is a word of truth, and that will prevail at length, however it be obstructed for a time. In the first publishing of the gospel this was manifested, when the whole world was conspired to shut the door against it: 1 Cor. 16:9, 'A great door and effectual is opened to me, and there are many adversaries.' A few fishermen, who had not the power of the long sword, yet it is spread far and near. The fathers often urged this. Clemens Alexandrinus saith, *Propositam Græciæ philosophiam si quis magistratus prohibuerit, en statim perit; nostram autem doctrinam a prima usque ejus prædicatione prohibent reges, duces, magistratus cum universis satellitibus, illa tamen non flaccescit ut humana doctrina, sed magis floret.* It spread far and near, the first reformation, what small beginnings it had.

[2.] There are judgments, strange providences, by which God breaketh opposition, either changing the hearts of men, or else cutting them off in the midway, 'when his wrath his kindled but a little,' Ps. 2:12. They dash against the corner-stone. God will show himself mighty and powerful in promoting the word of truth, and will carry on the kingdom of Christ over the backs of his enemies.

Doct. 4. We should not give over dealing with God, though he is pleased to desert us in some passages of our trials, that he may not forsake us utterly.

Many of God's choicest servants have been tripping: Ps. 73:21, 'As for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped;' but they recover themselves again. Peter fell for a time, but afterwards groweth bold. Once timorous Peter, but, Acts 4:13, 'When they saw

the boldness of Peter and John.' The martyrs that were permitted for a while to deny the truth, yet were not permitted to deny it utterly; they bewailed their faults, and suffered the more courageously. (1.) It is fit the creatures should know themselves; therefore God will humble us, and in part leave us to our own fears, but not wholly leave us destitute of grace; as the nurse seemeth to let the child fall, that he may clasp the more strongly about her. (2.) It is fit the world should know that a zealous defence of the truth comes not from natural stubbornness and pertinacity, but from divine assistance; therefore God showeth what the flesh would do, how it would shrink in the confession of the truth, if it were permitted to prevail. (3.) It is fit we should see the necessity of continual dependence. After grace received we have not always the same presence of mind so as to plead for God, but only as he is pleased to influence us: our case doth change and alter, ebb and flow, as it pleaseth God.

Use. Not to be severe against those that fail out of infirmity, nor to cast them off, for God doth not pity them; rather than censure them, let us help them out of the mire. Unhumbled hearts, that are puffed up with pride and confidence in their own strength, when out of the temptation may judge it a task of no great difficulty to carry it with courage, and will readily condemn others of cowardice and backsliding who ride not out the storm with as much courage and cheerfulness and resolution as they conceive themselves would do: Job 4:5-7, 'Now it is come upon thee and thou faintest, it toucheth thee and thou art troubled. Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, and the uprightness of thy ways thy hope?' But a humble heart, acquainted with sufferings, will not judge so: he is sensible of weakness, and how hard it is for flesh and blood to deny itself, and to prefer a good conscience before safety and worldly increase: how ready it is to faint under a continued cross, how crafty to find out evasions to beguile itself into a way of sin, that they pity the poor

tempted man. In the primitive times, Novatus and his followers denied those that had fallen to be received into the communion of the church, though upon repentance.

Doct. 5. They will not be utterly overcome in their trials that hope in God's judgments. Why?

1. Because this hope will teach us to wait upon the Lord until he show us better things: Ps. 62:5, 'My soul, wait thou upon the Lord, for my expectation is from him.' They can tarry a little while, and so are not carried away with the violence of the present temptation. It is an inclination to present things that undoeth us. 'Demas hath forsaken us and loved this present world.' Now, when we can wait for future things, the soul is stayed and kept from apostasy. We read of 'the patience of hope,' 1 Thes. 1:3. And the apostle saith, Rom. 8:25, 'If we do hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.' He that believeth a better condition is not dejected with present evils.

2. It fortifieth the soul against present difficulties, so as they do not unsettle, but quicken us. It hath an apprehension that the good is hard to be obtained, therefore it gathereth all the force and strength of the soul to resist it.

For the nature of hope, see the Sermon on the 114th verse.

Well, then, hope in God's judgments. Consider who hath made the promises. Is it not God, whose word cannot fail of its effect? Rom. 4:20, 21, 'He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform.' And then consider how he standeth affected to us. Doth not he love us? And also in what relation he is obliged to us as a Father. And then consider what doth the promise say, and how it maketh for his

glory to accomplish it; what plentiful means he hath in store to bring to pass what he hath spoken, and what a potent and wise intercessor we have to plead our cause at the right hand of the Father, and to mind him still of whatever concerns our comfort!

## SERMON L

### **So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever.—VER. 44.**

FIRST, David prays for deliverance, ver. 41, 'Let thy salvation come,' &c. Next he prays, if he might not have deliverance, yet a little liberty to own God in the time of his trouble, 'Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth;' and with what argument doth he enforce it? In the close of the former verse he had pleaded, 'I have hoped in thy judgments.' Now he pleads his steadfast purpose to serve God, conceived in the form of a vow, 'So shall I keep thy law,' &c. They that hope in God's promises must have a tender regard to his precepts. First he saith, 'I hope in thy judgments,' then, 'I shall keep thy law.' The tender regard of God's precepts. How? What! to talk of them only? No, As in the former verse he speaks of the word of truth in his mouth, so here he speaks of keeping and observing the law in his practice, to show we should not own God in word only, but in deed also. He spoke of profession there, and now we are to fill up our profession with answerable practice: 'So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever.'

The text contains a promise of obedience.

1. The matter promised, I shall keep thy law.

2. The manner and constancy of that obedience, continually for ever and ever.

Mark, the promise of obedience is brought in by way of argument, 'So shall I keep;' so, that is, this will encourage me, this will enable me.

1. The granting of his requests would give him encouragement. When God answers our hope and expectation, gratitude should excite and quicken us to give him all manner of obedience. If he will give us a heart, and a little liberty to confess his name and serve him, we should not be backward or uncertain, but walk closely with him.

2. This would give him assistance and strength. If God do daily give assistance, we shall stand; if not, we fall and falter. This will be a means of his perseverance; not only engage and oblige him, but help him to hold out to the end.

Then mark the constancy of this obedience, 'Continually, and for ever and ever.' David would not keep it for a fit, or for a few days, or a year; but always, even to the end of his life.

Here are three words to the same sense, 'Continually, for ever, and ever.' And the Septuagint expresseth it thus: I shall keep thy law always, and for ever, and for ever and ever; four words there. This heaping of words is not in vain.

1. It shows the difficulty of perseverance. Unless believers do strongly persist in the resistance to temptation, they will soon be turned out of the way; therefore David binds his heart firmly. We must do it now, yea, always, unto the end.



2. He expresseth his vehemency of affection. Those that are deeply affected with anything are wont to express themselves as largely as they can. As Paul, that had a deep sense of God's power: Eph. 1:19, 'Exceeding greatness of his power,' 'according to the working of his mighty power.' He heaps up several words, because his sense of them was so great. So David here doth heap up words, continually, and for ever, and for ever and ever.

3. Some think the words are so many, that they may express not only this life but that which is to come. I will keep them 'continually, and for ever and ever;' that is, all the days of my life, and in the other world. So Chrysostom, 'I will keep them continually,' &c., points out the other life, where there will be pure and exact keeping of the law of God. Here we are every hour in danger, but then we shall be put out of all danger; and without fear of sinning, we shall remain in a full and perfect righteousness. We hope for that which we have not attained unto, and this doth encourage us for the present; so would he make David express himself.

4. If we must distinguish these words, I suppose they imply the continuity and perpetuity of obedience: the continuity of obedience, that he would serve God continually without intermission; and the perpetuity of obedience, that he would serve God for ever and ever, without defection and revolt, at all times, and to the end.

Doct. Constancy and perseverance in obedience is the commendation of it.

When David promiseth to obey, he saith he would do it 'continually for ever and ever.' This is the obedience God longs for: Deut. 5:29, 'Oh, that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always!' Here we find all things which are requisite to God's service: the sincerity of it, that they had

a heart; the gracious principle which works in obedience, a heart to fear me; the universality of it, to keep all my commands; and the perpetuity of it, to keep them always. They are in a good mood now. As if God had said, Oh, that they had a heart to do it always! Christ redeemed us to this end: Luke 1:74, 75, 'Delivered us out of the hands of our enemies, that we might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him;' not for a while only, but 'all the days of our life.'

I shall distinguish of a double constancy and perseverance, and under each branch give some reasons, with their applications.

1. A perseverance without intermission.
2. Without defection. Both are necessary.

First, A perseverance without intermission. We should at all times and in all places serve God, and not by fits and starts; as it is said of the twelve tribes, Acts 26:12, they 'served God instantly day and night;' alone and in company, in all conditions, adverse and prosperous. In all actions, common and sacred, God must be served and obeyed.

Let me give some considerations to enforce it, to serve God continually.

1. The law of God doth universally bind, and the obligation thereof never ceaseth, so as there can be no truce with sin for a while, nor any intermission of grace for a moment: Prov. 6:21, 22, 'O my son, keep thy father's commandments, and forsake not the law of thy mother; bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.' The commandments of God, he calls them the law of the father and mother; for Solomon speaks as to young ones and

children, as those that had been trained up by their parents. Now these must be looked upon as having a perpetual obligation to direct us and keep us: sleeping and waking we must have them always in our sight. Every motion and every operation of ours is under a law; our thoughts and words are under a law, and our actions are under a law; all that we speak and all that we do, it is still under a rule. The law of God is of perpetual use to show us what we must do and what we must leave undone. Oh, how exact should we be if we did regard this, and were mindful of the perpetual obligation of the law!

2. Grace planted in the heart should be always working. The fire on the altar was never to go out; and so grace should be always working, and influence all our actions, civil and sacred: 1 Peter 1:15, 'Be ye holy, as he that hath called you is holy, in all manner of conversation.' There is no part of a Christian's conversation which should not savour of holiness; not only his religious, but his common and civil actions. The pots in Jerusalem and the horses' bells were to bear God's impress, as well as the vessels and utensils of the temple, Zech. 14. As the sun is placed in the middle of the heavens to diffuse his influence and scatter his beams up and down the world, and nothing is hid from his light, so is grace planted in the heart to diffuse its influence into every part of his conversation; and therefore grace, where it is true, it is always at work. There are some parts of the body that are never out of action, as the heart and lungs; wherever a man goes, and whatever he goes about, yet they always do their office. So some graces are of continual exercise; as the fear of God: Prov. 23:17, 'Be thou in the fear of God all the day long.' A Christian doth not only pray in the fear of God, but eat, drink, and trade in the fear of God. So the love of God, in referring all things to his glory, whether they be acts of worship, or acts of charity, or of our callings, or recreations: grace hath an influence upon these, and is still to be at work upon these, 1 Cor. 10:31. And so faith is always at

work in depending upon God and looking up to him; it is our life, 'That which I live in the flesh:' Gal. 2:20, 'All that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God.' Well, then, the law of God is always binding, and every operation of ours is under a law, and grace should always be working.

3. God's eye is always upon us; he is alike everywhere; therefore a Christian should be alike everywhere, always like himself, at home and abroad, alone and in company: Phil. 2:12, 'As ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but much more in my absence.' Many are devout abroad, but carnal, careless, profane, if you follow them home to their families. When you are alone you are not alone, God is there; we have a heavenly Father that seeth in secret, Mat. 6:4; what you do in your closets, the doors made fast, and all company shut out. A man might allow himself in carnal liberty if he could go anywhere where God doth not see him; but his eye is still upon us; and therefore we should say with David, 'I will keep thy law continually.' 'Will he force the queen before my face?' saith Ahasuerus. We break God's laws before his face; his eye is always upon us, and all our ways are before him.

4. God is always at work for us: John 5:17, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' He sustains us every day, hour, moment, and waketh for us, watcheth over us by night and by day. When we sleep, the devil is awake to do us mischief. Ay! but the God of Israel, 'he that keepeth Israel neither slumbereth nor sleepeth,' but watcheth for our good. As soon as we arise, 'his compassions are new every morning,' Lam. 3:22, 23. Now, can we offend him from whom we receive life and breath every moment? If God should intermit his care but for one day, nay, but suspend it for one hour, what would become of thee?

5. All our actions concern eternity. This life is compared to a walk, Eph. 2:10. Everything we do or speak is a step either to heaven or hell, therefore to have an influence or tendency on that action. The more good we do, the more we are acted with a fear of God, and love of God, to do all things to his glory, the nearer heaven; and the more evil, the nearer hell. We should not stand still or go back, but always be getting ground in our journey.

6. To be off and on with God will cost us much sorrow; it will be bitterness in the end. Either it will cost us the bitterness of repentance here, or of weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth for ever; either holy compunction or everlasting horror. When you straggle from God, there is no returning to your former husband but by Weeping-cross, Hosea 2:14. And who would provide matter of sorrow for himself? I say, when you thrust your hand into Satan's dish, there is some sauce mingled with his meat, and then everlasting horror if not compunction, for that will be the end of them that are always unstable in all their ways, James 1:8. God will not always bear with them; he may at first, while they are children, poor weak novices, but will not always, Eph. 4:14. God expects that at length we should grow more constant, and grow up to a radicated state of grace; therefore, if we are always children, off and on with God, then he will cast us off.

7. By every intermission we may lose ground, and possibly may never wholly, if we recover it in part again. We may lose ground, for 'the way of the Lord is strength to the upright,' Prov. 10:29. The more we continue in it the fitter we are to walk in it. A bell, when once up, is kept up with greater ease than if we were to raise it anew. A horse warm in his gears is more fit for his journey than at first setting forth; and therefore keep up while you are in the way of God. If it be hard to keep in with God, it will be harder to recover when you are

out of the way. The only way to make religion easy is to be still in it; and to have our hearts still upon it; and therefore you lose by your intermission. And if you recover yourselves after intermission, it is not always to that degree of largeness of heart and fulness of spiritual comfort. A prodigal that hath rioted away his estate, if set up again, is not trusted with the like stock; and after a great disease, though a man recovers, yet it is not to the degree of his former health many times. Therefore we should without intermission persevere in our duty to God.

To apply this part.

Use 1. It should humble us all that we are so fickle and inconstant in that which is good. Our hearts are unstable as water. In the space of an hour, how are our thoughts changed from good to evil, and from evil to good in a moment! What a monster would man seem, if his heart were visible, in the best duty that ever he performed! Our devotion and goodness comes by pangs and fits; now humble, anon proud; now meek, anon passionate; now confident, then full of fear and anguish. Like men sick of an ague, sometimes well, sometimes ill, we do not seem to be the same men in a duty and out of a duty; nay, sometimes in the same duty we do not seem to be the same men, are not carried on with the same largeness of heart, and confidence in God, and savouriness and spirituality. Oh, how changeable and fickle are our hearts! This should humble us.

2. It reproveth them that would have a dispensation at times, and take liberty to cast off all Christian modesty and gravity; that think if they be serious sometimes, they may be light and vain at others; and therefore sometimes like angels of light, at other times like fiends of darkness. Sometimes we would take them for grave, serious Christians, at other times for loose libertines; and they cast the fear

of God behind their backs: Ezek. 33:13, 'If he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity,' &c.; that is, if upon presumption that he hath been righteous, he dispenseth with himself, and takes an indulgence from his former duty to be light, vain, careless, all his righteousness shall be forgotten. Such a dissimilitude is there between men; now they seem to be grave and serious, anon vain, light, and wanton; so very uncertain and uneven are we in our temper and practice.

3. It shows what need there is of a constant watchfulness, that in all things we may behave ourselves as God's children. Sin is always at work: Gen. 6:5, 'The imaginations and thoughts of our heart are only evil, and that continually:' and Satan is always at work, espying advantages against us, 1 Peter 5:8, to draw us off from God. Oh, then, let grace be in its continual exercise! Live as knowing all the motions and operations of the soul are under a rule; live as being always under the eye of God; live as being sensible God takes care of us himself, remembereth us every moment, therefore it is but reason we should take him.

Secondly, A perseverance without defection and apostasy, that we may not fall off from God when we have taken a profession of his name upon us. Now, the considerations to quicken you to that will be these:—

1. Consider how equal it is that our duty should last so long as we would have God's blessings last, that one part should answer another. We would have God bless us to the end, therefore we must serve and obey him to the end: Ps. 48:14, 'For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.' He doth not lay down the conduct of his providence until we come to heaven, and therefore we should keep his law for ever and ever. How can we

desire God to be ours to the end, if we are not his to the end? The stipulation of our part of the covenant must answer that of God's.

2. We have the same reasons to continue that we had to begin at first; there is the same loveliness in God's ways; Christ is as sweet as ever, and heaven as worthy and as great as ever. If there be any difference, there is more reason to continue than there was to begin. Why? Because we have more experience of the sweetness of Christ; you knew him before only by report and hearsay, but now you have tasted he is gracious, you know him by experience, 1 Peter 2:3. Surely when we have made trial, Christ should be sweeter and heaven nearer: Rom. 13:11, 'Our salvation is nearer.' The nearer to the enjoyment of any good, the more impatient in the want of it. A Christian, as he is nearer to his hopes and happiness, and the more experience of God and Christ, the more stable should his heart be in the ways of God. I speak of this, because at first men are carried out with great affection and zeal, and are of very promising beginnings. There is no reason of altering our course, or why we should grow remiss, lazy, and changeable in God's service. What is more usual with men than to cast off their first faith, 1 Tim. 5:12, and their first love, Rev. 2:4, and their first diligence and obedience, 2 Chron. 17:3. We read of 'the first ways of David.' Many that seem to have set forth with a great deal of forwardness and zeal tire afterward. In the marriage relation true affection increaseth, but adulterous love is hot only while it is new.

3. Consider the danger and mischievous effects of apostasy and declining from God.

[1.] This is somewhat, that you lose your crown: Rev. 3:11, 'Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.' The honour and comfort of all we have hitherto done and suffered will be lost and



gone, 'Therefore take heed to yourselves, that ye lose not the things which ye have wrought.' All your watchings, strivings, prayings, fastings, professing the name of God, all is come to nothing. The Nazarite under the law was to begin again if the days of his separation were defiled, Num. 6:12. If he had separated himself for such a while, though he kept almost all his time, yet if he defiled himself before the time was out, he was to begin all again: Ezek. 18:24, 'When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness and committeth iniquity, all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned.' When you turn head against your former profession, all comes to nothing.

[2.] Consider, falling off is more dishonourable to God than a simple refusal. Why? You bring an ill report upon him, as if he were not a good master. A wicked man that refuseth grace, he does not so much dishonour God, because his refusal is supposed to be the fruit of his prejudice. But now you cast him off after trial, and so your refusal is supposed to be the fruit of your experience, as if the devil were a better master. When you have tried both, you do as it were deliberately judge that Satan's service is best, or that you do not find in God that which he promised, and you expected from him. And that is the reason why God stands upon his credit, and pleads with apostates, Jer. 2:5, 'What iniquity have your fathers found in me that they are gone far from me?' and Micah 6:3, 'O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.' Is he hard to please, or backward to reward? What cause of distaste have you found in him? for you do implicitly accuse him.

[3] When you fall off after a taste of the sweetness and comfort of the practice of godliness, your condition is worse than if you had never begun, and you will be more unable than you were at first. A man that is climbing up a tree or ascending a ladder, if after he hath

gotten up many steps he let go his hold and falls down, he doth not only lose the benefit of his former pains, but gets a bruised body and broken bones, and is less able to climb up than he was before.

[4.] All the promises are made to perseverance, Heb. 3:6; Col. 1:23; Rev. 2:10; Rom. 2:7. Oh! there be many that leave their first love, and so they forfeit all the comfort of the promises.

[5.] The more you persevere, the more assurance you have of the goodness of your condition: Heb. 6:11, 'We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.' When a man keeps up his warmth, his hope increaseth, and he grows to more assurance and more establishment, and keeps up his diligence in God's service.

Use 1. For reproof.

1. Those that take up religion only by way of essay and trial, that do not resolve upon all hazards, but take it only as a walk, and not a journey, like men that go to sea for pleasure, not to make a voyage. But whenever we begin with God, we should say, I will keep thy law continually for ever and ever. We should sit down and count the charges, make God a good allowance, resolve that nothing shall withdraw us from him, Rom. 8:35, 36.

2. It reproveth aguish Christians, whose piety and devotion takes them by fits. Their righteousness is like 'the morning dew,' Hosea 6:4, that cannot endure the rising sun, and so they are off and on with God.

3. Those that are of the Samaritan temper, swayed altogether by temporal advantages. The Samaritans, sometimes they would be of the Jews' religion, when favoured by Alexander; when the Jews were

pursued by other princes, then they would be against the Jews, and deny the temple of God: sometimes their temple was dedicated to the God of Israel, sometimes to the God of the heathens, as their interests did fall or rise. So there are many that do intend or remit the confidence of their duty according to their interests; and therefore, when trouble ariseth, they are offended, Mark 4:17.

Use 2. For exhortation, to press you thus to keep God's law for ever and ever. To this end—

Direct. 1. Be fortified within. After you have gotten grace—I suppose men that they are in a good way—oh, be fortified from that which may shake you from without. Three things are wont to hurry men from one extreme to another—errors, persecutions, and scandals.

1. Errors. Be not troubled when differences fall out about the truths of God, nor shaken in mind: 1 Cor. 11:19, 'For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made-manifest among you.' Many question the ways of God and all religion; because there are so many differences about them, therefore they think nothing certain. These winds God lets loose upon the church to distinguish the chaff and the solid grain. God saw this discipline necessary, that we might not take up religion upon trust, without the pains of study and prayer.

2. Persecutions are an offence: Mat. 11:6, 'Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me;' that is, offended because of troubles that accompany the profession of the truth. The whole drift of the Christian religion is to draw us off from the interests and concernments of the present world, to look after another.

3. Scandals of professors. All that profess the name of God are his witnesses; their lives should be a confirmation of the gospel, but

indeed they often prove a confutation of it we should confirm the weak, and we offend the strong. Many have been gained by persecution, when they have seen the courage of God's servants; but the scandals of those that profess the name of God have proved a stumbling-block. Those that are offended by crosses, yet they have a secret liking of the truth; but those that are offended by scandals, they loathe the truth itself, and so are hurried away against the profession of God. Therefore be fortified against all these.

Direct. 2. Be fortified within by taking heed to the causes of apostasy and falling off from the truth, either in judgment or practice. What are those things?

1. Ungrounded assent. A choice lightly made is lightly altered, when men do not resolve upon evidence. We are to 'try all things,' 1 Thes. 5:21. When we take up a profession without evidence, we soon quit it: men waver hither and thither for want of solid rooting in the truth.

2. Ungrounded profession, want of solid rooting in grace, when not rooted either in faith, Col. 2:7, or grounded in love, Eph. 3:17, or established by grace, Heb. 13:9. There must be a foundation before a building, a thorough sense of the love of God, and a being rooted, when our hearts are sound in God's statutes.

3. Unmortified lusts. That which is lame is soon turned out of the way. While men keep up their respects to the pleasures, profits, and honours of the world unbroken, they are sure to miscarry; though they should stand for a while, yet temptation will come that will take them away. Lusts put us upon great uncertainty, as fear, or the favour of men, or as carnal hopes sway: 2 Tim. 4:10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world.'

4. A fond easiness. Men change their religion with their company, out of a desire to please all, as the cameleon changeth colours according as it touches. True religion is indeed 'easy to be entreated,' James 3:17. But now, to make bold with God and conscience, to please men, is a sad adventure; it is not a good disposition, but pusillanimity.

5. Self-confidence, when we think to bear it out with natural courage and resolution, and will be playing about the cockatrice's hole, and dallying with temptation; as Peter's confidence; you know how dear it cost him, John 18:16, 17. It is God which 'keepeth the feet of his saints,' and he will be known to be their guardian, 1 Sam. 2:9; therefore he will be depended on.

Direct. 3. Take heed of the first decays, and look often on the state of your hearts. A man that never casts up his estate is undone insensibly. It is the devil's policy, when once we are a-declining, to carry us further and further. A gap once made in the conscience, grows wider and wider every day. The first declinings are the cause of all the rest. Evil is best stopped in the beginning. When first you begin to be careless, mindless of God, and neglectful of communion with him, oh! then take heed. It is easier to crush the egg than kill the serpent. He that keeps the house in constant repair prevents the ruin and fall of it; so do you keep your soul in constant repair, take notice of the first swerving, lest it carry you further and further. Men fall off by degrees, and grow worse and worse, neglect this duty and that, till they cast off all. Like Nebuchadnezzar's image, which was of gold, silver, iron, clay, from worse to worse, they presently run from one extremity to another. There are degrees of hardness: Heb. 3:14, 'Let us hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.' The first sense, taste, and liveliness of it: learn from whence you are fallen. And then a steadfast expectation of the reward, 1 Cor. 15:58.

You have but a few years' service more, a little while to be put upon labour and striving, then you shall be as happy as heart can wish. Then a religious use of the Lord's Supper, for here you renew again the oath of allegiance to God. The great purport of this duty is to bind yourselves to this firm and close walking. The Lord's Supper is a renewing of covenant, to fix our hearts by new promises of obedience. When we begin to waver and faint, and stand, we receive new strength; as they, when they had a little refreshing, then they went on from strength to strength, Ps. 84:7, 8. The Lord's Supper is our viaticum, our well and refreshing by the way, that we may hold out to our journey's end.

## SERMON LI

### **And I will walk at liberty; for I seek thy precepts.—VER. 45.**

THE copulative in front of the text showeth some dependence which the words have upon the former. His last request was, ver. 43, for an opportunity and heart to own the ways of God. His arguments are—

1. His present hope, in the end of that verse.
2. His perseverance in obedience, ver. 44. Now—
3. The freedom of his heart in that continued course of obedience. A free and open confession of the truth may seem to cast us into bonds and straits, but yet it giveth us liberty: the truth sets us free, John 8:32. If it bring the body under fetters, yet it enlargeth the heart. We never have greater freedom than when we are pleasing God, though at our bitter cost: 'I will walk at liberty,' non in angustiis timoris, sed

in latitudine dilectionis—not straitened by fear, but set at large by love: 'I will walk at liberty; for I seek thy precepts.' In the words observe—

1. David's privilege, and I will walk at liberty.
2. The ground of it, for I seek thy precepts.

The points are two:—

Doct. 1. To walk in the way of God's precepts is to walk at liberty.

Doct. 2. The more we take care to do so, the more we find this liberty. I seek, that noteth an earnest diligence. Both these points will be made good by these three considerations:—

1. The way of God's precepts is in itself liberty.
2. There is a liberty given to walk in that way.
3. Upon walking in that way we find it liberty.

First, The way of God's precepts is liberty. Therefore his law is called a 'law of liberty,' James 1:25. No such freedom as in God's service; and, on the contrary, no such bondage as to be held with the cords of our own sin: 2 Peter 2:19, 'While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption.' A liberty to do all we please is the greatest bondage. There are three pairs of notions in which men are extremely mistaken—in misery and happiness, wisdom and folly, liberty and bondage. Men think none miserable but the afflicted, and none happy but the prosperous, because they judge by the present ease and commodity of the flesh; therefore Christ in his Sermon on the Mount maketh it his drift to undeceive the world, to show that the mourners and the persecuted, the pure

and the meek, they are the happy men, Mat. 5. So in the notions of wisdom and folly the world are mistaken. Man, that is an intelligent creature, affects the reputation of wisdom, and would rather be accounted wicked than weak. But how do they mistake? He is the wise man in their account that can carry on his worldly business with success. They judge of wisdom and folly, not by the concernments of the other world, but by present interests. Therefore the whole drift of the scripture is to make us 'wise to salvation,' 2 Tim. 3:15, to call us off from secular wisdom, and to teach us to become fools that we may be wise. So they are put in the notions of liberty and bondage. All men desire liberty, especially from tyranny and base servitude; and so far they do well in the general: but then they think that is only liberty to do what they please; and so the more they think to be, and labour to be, free in a carnal way, the more slaves they are. The service of God, and strict walking with him, they count a very prison and thralldom; and therefore cry out of bonds and yokes and cords: Ps. 2:3, 'Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us;' and are impatient of any restraint. Whereas, on the other side, to do what we list without check or control, and to speak what we list, and think what we list, this they think the only freedom: 'Our tongues are our own: who is Lord over us?' Whereas, indeed, he liveth the freest life that lieth under the bonds of duty, that maketh conscience of praying and praising God, and conversing and walking with him in a course of holiness; and the true liberty is in walking in God's statutes. So that true bondage and liberty is little or nothing at all known and discerned in the world. To make this evident unto you, I shall prove—

1. That carnal liberty is but thralldom.
2. That the true liberty is in the ways of God.



1. That carnal liberty is but thralldom. To understand this, I must lay down one proposition that conduceth to cure the great mistake about liberty and bondage: That liberty is not potestas vivendi ut velis—a power to live as we list; no, it is to live as we ought—potestas volendi quod lex divina jubet. The life and spirit of liberty lieth in that, a power to do what we ought, not a power to do what we will. Ever since we drank in that poison, 'Ye shall be as gods,' Gen. 3:5, man affecteth a dominion over himself, and would be lord of his own actions, sui juris, at his own dispose, do what he pleaseth. Indeed, if we had a perfectly holy understanding to guide us, the danger would not be so great; but now it is the greatest misery that can befall a man to be at his own dispose, to do lawlessly what he will: and therefore God's fearful and dreadful judgment, after all other courses tried, is to give up men to the sway of their own hearts, to do what they please: Ps. 81:12, 'So I gave them up to their own hearts' lust, and they walked in their own counsels;' to be left to our brutish affections. But to prove it.

[1.] That infringeth a man's liberty that hindereth and disableth him from prosecuting his great end, which is to be truly happy. Now thus doth the carnal life, and therefore this is true and perfect bondage. Though men live in their bonds with as much delight as fishes in their own element, yet that doth not alter the case; they are slaves for all that: 'They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh,' Rom. 8:5. They seem to live at large, but indeed they are in a spiritual prison; they cannot use the means that should make them happy. They employ their whole time in the remote subservient helps to a happy life, in pleasures, and honours, and profits; as dissolute and carnal factors and servants, who, finding contentment at the first inn they come at, spend most of their time and money there, which should be spent at the fairs and mart for which they are bound. Pleasure, and delight, and contentment of mind and body, is a

remote subservient help; so competency of wealth, and some place wherein we may glorify God: these things are not to be desired for themselves, nor in any great measure, but subordinately, in order to our great end. Now, when they entice and detain our affections, and we cannot look after our great end, they break our liberty; for the less power we have to do that which we should desire to do, the more slaves are we.

[2.] That which disordereth the constitution of the soul, and puts reason out of dominion, that certainly is spiritual bondage and thralldom. Now, when the base prevail above the honourable, it is a sign a country is enthralled; where beggars are on horseback, and princes walk on foot; or, as it is monstrous in the body if the head be there where the feet should be, and the feet where the head should be; such a de-ordination is there in the soul when the affections carry it, and lust taketh the throne instead of reason: Titus 3:3, 'Serving divers lusts and pleasures.' When a man yieldeth up himself to his own desires, he becometh a proper servant: Rom. 6:16, 'Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?' Now, man rightly constituted, his actions are thus governed: The understanding and conscience prescribe to the will; the will, according to right reason and conscience, moveth the affections; the affections, according to the command and counsel of the will, move the bodily spirits and members of the body. But by corruption there is a manifest inversion and change; pleasures affect the senses, the senses corrupt the phantasy, phantasy moveth the bodily spirits, they the affections; and by their violence the will is carried captive, man blinded, and so man goeth on headlong to his own destruction. The corrupt passions are like wild horses, that do not obey the driver, but draw to precipices for his destruction.

Therefore Basil of Seleucia calleth a carnal man a slave, that runs after the chariots of his own passions and corrupt affections.

[3.] Consider the great tyranny and power of sin; it leaveth us no right and power to dispose of ourselves and our actions, and so men cannot help themselves when they would; as is sensible in them that are convinced of better, and do worse: they see what they should do, but do not do it, being drawn away by their own lusts. *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor.* Sin hath gotten such a deep interest in their actions, and command over their affections, that they cannot leave what they know to be naught, or follow that which they conceive to be good. And this bondage is more sensible in them that have some kind of remorse and trouble with their convictions, either from temporal inconvenience, shame, or loss, and yet cannot leave their lusts, and so in despair, resolve to go on, and make the best of it: Jer. 18:12, 'And they said, There is no hope, but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart;' Jer. 2:25, 'Thou hast said, There is no hope; no, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go;' yea, further, that have a kindly remorse from the conviction of the Spirit: Jer. 31:18, 'I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself, thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.' And so Paul: Rom. 7:14, 'I am carnal, sold under sin.'

[4] Consider how this bondage is always increased by custom, which is a second nature, or an inveterate disease not easily cured: Jer. 13:23, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good who are accustomed to do evil.' The more he continueth in this course, the less able to help himself; the more he sinneth, the more he is enthralled to sin; as a nail, the more it is knocked, the more it is fastened in the wood. First a man yields up himself to sin as a servant by covenant: Rom. 6:16, 'Know ye not to

whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?' that is, gives up his principal time, actions, and employment. Then a servant of conquest: 2 Peter 2:19, 'While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.' A sinner is under the dominion of sin, as a hired servant and a captive. We first willingly, and by our own default, run into it, and after cannot rid ourselves of it. *Ligatus eram non ferro alieno, sed mea ferrea voluntate; velle meum tenebat inimicus, et me mihi catenam fecerat, et constrinxerat me*—Lord, I am bound, not with iron, but with an obstinate will; I gave my will to mine enemy, and he made a chain of it to bind me, and keep me from thee. *Quippe ex voluntate perversa facta est libido, et dum servitur libidini facta est consuetudo, et dum consuetudo non resistitur facta est necessitas* (Aug. Confes. lib. viii. cap. 5)—a perverse will gave way to lustings, and lustings made way for a custom, and a custom let alone brought a necessity upon me, that I can do nothing but sin against thee. And after that, *Reformidabam quasi mortem consuetudinis mutationem* (Aug. Confes. lib. viii. cap. 7). Thus are we by little and little enslaved, brought under the power of every toy. Things are lawful as subordinate helps; but we, contrary to the law of reason, and the inclination to true happiness, immoderately desire them; and these desires being excessive, get a complete victory Over our souls: and at length we are brought under the power of every creature: 1 Cor. 6:12, 'All things are lawful, but I will not be brought under the power of any.'

[5.] There is one thing more that maketh the carnal life to be a mere slavery; and that is, the fear and terror which doth arise from the consciousness of sin, the fear of death and damnation, and wrath to come, which doggeth sin at the heels. When Adam sinned, he was afraid, Gen. 3:7; and carnal men are 'all their lifetime subject to

bondage through the fear of death,' Heb. 2:15. There is a fire smothering in the bosom of a sinner, and sometimes it flashes out in actual gripes and horrors; they have grievous dampings of heart; so that sinners are so far bondmen, that they dare not seriously call themselves to an account for the expense of their time and employments, which every one should do, nor think seriously of death, or God's judgment, or hell. He that is always under the check of a cruel master cannot be said to be a freeman. Now so is every man that is not in Christ; let him be never so great, and mighty, and powerful, he is ἔνοχος δουλείας, 'subject to bondage,' in danger of hidden fears, easily awakened in his heart. Well, then, call you this a free life? As jolly and jocund as wicked men seem to be, or as great as they are, it is a liberty of the flesh taken by men, not given by God; the quietness of the flesh, but bane of the soul.

2. On the contrary, the true liberty is in the ways of God.

[1.] There we are directed how to attain to our great end, which is true blessedness: Mat. 7:14, 'Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.' A way of sin seemeth broad and easy to the flesh, but it is strait and hard to the spirit; and the way of duty strait and narrow to the flesh, but, because it is to life, it is broad to the spirit or new nature: 'I shall walk at liberty.' To a renewed heart the divine commandments are not grievous, 1 John 5:3, for by this means they come to enjoy God, and walk to their happiness, and attain to the end for which they were made. A poor heart goes home cheerfully.

[2.] In loving, fearing, praising, serving God, the noblest faculties are exercised in the noblest and most regular way of operation. The soul is in the right temper and constitution; they are the highest actions of the highest faculties, elevated by the highest principles, about the

highest objects. The objects are God, Christ, heaven, the great things of eternity. The principles are the love and fear of God, the faculties, understanding, and will, not sensitive appetite; these exercised in thinking of God, and choosing of God.

Secondly, The second part of the demonstration is that there is liberty given to walk in that way. Ever since Adam's fall every man is a spiritual slave, under the dominion and power of sin and Satan, and the curse of the law; but now, 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty,' 2 Cor. 3:17; true Christian liberty, or a power given us to walk familiarly with God, and cheerfully and comfortably in his service. By grace a man is freed—

1. From the yoke of oppressing fears.

2. The tyranny of commanding lusts.

1. We are freed from the bondage of sin: Rom. 8:2, 'The law of the spirit of life, which is in Christ Jesus, hath made us free from the law of sin and death;' John 8:36, 'If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.' There is a liberty in that which is good: Ps. 119:32, 'I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart'

2. We are freed from those doubts and fears and terrors which accompanied the state of sin: Job 36:8, 'If they be bound in fetters, and be holden in the cords of affliction;' Job 13:27, 'Thou putttest my feet also in the stocks;' Lam. 3:7, 'He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out; he hath made my chain heavy.' So that the meaning is, I shall walk at liberty, be cheerful and enlarged in heart; for I seek thy precepts.

Thirdly, There is liberty in that walking: it is the fruit of strictness. There is a twofold liberty:—

1. Outward deliverances out of straits and afflictions: Ps. 118:5, 'I called upon the Lord in distress; the Lord answered me, and set me in a large place;' and Ps. 18:19, 'He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me because he delighted in me.' So Ps. 4:1, 'Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress.' Affliction is compared to a prison, where the poor afflicted creature is as it were confined, committed by God, and must not break prison, come out by the window, but the door. When we are let out by God upon submission and supplication, urging the satisfaction of Christ, as we are sent thither by God's authority, so we come out by God's love. Now, God doth this for those that obey him, as all those places manifest.

2. Inward confidence. "Εννομος ζωή τῆς παρρησίας δημοῦργος, saith Chrysostom on the text—A holy life is the ground of liberty, and holy boldness: 1 John 3:21, 'If our hearts condemn us not, then have we liberty towards God;' we have delight, and pleasure, and contentment. Till we defile conscience, we have a great deal of boldness and courage against opposition, yea, a boldness to go to God himself, who otherwise is a consuming fire.

Use 1. Is to take off that prejudice that we have against the ways of God, as if they were strait and hard, and not to be endured. Oh, no! all God's ways are for our good: Deut. 6:24, 'The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes,' to fear the Lord our God for our good always. And the duties that he requireth of us are honourable and comfortable; we never walk more at large than when we have a conscience of them. Man acteth like himself when he is holy, just, temperate, sober, humble. Grace puts all things in the right frame and posture again: it puts reason in dominion, and maketh us kings

in governing our own hearts; and this breedeth sweetness and peace. Pax est tranquillitas ordinis—when all things keep their place, then is there peace. As when the humours of the body are in order, and the spirits move tuneably, there is a cheerfulness ensueth; so the fruit of righteousness is peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. If a man had no rule to guide him, and God had left him without a law, yet, if he were well in his wits, he would prefer the duties which he hath enjoined before liberty, and of his own accord choose to live according to such an institution; there is such a suitableness in all those things to the reasonable nature. What do men aim at—pleasure, honour, or profit? For pleasure: Prov. 3:17, 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.' None have such a sweet life as they that live virtuously and as God hath commanded. All the sensualists in the world have not such a dainty dish to feed on as they that have a good conscience: they have a continual feast, that never cloyeth. You never come away from your sports with such a merry heart as they come away from the throne of grace. If men would consider their experiences after the discharge of their duties and when straggling to carnal delights; after saddest duties, there is a serenity in the conscience. Who ever repented of his repentance? 1 Sam. 1:18, 'Hannah went her way, and did eat, and her spirit was no more sad.' Prayer giveth ease, but sensual pleasures leave remorse and a sting. If you count liberty to consist in hunting after honours and great places, can there be a greater honour than to serve God? Who hath the better service, he that attendeth on the uncertain will of men, yea, of the greatest princes, or he that waiteth on the Lord? Your work is more noble: Prov. 12:26, 'The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.' What an unprofitable drudgery is the service of the greatest prince in the world, in comparison of the work of a poor Christian, that liveth in communion with God? We serve a greater prince, and on surer terms. Then for profit: Where is there more gain, as to our vails and wages, than in God's service? Well, then, he



that liveth holily hath much the sweeter and happier life than they that serve covetousness, ambition, or any other lust. Certainly this should persuade us to put our neck under Christ's yoke; it is ζῦγος χρηστὸς—Mat. 11:29, 'His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.' If it be grievous, it is to the flesh, and we have no reason to indulge the flesh: Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' The command to an unsound conscience is as a light burden laid on a sore back. Men that are soaked in pleasures are incompetent judges of the sweetness of the heavenly life. On the other side, what a miserable servitude is there in sin! how disabled for their great end for which they were created! Corruption is an imperious master; it will not suffer us to hear good things, to be there where good things are spoken, to accompany them that are good; it hath them in so strait a custody, they hate the means of their recovery. They have many masters. Quot habet dominos qui unum habere non vult! Titus 3:3, 'For we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures;' and James 4:1, 'Whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts, that war in your members?' One lust draweth one way, another another way; covetousness, voluptuousness, ambition, uncleanness; as when two seas meet. We have little reason to envy them for their free life; pity them rather. How do their brutish affections hurry them! What pains, aches in the body, wounds in the conscience! How many secret gripes and scourges! No such subjection, no slave so subject to the will of his lord, as a man to his lusts and sinful desires,—will speak, think nothing but what sin commands. It is a besotting slavery. Wicked men remain in this bondage with a kind of pleasure. Galley-slaves would fain be free, wish for liberty. Israel was in bondage in Egypt, but they groaned under it: 'The cry of the children of Israel is come up to me.' Here men loathe to come out of their slavery, and are enemies to those that would help them out. Their work is hard

and oppressive,—loss of name, health, estate. They tire their spirits, rack their brains, and after all their drudging are cast into hell.

Use 2. Do we walk at liberty?

1. There was a time when we served sin; but being converted, we change masters: Rom. 6:18, 'Being made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.' If there be such a change, it will discover itself. (1.) You will do as little service for sin as formerly for righteousness: Rom. 6:20, 'When ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness;' righteousness had no share in your time, thoughts, cares; you made no conscience of doing good, took no care of it: so now you do as little for sin. (2.) Positively do as much for grace as formerly for sin: ver. 19, 'As you yielded your members servants unto uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, so now yield your members servants unto righteousness unto holiness;' as watchful, as earnest, as industrious to perfect holiness, as formerly to commit sin: it is but equal. He that hath been servant unto a hard and cruel master is thereby fitted to be diligent and faithful in the service of a loving, gentle, and bountiful master. You can judge what a tyrant sin was. Shall not grace have as much power over you now, and will you not do as much for God as for your lusts?

2. What do you complain of as the task and yoke—the strictness of the law, or the relics of corruption? Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be;' compared with 1 John 5:3, 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.' What is a bondage—sin or duty? Is the commandment grievous, or indwelling sin? The apostle was complaining, but of what? The purity of the law? No; but the power of indwelling corruption, the body of death: Rom. 7:24, 'O wretched man that I

am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?' Which do your hearts rise against?

3. What freedom? Luke 1:74, 75, 'That you, being delivered out of the hands of your enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of your lives.' If you are enslaved to any one lust, you cannot walk at large. Are your gyves and fetters knocked off? Have you that free spirit? Ps. 51:11, 12, 'Cast me not away from thy presence, take not thy Holy Spirit from me; restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me by thy free spirit.'

## SERMON LII

### **I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.—VER. 46.**

THE man of God had prayed, ver. 43, that God would 'not take the word of truth utterly out of his mouth;' that is, deny him the liberty or the grace, the opportunity or the heart, to make an open profession of his faith and respect to God and his ways. This suit he backeth with sundry arguments.

1. From his hope: ver. 23, 'For I have hoped in thy judgments.' He had placed all his confidence in them, and therefore would openly profess what rule he lived by, and what expectations he had from God.

2. His resolution to persist in this course, whatever befell him: ver. 44, 'So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever;' it would engage him to constancy to the end of his life.

3. From the alacrity and readiness of his obedience, as well as the constancy: ver. 45, 'And I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts.' Then we have true liberty.

4. That no worldly splendour or terror should take him off from making this confession, if God would give him liberty and opportunity. Two things hinder a free confession of God's truth—carnal fear and carnal shame. Both are obviated by the resolution of the man of God; he would neither be afraid nor ashamed to recommend the ways of God to the greatest princes of the world.

[1.] The terror of kings or men in power may be supposed to be a hindrance to the free confession of God's truth; therefore he saith, 'I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings.'

[2.] Carnal shame may breed a loathness to own God's despised ways; therefore he addeth, 'I will not be ashamed.' David would neither be afraid nor ashamed, if called thereto, to make this open confession, to own God and his truth.

First, His resolution against fear deserveth a little opening: 'I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings.' The words may be looked upon as a direction for them who are called to speak before kings. Men may suppose to be called—

1. Either by the duty of their office, to speak to them in a way of instruction; or

2. As convened before them in a judiciary way, to give an account of their faith.

1. In the first sense, those who are called to instruct kings ought with the greatest confidence to recommend the ways of God to them, as

that which will enhance their crowns and dignity, and make it more glorious and comfortable to them and their subjects than anything else. And so David's resolution showeth what faithfulness becometh them who live in the courts of princes. It concerneth princes to be instructed: Ps. 2:10, 'Be wise now therefore, ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth.' Few speak plainly and sincerely to them, as Nathan to David: 2 Sam. 12:7, 'Thou art the man;' and God to David: 2 Sam. 24:13, 'Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land; or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in the land?' John the Baptist to Herod: Mat. 14:4, 'It is not lawful for thee to have her.' Jehu to Jehoshaphat: 2 Chron. 19:2, 'Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord.' Many times they are impatient of truth, as Ahab could not endure Micaiah: 1 Kings 22:8, 'And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, 'There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil,' &c. (Josephus, lib. viii. cap. 10; Theodoret, lib. 4. Cap. 30).

2. If convened before them in a judiciary way, as the three children were before Nebuchadnezzar: Dan. 3:13, 'Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and they brought these men before the king;' and ver. 16–18, 'They answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar! we are not careful to answer thee in this matter; if it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us out of thine hand, O king; but if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up;' Mat. 10:18, 19, 'Ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them.' There are some kings that have not submitted their crowns and sceptres to the King of kings; so pagans

and wicked princes who can neither endure the truth, nor those which profess it Ὅι καλλίνικοι μάρτυρες τῶν δυσσεβῶν κατεφρόνησεν βασιλέων, The children of God ought not to be daunted by any power and fear of princes. Their power may be a terror to us, and in other cases ought to be revered by us; but it should not be a snare to us, to make us desert our duty to God. We must never forget the honour put upon them by God: they bear his image, and in all lawful cases we acknowledge God's authority in them; they are those by whom God will govern us; but if anything be decreed against God, we only urge our obedience to the Lord paramount: Acts 4:19, 'Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than God, judge ye;' Acts 5:29, 'Then Peter and the apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.'

The latter branch needeth little explaining. What shall we observe?

1. If I should take the first reference, and urge the duty of kings and princes, that would be unseasonable for this auditory. It is a preposterous solecism to preach to the people the duty of kings, and then to kings the duty of their people; as foolish a course as to make fires in summer, and adorn the chimney with herbs and flowers in winter.

2. If I should speak of the second reference, the clemency of the government we live under maketh it unseasonable also; for our king (whom God preserve) hath often avowed his resolutions against persecutions for conscience' sake. Therefore, waiving all other things, I shall only insist upon two points, which are necessary, partly to show the excellency of our religion which we profess, partly to guide our practice.

Doct. 1. That nothing is so necessary for kings, princes, and magistrates to know as God's testimonies.

Doct. 2. That God's testimonies are so excellent, that we should not be afraid or ashamed to own them before any sort of men in the world.

Of the first briefly.

Doct. 1. That nothing is so necessary for the potentates of the world to know as God's testimonies. The king of Israel was to write a copy of the law of God in a book, and to have it ever before him, that he might read therein, and learn to fear the Lord his God, Deut. 17:18, 19. And therefore Josiah, one of the good kings which God gave unto his people, searched for the book of the law, 2 Kings 23:2. The reasons concern them, if considered both as men and as potentates.

1. As men.

[1.] They are upon the same level with others, and are concerned to understand the way of pleasing, glorifying, and enjoying God, as much as their meanest subjects; for it is said, Job 34:19, 'He accepteth not the person of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor; for they are all the works of his hands.' God dealeth with them impartially, respecting the greatest no more than the meanest. He hath an equal interest in all, and therefore doth command and dispose of all; for all are his creatures, not exempted from being subject to his dominion; as the potter is not more obliged to vessels of honour, than of dishonour. As his law bindeth all, so all that continue in impenitency and the neglect of his grace are obnoxious to the curse of the law. It is general to all transgressors: 'Cursed is every one,' &c. And if God should lay their sins home to their consciences, and speak to them in his wrath, they can stand before him no more

than the meanest: Rev. 6:15, 16, 'And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.'

[2.] The higher their station the greater their obligation. No sort of men more obliged to God than those that are advanced by him to rule over his people; therefore their ingratitude would be greater if they should sin against God: 2 Sam. 12:7–9, 'I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hands of Saul, and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?' Their sins do more hurt, because of their example and authority, Job 34:20.

2. As rulers and potentates they are concerned to be acquainted with God's testimonies.

[1.] That they may understand their place and duty. They are first God's subjects, then his officers. They have their power from, God: Rom. 13:4, 'For he is the minister of God to thee for good.' They hold their power in dependence on him; both natural, their strength and force: 'Thou couldest have no power unless it were given thee from above,' John 19:10, 11. Legal, their authority or governing power, they hold it in dependence upon the absolute and heavenly Sovereign, who is the 'Lord of lords and King of kings:' Prov. 8:15, 16, 'By me kings reign, and princes decree justice; by me princes rule, and nobles, and all the judges of the earth.' And as they hold it in



dependence on him, they must use it in subordination to him. God, who is the beginning, must also be the end of their government. They are not officers of men, but ministers of God, from whom they have their authority; and therefore must rule for God, and seek his glory.

[2.] That they may be carried through their cares, and fears, and snares, and may know what reward to expect from the absolute Sovereign, who is the great patron of human societies. It is trust and dependence upon God that maketh good magistrates: 2 Kings 18:5, 'He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that went before him.' Oh! it is a blessed thing when they can go to God for direction, and depend upon God for success. Great are the cares and fears which belong to a governor; and who can ease him of this burden but the Lord, who hath showed in his word how far he is to be trusted? It is not carnal policy which helpeth them out in their work, but trust in God in their high calling. Whosoever will improve his power for God will meet with many discouragements. Now that which supports his heart in his work is this holy trust: Prov. 29:25, 'The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.' Every public calling hath its snares and temptations from the fears of men. A minister, if he doth not trust God to bear him out in his work, he will do nothing with that courage which becometh a minister, but comply with the lusts of men, grow lukewarm, prostitute the ordinances for handfuls of barley, and pieces of bread, and family conveniences. The magistracy is a higher calling, which is more obnoxious to temptations from the different humours of men, who are to be governed. Nothing will carry a man through it but this holy courage and dependence on God. The fear of man brought a snare to Jeroboam, that he perverted the worship of God: 1 Kings 12:30, 'And this thing became a sin; for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan.' So Jehu, so others, for their cares.

But he that trusts in God in his discharge of this public office, though many difficulties interpose, finds the blessed experience of the Psalmist verified, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.'

[3.] As to success and acceptance, obedience to God makes them a double blessing to the people—as governors, as holy; as they have the natural image of God in dominion and authority: 1 Cor. 11:7, 'Forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God,' which must be revered and respected, not resisted; so the spiritual image of God in holiness: the people doubly see God in their rulers. And besides, it bringeth down God's blessings, while they command and the people obey in the Lord: 2 Kings 18:7, 'And the Lord was with him, and he prospered whithersoever he went forth.' Good magistrates are usually more prosperous than good men in a private condition, because they are given as a public blessing.

Use 1. To inform us that religion hath a great influence on the welfare of human societies; for it equally respects governors and governed, carving out their respective duties to them, causing the one to rule well, and the other to obey for conscience' sake. The testimonies of the Lord prescribe the duty of rulers: 2 Sam. 23:3, 'He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.' There is a word belonging to either table; justice to the second, fear of God to the first. Now all this duty is best learned out of God's testimonies. For the governed it interposeth express rules for their obedience: Rom. 13:1, 'Let every soul be subject to the higher powers;' and 1 Peter 2:15, 'For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.' There are many arguments why we should reverence magistrates. They bear God's image: Ps. 82:6, 'I have said ye are gods;' visible representators of his authority and dominion over the creatures, because of their majesty, largeness of

command and empire, and because of their use: they are exalted supra alios, above others in their authority; but propter alios, for others in their use and benefit. But the supreme reason is the will of God. The magistrate was then an enemy to religion when this commandment was given forth, even then when that part of the world in which the church was seated was under the command of Nero, whose universal wickedness and particular cruelty against the Christians might tempt them to disobedience and scorn of his authority: then God said, Obey 'not for fear of wrath, but conscience' sake;' then, 'Fear God, honour the king, for so is the will of God.' Now let atheists and anti-scripturists, or the enemies of those who profess to live by scripture, think, if they can, that the Christian religion doth not befriend human societies, or doth contain dangerous principles to government.

Use 2. It showeth us what to pray for, for our princes and governors, even a wise and an understanding heart, and a spirit of the fear of the Lord, that they may rule for God, and take his blessing along with them in all their affairs.

Doct. 2. That God's testimonies are so excellent that we should not be afraid or ashamed to own them before any sort of men in the world; for David saith, 'I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.'

First, Observe, here are two things supposed which might shut his mouth and obstruct the confidence and boldness of his profession—fear and shame. Fear represents danger in owning the ways of God; shame represents mockage, scorn, and contempt. Fear considereth our superiors and governors; we fear them that have power and authority in their hands. Shame may arise not only from the consideration of superiors, but inferiors and equals also. Fear

respects the danger of the party professing; shame, the cause or matter professed. Therefore, of the two, to be ashamed of the ways of God doth more destroy godliness than to be afraid to own them, for then it is a sign we are not so soundly convinced, and deeply possessed of the goodness of them; for, *Pudor est conscientia turpitudinis*—it is a consciousness of something that is base. Look, as, on the contrary, to be ashamed of sin doth more wound it to the heart than to be afraid of sin, many a man is apprehensive of the danger of sin, who yet doth not hate it in his heart, but only abstaineth out of the fear of punishment; but when he is ashamed of sin, then he beginneth to hate sin as sin. In conversion, fear is stirring before shame; as a man sick of a loathsome painful disease is more and first affected with the pain than with the nastiness and filthiness and putrefaction that accompanieth the disease. So here, in religion; as the case is hopeful when ashamed of sin, so dangerous when ashamed of a strict holy course. A man may be willing to do that which he dares not do for fear; but shame extinguished the willingness itself. In short, to be afraid respects our interest; to be ashamed respects the cause, the gospel itself.

Secondly, I shall speak of them distinctly; and so—

1. Show why we should not be afraid to own the testimonies and ways of God before any sort of people in the world.

[1.] Because holy boldness in confession is an especial gift of God. David asketh it here, 'Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth;' and promiseth that if God would give him this gift, the splendour of worldly greatness should not dazzle his eyes, and he would behave himself as one armed against all terrors of men, or gotten above the hopes and fears of the present world. And indeed it argueth some good degree of profiting in the word of God when it is

so with us. Fearlessness of men in God's cause is an excellent grace, which God hath promised to his choice servants. To Christ: Isa. 50:7, 'For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed; I shall not be confounded, for God is at my right hand.' To Jeremiah, whom God set up 'as a brazen wall' against all oppositions: Jer. 1:18; and to Ezekiel, chap. 3:8, 'Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads.' So to the disciples: Mat. 10:19, 20, 'They shall bring you before rulers and governors; but take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in the same hour what ye shall speak.' None have the gift of boldness but those to whom God gives it. If left to ourselves, we shall falter, as Peter did at the damsel's question; but God will assist the resolved heart by his Spirit, and assist him in that very hour when the trial cometh; and then we need not be afraid before whomsoever we come, we need not be anxious. The servants of God beg this gift: Acts 4:29, 'Grant unto thy servants that with all boldness we may speak thy word;' when the world rageth against them.

[2.] Though it be an especial gift of God, yet the duty is contained in our first dedication and resignation of ourselves to Christ; when we professed ourselves to be dead to every worldly interest, and promised to own him and his ways, whatever it cost us: Luke 14:26, 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple;' ver. 33, 'So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all he hath, he cannot be my disciple.' Therefore this should not be retracted, but verified in our whole course, for that showeth this dedication was sound: Heb. 3:6, 'Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end; ver. 14, 'For we are made partakers of Christ,

if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.' And therefore we should be 'ready to render a reason of the hope which is in us, to every one that asketh us, with meekness and fear,' 1 Peter 3:15. Λόγον ἐλπίδος is an account of our religion, ἔτοιμοι, ready to confess Christ in persecutions and dangers: it is the same with ἐτοιμῶς ἔχω—Acts 21:13, 'I am ready not only to be bound, but to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus;' the same with ἐτοιμασία τῆς εἰρήνης τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, 'the preparation of the gospel of peace,' Eph. 6:15; a prepared resolved heart to encounter all difficulties for the gospel's sake, so satisfied with the truth and hopes thereof.

[3.] This duty is confirmed in us by many Christian graces, as faith, love to God, fear of God, a deep sense of the world to come. We are afraid to own God and his ways, because we have not such a high opinion of God as we should have, but too great a love to ourselves; therefore faith, fear, and love is necessary to confirm and strengthen this resolution in us, and also the lively hope of blessedness to come.

(1.) Faith informeth us of the truth, goodness, power, and excellency of God, the worth of his favour, and the terror of his wrath, that the displeasure of God is much worse than the frowns of men. When we think of a higher Lord, why should we be afraid of a man that shall die, and the son of man that is as grass? If a great man stand by, we are not afraid of an underling. If the King of kings be with us, whom should we fear? Heb. 11:27, 'By faith Moses feared not the wrath of the king,' meaning Pharaoh. Why? For 'he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.' A heathen could say, *Regum timendorum in proprios greges, reges in ipsos imperium est Jovis*. A believer should much more oppose God's heavenly majesty to their earthly dignity. Their power is great, and to be revered next to God; but God is

greater. We serve a king whose power is everlasting, and whose kingdom is to all generations.

(2.) Love to God is necessary to confirm and strengthen this resolution in us, for that overcometh all terrors: Rom. 8:37, 'Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us;' and Cant. 8:6, 7, 'Love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame; many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.' There is an unconquerable force in love; it is a fire that cannot be quenched. When Christ hath us by the heart, it is much more than when he hath us by the head. They that make a religion of their opinions, and have a faith that never went deeper than their brains and fancies, are soon discouraged; but when Christ 'dwelleth in the heart by faith,' Eph. 3:17, there he resideth as in his strong citadel and castle. A Christian, because he loveth Christ, will own him, and his ways and truth, though they be never so much despised in the world. A superficial bare assent to the gospel may let Christ go, but a faith working by love will not.

(3.) The fear of God, or a deep awe and reverence of him, when we are more afraid to offend God than to suffer from man. The apostle, when he biddeth us to be ready to make profession, 1 Peter 3:5, bids us do it 'with meekness and fear.' Meekness respects men; fear, a care to approve ourselves to God. The fear of men is checked by the fear of God: Isa. 8:12, 13, 'Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid: sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread;' Luke 12:4, 5, 'Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear; fear him which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell.' A holy impression of God's

excellency and greatness left upon the heart is this fear that carrieth the cause clearly for God; and as one nail driveth out another, the fear of men banisheth the fear of God out of our hearts. We are obliged to none so as to God, who hath the power of eternal life and eternal death. What is a prison to hell, a little vainglory to eternal glory, the creature to God?

(4.) A deep sense of the other world. When we translate the scene from earth to heaven, from this world to the next, and consider who is scorned there, received there, or rejected there, the temptation is lessened. The apostle showeth that a spirit of faith is at the bottom of confession with the mouth: 2 Cor. 4:13, 'We, having the same spirit of faith, believe, and therefore speak.' He that believeth another world, and hopeth for it, will never be cowardly and bashful, but will confidently confess Christ, and own him both in worship and conversation. A spirit of faith cannot be suppressed, but will break out and show itself, and not be ashamed of Christ, his truth and ways.

Well, then, Christians should be ashamed of that spirit of fear, bashfulness, and inconfidence which keeps us from confessing Christ and owning his ways. Kings are more formidable by their place and power than the rest of the world; but alas! we give place to the meanest men, and the smallest opposition maketh us give out: 2 Tim. 1:7, 'We have not the spirit of fear, but the spirit of love, power, and a sound mind.' The Christian spirit is a sober spirit, that valueth all things according to their weight; but not a dastardly spirit: a spirit of love and power, that owneth Christ with meekness, and a due respect to earthly tribunals; and yet with courage, as looking higher, to the throne of God.



2. We must not be ashamed to own the testimonies and ways of God before any sort of men in the world. The apostle telleth us, Rom. 1:16, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ.' The gospel is such a pure, sure rule, and offereth us such glorious hopes, that we should be ready to profess it without being ashamed of it. So he bids Timothy, 2 Tim. 1:8, 'Be not ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner;' neither of the profession, nor of our companions in the profession, when they are under the greatest disgrace. So again, 1 Peter 4:16, 'If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but glorify God in this behalf;' it is matter of thanksgiving, not of shame. David is an instance; when Michal scoffed at him, 'I will yet be more vile,' 2 Sam. 6:22. It is an honour to be dishonoured for Christ. The primitive Christians, when the heathens reproached them, Art thou not ashamed to believe in him that was crucified? the answer was, I am ashamed to believe in him that committed adultery, meaning the heathen Jupiter. Affliction is no disgrace, but sin is.

But what danger is there of being ashamed of the gospel, since Christianity is in fashion?

Ans. 1. Sometimes the simplicity of the gospel is contemned by the wits of the world; and therefore they either muster up the oppositions of science falsely so called, or else droll upon religion, and make it the common jest and byword.

Ans. 2. The stricter profession of the ways of God is under reproach. Though the nominal Christian and the serious Christian have the same Bible, and believe the same creed, and are baptized into one and the same profession, yet those that are false to their religion will hate and scorn those that are true to it; and among the carnal it will be matter of reproach to be serious and diligent. Now, though a

gracious heart can be vile for God, yet others are afraid they shall be marked, and accounted precise, or Puritans; and so by resisting an imaginary shame, they fall into an eternal reproach.

Ans. 3. It may be the strict sort of Christians are the poorer sort; and though they be precious in the eyes of God, yet they are despised by men: John 7:49, 'This people that knoweth not the law are accursed. Have any of the Pharisees believed in him?' any people of quality? They shall be accounted people of no port and breeding if they are strictly Christian. *Quantus in Christiano populo honor Chiristi est, ubi religio ignobilem facit? coguntur esse viles ne mali videantur.* Religion is too mean a thing for persons of quality, of their rank. Thus with many God's image is made a scorn, and the devil's image had in honour, and serious godliness is made a byword.

Now, to fortify you against being ashamed of God and his ways, take these considerations:—

1. The short continuance of this world's glory. Within a while we shall be levelled with the lowest, and our dust mixed with common earth; and shall we love the praise of men more than the praise of God? This corruptible flesh must turn into a loathsome rottenness, though now it looketh high, and sets forth itself, and would be brave and lordly; but 'the spirit must return to God that gave it,' to be commanded into unseen and unknown regions: 1 Peter 1:24, 'All flesh is grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass.'

2. God is the fountain of honour; all things and persons receive an honour by having relation to him: James 2:1, 'Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, in respect of persons.' services mean in themselves are accounted honourable with respect to princes. The reproach of Christ is enough to weigh down all the

honours in the world: Heb. 11:26, 'Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.'

3. If your hearts be sincere with God, you will not be ashamed of his ways, for 'wisdom is justified of her children;' in Luke it is, 'All her children,' Luke 7:35. They that have a faith which is the fruit of conviction only may be ashamed: John 12:42, 43, 'Among the rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.' But that faith which is the fruit of conversion will make us courageous in God's cause. In its infancy there may be some relics of fear in a Christian, as Nicodemus at first came to Jesus by night, John 19:39; but a grown faith counts it no loss of honour or impeachment of dignity to become vile for God.

4. The eternal recompense: 1 Sam. 2:30, 'Those that honour me I will honour;' 1 Peter 1:7, 'That your faith may be found to praise, glory, and honour, at Christ's coming.' On the other side, if we are ashamed of Christ, Christ will be ashamed of us for evermore: Mark 8:38, 'Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his father, with the holy angels.' The eagle eye of faith can look through all the pageantry of the world, and the mists and clouds of time, to the future state, the judgment that shall be made of things. To a believer's eye all the honour of the world is but a fancy and vain appearance, a scene in which a base fellow acteth the part of a prince.

5. The judgment of the world is not to be stood upon. Why should we desire the applause of the blind ungodly world, or make any great matter of their contempt and scorn? Shall the scorn of a fool be more

to us than the approbation of God? If they slight you who slight God and Christ and their own salvation, why should you be troubled? They are incompetent judges of these things: 1 John 3:1, 'The world knoweth us not.'

Use. See the strange perversion of human nature. Men are ashamed where they should be bold, and bold and confident where they should be ashamed: 'They glory in their shame;' but think it a disgrace to speak of God, and own God, not before kings only, but before their familiars and companions. Be ashamed to be filthy, false, proud; but never be ashamed to go to a sermon, where you may profit in the ways of God, and the knowlege of his testimonies; to be strict in conversation, to speak reverently of God, though scorned by men. None of God's servants have reason to be ashamed of their master.

## **SERMON LIII**

**And I will delight myself in thy  
commandments, which I have loved.—**

**VER. 47.**

THE man of God is giving arguments to enforce his request that 'the word of truth might not be taken utterly out of his mouth.'

1. He could not bear it, because all his hopes of felicity were built upon it, ver. 43.

2. He promiseth constancy of obedience, ver. 44.

3. Liberty of practice, ver. 45.

4. Liberty of profession, not hindered by fear or shame, but should be borne out with confidence in that profession.

5. He urgeth in the text with what delight he should carry on the work of obedience, 'And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.' In which observe—

1. His great pleasure and contentment is asserted and professed, I will delight myself.

2. The object of it, in thy commandments.

3. The fundamental reason or bottom cause of this delight, which I have loved.

Doct. A gracious heart doth love and delight in the commandments of God: the godly are described by it. Hence David makes it the character of a blessed man: Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he meditate day and night. And Ps. 112:1, 'Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, and delighteth greatly in his commandments.' Paul asserts of himself, as a comfortable evidence of his sincerity in the midst of his infirmities, Rom. 7:22, 'For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.' By 'the inward man' he means the renewed part, that is pleased with all things that please God, if we have such a delight as is above the delight of sense, &c. I will—

1. Explain the point as it lieth here in the text.
2. Show how the heart is brought to this; for corrupt nature is otherwise affected.

First, To explain the point.

1. His pleasure and contentment is asserted, 'I will delight myself.' A Christian hath his joys and delights, but they are pure and chaste; they delight in the Lord, and in his word and ways: Phil. 4:4, 'Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.' He hath a liberty, ἀλλὰ μόνον ἐν κυρίῳ, 'but only in the Lord,' 1 Cor. 7:39; not only may, but must. It is his duty. Joy is a great part of his work; not our felicity or wages only, but our work also. Now, I shall prove that all the pleasures and delights of the earth are nothing to the pleasures and delights which the godly do find in God and in a holy life.

[1.] These delights are more substantial. It is not a superficial joy that they are delighted withal, but a substantial joy. It must needs be so, partly because these are better grounded, not built upon a mistake and fancy, but the highest warrant and surest foundation which mankind can build upon, the word of the eternal God, which can never fail; whereas the joy that is merely built upon carnal delights is built upon a fancy and mistake. Both are represented by the apostle: 1 John 2:17, 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever.' If they considered the shortness of their pleasures, and in what a doleful case their wealth, and honour, and fleshly delights will leave them, they would have little list to be merry till they had looked after a more stable blessedness. The world will be soon gone, and the lust and gust thereof gone also; but he that goeth on with the work of holiness, building on the promise of another world, layeth a sure foundation. Partly because they do more intimately affect the soul. Sensual

delights do not go so deep as the delights of holiness: Ps. 4:7, 'Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time when their corn and their wine increased;' like a soaking shower that goeth to the root. The other tickleth the senses; poor, slight, and outside comforts, that do not fortify the heart against distresses, much less against the remembrance of our judge, or the fears of an offended God, or the serious thoughts of another world. For these two reasons, the joys of a Christian, stirred up in him by the conformity of his will to the will of God, are solid, substantial joys. A wicked man may be jocund and jovial, but he hath not the true delight; he may have more mirth, but the Christian hath the true joy: 'In the midst of mirth the heart is sorrowful.' It is easy to be merry, but it is not easy to be joyful, or to get a substantial delight.

[2.] These delights are more perfective; a man is the better for them. Other delights, that please the flesh, feed corruption, but these corroborate and strengthen graces. They are so far from disordering the mind, and leading us to sin, that they compose and purify the mind, and make sin more odious, and fortify us against the baits of sense, which are the occasion of all the sin in the world. All our joy is to be considered with respect to its use and profit: Eccles. 2:2, 'I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doth it?' The more a man delighteth in God, and in the ways of God, the more he cleaveth to him, and resolveth to go on in this course, and temptations to sensual delights do less prevail; for, 'the joy of the Lord is our strength.' The safety of the spiritual life lieth in the keeping up our joy and delight in it: Heb. 3:6, 'Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end;' Isa. 64:5, 'Thou meetest him who rejoiceth and worketh righteousness.' But now carnal delights intoxicate the mind, and fill it with vanity and folly. The sensitive lure hath more power over us to draw into the slavery of sin: Titus 3:3, 'For we ourselves were also foolish,

deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures.' Surely then the healing delights should be preferred before the killing, wounding pleasures that so often prove a snare to us.

2. The object is to be considered, 'Thy commandments.' Here observe

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[1.] David did not place his delight in folly or filthiness, as they do that glory in their shame, or delight in sin, and give contentment to the lusts of the flesh; as the apostle speaks of some that 'sport themselves in their own deceivings,' 2 Peter 2:13; that do not only live in sin, but make a sport of it, beguiling their own hearts with groundless apprehensions that there is no such evil and hazard therein as the word declareth and conscience sometimes suggesteth; they are beholden to their sottish error and delusion for their mirth. Neither did he place his delight in temporal trifles, the honours, and pleasures, and profits of the world, as brutish worldlings do; but in the word of God, as the seed of the new life, the rule of his conversation, the charter of his hopes; that blessed word by which his heart might be renewed and sanctified, his conscience settled, his mind acquainted with his Creator's will, and his affections raised to the hopes of glory. The matter which feedeth our pleasures showeth the excellency or baseness of it. If, like beetles, we delight in a dunghill rather than a garden, or the paradise of God's word, it shows a base, mean spirit, as swine in wallowing in the mire, or dogs to eat their own vomit. Our temper and inclination is known by our complacency or displacency: Rom. 7:5, 'For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sin which were by the law did work in our members, to bring forth fruit unto death.' Therefore see which your hearts carry you to—to the world or the word of God. The most part of the world are carried to the pleasures of sense, and mastered by them; but a divine spirit or nature put into us makes us look after



other things: 2 Peter 1:4, 'Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises,' even of the great blessings of the new covenant, such as pardon of sin, eternal life, &c.

[2.] Not only in the promissory, but mandatory part of the word. Commandments is the notion in the text. There is matter of great joy contained in the promises, but they must not be looked upon as exclusive of the precepts, but inclusive. Promises are spoken of Ps. 119:111, 'Thy testimonies have I taken as a heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.' They contain spiritual and heavenly riches, and so are matter of joy to a believing soul. But the commandments call for duty on our parts. The precepts appoint us a pleasant work, show us what is to be done and left undone. These restraints are grateful to the new nature, for the compliance of the will with the will of God, and its conformity to his law, hath a pleasure annexed to it. A renewed soul would be subject to God in all things, therefore delights in his commandments without limitation or distinction.

[3.] It is not in the study or contemplation of the justice and equity of these commandments, but in the obedience and practice of them. There is a pleasure in the study and contemplation, for every truth breedeth a delectation in the mind: Ps. 19:8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the soul.' It is a blessed and pleasant thing to have a sure rule commending itself with great evidence to our consciences, and manifesting itself to be of God. Therefore the sight of the purity and certainty of the word of God is a great pleasure to any considering mind; no other study to be compared with it. But the joy of speculation or contemplation is nothing to that of practice. Nothing maketh the heart more cheerful than a good conscience, or a constant walking in the way of God's commandments: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that, with

simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, I have had my conversation in the world.' Let me give you this gradation: The pleasures of contemplation exceed those of sense, and the delights of the mind are more sincere and real than those of the body; for the more noble the faculty is, the more capable of delight. A man in his study about natural things hath a truer pleasure than the greatest epicure in the most exquisite enjoyment of sense: Prov. 24:13, 14, 'My son, eat thou honey because it is good, and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul when thou hast found it; then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.' But especially the contemplation of divine things is pleasant; the objects are more sublime, certain, necessary, profitable; and here we are more deeply concerned than in the study of nature. Surely this is sweeter than honey and honeycomb, to understand and contemplate the way of salvation by Christ. This is a heaven upon earth to know these things: John 17:3, 'This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' As much as the pleasures of the natural mind do exceed these bodily pleasures, so much do these pleasures of faith and spiritual knowledge exceed those of the natural mind; these things the angels desire to pry into. Now the delights of practical obedience do far exceed those which are the mere result of speculation and contemplation. Why? Because they give us a more intimate feeling of the truth and worth of these things, and our right in them thereby is more secured, and our delight in them is heightened by the supernatural operation of the Holy Ghost. The joy of the Spirit is said to be 'unspeakable and full of glory,' 1 Peter 1:8. In short, it is exercised about noble objects, the favour of God, reconciliation with him, and the hope of eternal life—all these as belonging to us; and it is excited by a higher cause, the Spirit of God; and lastly, it giveth us a sense of what we had but a

guess before: we 'know the grace of God in truth,' Col. 1:6; we know it so as to taste of it.

3. The fundamental or bottom cause of this delight is expressed, 'Which I have loved.' There is a precedent love of the object before there can be any delight in it. Love is the complacency and propension of the soul toward that which is good, absolutely considered, abstracting both from presence and absence. Desire regardeth the absence and futurity of a good; delight the presence and fruition of it. It is impossible anything can be delighted in, but it must be first loved and desired. None can truly delight in obedience but such as desire it. By nature we were otherwise affected, counted his commands burdensome, because contrary to the desires of the flesh: Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' But when the heart is renewed by grace, then we have another love and another bias upon our affections: 1 John 5:3, 'This is love, to keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.' To others they are against the bent and the hair, and too tedious, and love maketh way for delight.

Secondly, Reasons why a gracious heart doth love and delight in the commandments of God.

1. The matter of these commandments showeth how much they deserve our love and delight. The matter respects either law or gospel. (1.) That which is strictly called the moral law is the decalogue; a fit rule for a wise God to give, or a rational creature to receive, a just and due admeasurement of our duty to God and man: the world cannot be without it. To God, that we should love him, serve him, depend upon him, delight in him, that we may be at length happy in his love. 'The law is holy, just, and good;' not

burdensome to the reasonable nature, but perfective. Surely to know God, to love him, and fear him, and trust and repose our souls on him, and to worship him at the time, in the way, and manner appointed, is a delightful thing, and should be more delightful to us than our necessary and appointed food. To man, justice, charity: Micah 6:8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy;' Hosea 12:6, 'Keep mercy and judgment.' Now all kinds of justice should not be grievous. Political justice, between the magistrates and people. How should we live else? This maintaineth the order of the world. Private justice, between man and man: Mat. 7:12, 'Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.' Family justice, between husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants. How else can a man have any tolerable degree of safety and comfort? 1 Peter 3:7, 'Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge.' Then for mercy, there is not a pleasanter work in the world than to do good; it is God-like. A man is as an earthly god, to comfort and supply others: Acts 20:35, 'It is a more blessed thing to give than to receive.' And blessedness is not tedious; the work rewards itself. The satisfaction is so great of doing good, and being helpful to others, that certainly this is not tedious. (2.) The gospel offereth such a suitable remedy to mankind that the duties of it should be as pleasant and welcome to us as the counsel of a friend for our recovery out of a great misery into which we had plunged ourselves. In the law, God acteth more as a commander and governor; in the gospel, as a friend and counsellor. Surely to those that have any feeling of their sins, or fears of the wrath of God, what can be more welcome than the way of a pardon and reconciliation with God, whom his word and providence, and the fears of a guilty conscience, represent as an enemy to us? Surely this should be more pleasant than all the lust, sport, and honours, and pleasures of the world. Here is the foundation laid of everlasting joy,

a sufficient answer to the terrors of the law, and the accusations of a guilty conscience, which is the greatest misery can befall mankind. In short, that the matter of God's commands deserves our delight and esteem is evident:—

[1.] Because those that are unwilling to submit to them count them good and acceptable laws. When their particular practice and sinful customs have made them incompetent judges of what is fittest for themselves in their health and strength, yet their conscience judgeth it a more excellent and honourable thing in others if they can deny the pleasures of the flesh, and overcome the temptations of the world, and deny themselves the comforts of the present life, out of the hopes of that which is to come. Such are accounted a more excellent and better sort of men: Prov. 12:26, 'The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour;' he hath more of God and of a man than others, as he hath a freer use of reason, and a greater command of his own lusts and passions. There is a reverence of such darted into the consciences of wicked men: Mark 6:20, 'Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and observed him.'

[2.] Because of the sentiments which men have of a holy, sober, godly life, when they come to die, and the disallowance of a dissolute carnal life: Job 27:8, 'What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?' Ps. 37:37, 'Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.' When men are entering upon the confines of eternity, they are wiser; the fumes of lust are then blown over, their joys or fears are then testimonies to God's law: 1 Cor. 15:56, 'The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.' It is not from the fancy or melancholy of the dying person, nor his distemper, that his fears are awakened, but his reason. If it did only proceed from his distemper, men would be rather troubled for leaving worldly comforts than for

sin. No; it is the apprehension of God's justice by reason of sin, who will proceed according to his law, which the guilty person hath so often and so much violated and broken. They are not the ravings of a fever, nor the fruits of natural weakness and credulity. No; these troubles are justified by the law of God or the highest reason.

[3.] By supposing the contrary of all which God hath commanded concerning the embracing of virtue, shunning of vice. If God should free us from these laws, leave us to our own choice, command us the contrary, forbid us all respect to himself, commanding us to worship false gods, transform and misrepresent his glory by images, and fall down before stocks and stones, blaspheme his name continually, and despise all those glorious attributes which do so clearly shine forth in the creation; if he had commanded us to be impious to our parents, to fill the world with murders, adulteries, robberies, to pursue others with slanders and false-witnessings, to covet and take what is another man's, wife, ox, or ass,—the heart of man cannot allow such a conceit; nay, the fiercest beasts would abhor it, if they were capable of receiving such an impression. Now, surely a law so reasonable, so evident, so conducing to the honouring of God, government of ourselves, and commerce with others, should be very welcome and acceptable to a gracious heart.

2. The state and frame of a renewed heart; they are fitted and suited to these commandments, and do obey them not only because enjoined, but because inclined. Nothing is pleasant to men but what is suitable to their nature; so that may be delightful to one which is loathsome to another; as the food and converse of a beast is loathsome to a man; one man's pleasure is another's pain. There is a great deal of difference between a carnal and a spiritual mind, the heart sanctified and unsanctified: Ezek. 36:26, 27, 'I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh;

and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments to do them.' When the heart is fitted and suited by principles of grace, the work is not tedious, but delightful. Things are easy and difficult according to the poise and inclination of the soul. So Heb. 8:10, 'I will write my laws upon their hearts, and put them into their minds.' The law without suiteth with an inclination within; and when things meet which are suitable to one another, there is a delight: Ps. 40:8, 'Thy law is in my heart; I delight to do thy will, O God.' There is an inclination, not necessary, as in natural agents; but voluntary, as in rational agents. There is an inclination in natural agents, as in light bodies to move upwards, heavy bodies to move downwards; in rational agents, when a man is bent by his love and choice. This latter David speaketh of, Ps. 119:36, 'Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.' The heart of man standeth between two objects—the laws of God and carnal vanities. In our natural estate we are wholly bent to please the flesh; in our renewed estate there is a new bent put upon the heart. Now the old bent is not wholly gone, though overmastered and overpowered: the false bias of corruption will still incline us to the delights of sense; but the new bias to the way everlasting, to spiritual eternal happiness: as that prevaieth, we love and delight in the commandments of God.

3. The helps and assistances of the Spirit go further, and increase this delight in the way of God's commandments. God doth not only renew our wills, and fit us with an inward power to do the things that are pleasing in his sight, but exeiteth and actuateth that power by the renewed influences of his grace: Phil. 2:13, 'He giveth us to will and to do;' not only a will, or an urging and inclination to do good; but because of the opposition of the flesh and manifold temptations, he gives also a power to perform what we are inclined unto: 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,' 2 Cor. 3:17, or a readiness of

mind to perform all things required of us, not only with diligence, but delight.

4. The great encouragements which attend obedience, as the rewards of godliness both in this life and the next. The rewards of godliness in this life I shall speak of in the next head; for the future, the end sweetens the means to us. We have no mean end, but the eternal enjoyment of God in a complete state of glory and happiness. Now this hath an influence upon the love and delight of the saints, to sweeten their labours, and difficulties, and temptations. The scripture everywhere witnesseth: 1 Cor. 15:58, 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord;' Phil. 3:14, 'I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus;' Rom. 5:2, 'We rejoice in hope of the glory of God;' and Rom. 8:18, 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.'

5. Present comfortable experience.

[1.] In the general, of peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost.

(1.) Peace, which is the natural result of the rectitude of our actions: 'The fruit of righteousness is peace,' Isa. 32:17; and Ps. 119:165, 'Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.' Pax est tranquillitas ordinis. That description fits internal peace, as well as external. When all things keep their order, affections are obedient to reason, and reason is guided by the Spirit of God according to his word, there is a quiet and rest from accusations in the soul.



(2.) Joy in the Holy Ghost is distinct from the former: Rom. 14:17, 'For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' These two differ in the author. Peace of conscience is the testimony of our own souls approving the good we have done; joy in the Holy Ghost is a more immediate impression of the comforting Spirit: Rom. 15:13, 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.' They differ in their measure: peace is a rest from trouble; joy, a sweet reflection upon our good condition or happy estate. It is in the body a freedom from a disease, and a cheerfulness after a good meal; or in the state, peace, when no mutinies and disturbances; joy, when some notable benefit or profit accrueth to the state. So here they differ in their subjects. The heathen, so far as they did good, might have a kind of peace or freedom from self-accusing and tormenting fears: Rom. 2:15, 'Which show the work of the law written in their hearts; their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts in the meantime excusing or else accusing one another;' but 'a stranger intermeddleth not with these joys.' The Spirit, where a sanetifier, there he is a comforter. They differ in the ground. The joy of the Holy Ghost is not merely from a good conscience as to a particular action, but from a good estate as being accepted with God, who is our supreme judge, and assured of our interest in eternal life. They differ in effects. Peace is an approbation for the present; joy in the Holy Ghost a pledge and beginning of that endless joy we shall have hereafter: 2 Cor. 1:22, 'Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts;' and Rom. 8:23, 'We ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body' Both together show that there is no such solid comfort as in the obedience of God's commandments; certainly more than in all the pleasures of sin, yea, more than in all the enjoyments of the world: whoever have proved

them both will find it so. Many have proved the pleasures of sin, but never yet found what comfort is in mourning for sin. Many have proved the comforts of the world, but never yet proved what is the joy of a good conscience, and the sweet pleasure of a godly conversation.

[2.] There is a particular experience, when borne out in the confession of truth in the time of trial. A man that out of love to God's commands hath endured troubles and trials, and hath overcome temptations, will see more cause to love these commandments, and to increase his obedience to them, than ever before in ordinary temptations: Ps. 19:11, 'Moreover, by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is a great reward.' When they see that divine truth is like to bear out itself, and man that doth confess it, in such cases, they feel the excellency of God's truth, and the power of God sustaining them that confess it, therefore embrace heartily the Lord's commands, and take pleasure in his ways. The Lord appealeth to this experience: Micah 2:7, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' Have not you found the fruit answerable? Therefore the children of God value and esteem and look upon them as the greatest means of their safety and comfort.

6. Because of their love to God, they have a value for everything which cometh from God and leadeth to him. Common mercies point to their author, and their main end is to draw our affections to him, and enable us in his service; but these are apt to be a snare, and are used as an occasion to the flesh. But here is a greater impression of God on his word and laws; their use is more eminent to direct us to God, therefore are valued above ordinary comforts: Job 23:12, 'I have not gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.' They are his

commandments, therefore dear to us, who hath obliged us so much in Christ, whose love they believe and have felt. The word is wholly appointed to maintain the life of grace in us.

Use 1. Is to show us how to bring our hearts to the obedience of God's commands.

1. Love them, if we would keep them. Nothing is hard to love. An esteem will quicken us to the obedience of them.

2. Delight in them, for then all goeth on easily. Delight sweeteneth everything, though in themselves toilsome or tedious; as fowling, hunting, fishing. Delight never mindeth difficulties. The reason why the commands are grievous is want of love and delight.

Use 2. Showeth of what kind our obedience must be—free and unconstrained; when we are not forced to our duty, but do willingly delight in it and the law which prescribeth it, and do bewail our daily failings. Many do some external works of obedience, but not with an inward delight, but out of custom or compulsion. God never hath our heart till he hath our delight, till we willingly abstain from what may displease him, and cheerfully practise what he requireth of us; when it is grateful to obey, and all pleasures to this are nothing worth.

## **SERMON LIV**

**My hands also will I lift up to thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.—VER. 48.**

IN the morning we opened one profession of David's respect to the word of God; now follows another. He would employ all his faculties about the commandments of God, which is his last argument: his mind, for here is meditation promised; his heart, for here is love asserted; his tongue, for that is his original request which occasioned all these professions; and here his hands, his life, 'My hands also will I lift up,' &c. Observe—

1. The ground or cause of his respect to the commandments of God, in that clause, which I have loved.
2. A double effect, I will lift up my hands to thy commandments, and I will meditate in thy statutes.

Lifting up the palms or hands is a phrase of various use.

1. For praying: Ps. 28:2, 'Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands towards thy holy oracle;' Lam. 2:19, 'Lift up thy hands towards him, for the life of thy young children,' &c.; Hab. 3:10, 'The deep uttered his voice, and lift up his hands on high.' Thence the apostle, 1 Tim. 2:8, 'I will, therefore, that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.'

2. For blessing others. Aaron lift up his hands towards the people, and blessed them. Or for praising or blessing God: Ps. 134:2, 'Lift up

your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord;' so Ps. 63:4, 'Thus will I bless thee while I live; I will lift up my hands in thy name.'

3. For swearing or vowing: Gen. 14:22, 'I have lift up my hand to the most high God,' that is, sworn; so Rev. 10:5, the angel 'lift up his hand and swore.' So of God: Ps. 106:26, 'Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness that is, 'swore they should not enter into his rest.'

4. For setting about any action, especially of weight: Gen. 41:44, 'Without thee shall no man lift up his hand that is, attempt or do anything; so Ps. 10:12, 'Arise, O Lord, lift up thine hand; forget not the poor' that is, set to thine active hand for their assistance; so Heb. 12:12, 'Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees,' that is, set actively and vigorously about the Christian task. To this rank may be also referred what is said Mat. 6:3, 'Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.' The hand is the instrument of action.

Now all these senses might be applied to the present place.

[1.] Praying for God's grace to perform them.

[2.] Blessing God, as we do for our daily food, giving thanks for them.

[3.] Vowing or promising under an oath a constant obedience to them. But the commandments are not the proper object to which the acts of praying, blessing, swearing are directed, but God. It is not, I will lift up my hand to God, but 'thy commandments.' We ought indeed to bless God and praise God for the blessings we receive by his word, to vow our duty; but lifting up the hand in all these senses is to God. Therefore—

[4.] Here it meaneth no more but I will apply myself to the keeping of them, or set vigorously about it, put my hands to the practising of thy law with all earnestness, endeavouring to do what therein is enjoined. Two points:—

Doct. 1. That it is not enough to approve or commend the commandments of God, but we must carefully set ourselves to the observance of them.

Doct. 2. Whosoever would do so must use great study and meditation.

Doct. 1. That it is not enough to approve or commend the commandments of God, but we must carefully set ourselves to the practice of them.

1. Hearing without doing is disapproved: Deut. 4:5, 'I have taught you good statutes and judgments, that ye might do so;' Deut. 5:1, 'Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and do them.' Otherwise we deceive our own souls: James 1:22, 'But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own souls.' We put a paralogism on ourselves, build on a sandy foundation: Mat. 7:26, 'Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man that built his house upon the sand.'

2. Knowledge without practice is not right: Luke 12:47, 48, 'He that knoweth his master's will, and prepareth not himself to do it, shall be beaten with many stripes.' Better never known, if not done, for then they do but aggravate our guilt and increase our punishment.

3. Our love is not right unless it endeth in practice. A Christian's love, to whatever object it be directed, must be an unfeigned love. If God,

if the brethren, if the word of God, those words must ever sound in our ears, 1 John 3:18, 'My little children, love not in word and tongue, but in deed and in truth.' Do you love the word of God? Do it not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

4. Our delight is not right; the pleasure is but an airy, idle, and speculative delight, unless it set us about the practice of all holy obedience unto God, making it the design and business of our lives to exercise ourselves unto godliness. That showeth the reality of your delight, when you come under the power of the truth, and are absolutely governed by it; for then you delight in them aright as mysteries of godliness. The Lord complaineth of them that had a delight in the prophet, 'His voice was as pleasing to them as a minstrel; they hear the words, and do them not,' Ezek. 33:32. They may delight in sublime strains of doctrine or flourishes of wit. Demosthenes had made a plausible speech to the Athenians; Phocion told them that the cypress-tree is goodly and fair, but beareth no fruit. There may be flourishes of wit, but no food for hungry consciences.

5. Our commendation is not right unless it endeth in practice. Many may discourse of the ways of God, never speak of them but with commendation, but they do not lift their hands to this blessed work: they show some love to God's commandments, but when it cometh to action, their hands are remiss and faint. Christ refuseth that respect of bare naked commendation: Luke 11:27, 28, 'Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that thou hast sucked. Μενοῦνγε, yea, rather, blessed is he that heareth the word of God, and keepeth it.' We are disciples of that master that did both teach and do: Acts 1:1, 'The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.' Of the Pharisees it is said, 'They say, and do not,' Mat. 23:2, 3. But in Christians there must be saying and

doing: James 2:12, 'So speak, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.' We shall be rewarded, not for speaking well, but for doing, hands lifted up.

Well, then, nothing remains but practising duties that are pressed upon you on the first opportunity. Not he that heareth, understandeth, loveth, delighteth, commendeth, but 'he that keepeth instruction,' it is, 'is in the way of life,' Prov. 10:17. He that submitteth himself to be guided by God's word, he is going the right way to eternal life and happiness. But to set home this point more fully, I shall inquire—

1. What kind of observance we must address ourselves unto.
2. Why we must thus lift up our hands, or address ourselves to our duty.

First, How, for the manner, must we lift up our hands, or what doing is necessary?

1. It must be universal: 'Herod did many things,' Mark 6:20. Partial reformation in outward things will not serve the turn. In sundry particulars men may yield to the word of God, but in others deny their obedience; as in some cheap observances, or such duties as cross not our lusts; but David would lift up his hands to the commandments, without distinction and limitation. Many, this they will do, and that they will not do; and so do not obey God's will, but their own: Ps. 119:6, 'Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments;' Luke 1:6, 'And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.'



2. This doing must be serious and diligent. Every Christian must bend the powers of his soul, and lay out the first of his care and labour, in his obedience unto God: Phil. 2:12, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling:' this is not a work to be done by the bye; but with the greatest care and solicitude.

3. This must be our settled and our ordinary practice. To lift up our hands now and then is not enough, to do a good thing once, or rarely. No; we must make religion our business. The lifting of the hands to God's commandments is not a thing done accidentally, occasionally, or in a fit of zeal, but our trade and course of life: Acts 24:16, 'I exercise myself in this, to have a conscience void of offence both towards God and men, ἐν τούτῳ ἀσκήω. This was the employment of his life.

4. We must persevere or continue with patience in well-doing, notwithstanding discouragements: Heb. 12:12, 'Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.' There must be no fainting, whatever discouragements happen; as there was a great deal of do to hold up Moses's hands in Israel's conflict with Amalek: Exod. 17:11, 12, 'As long as he held up the rod of God, Israel prevailed; but Moses' hands were heavy;' a sign of many infirmities, not able long to endure in spiritual exercise; for though 'the spirit be willing, yet the flesh is weak.' But faith should still hold up our hands.

5. This lifting up the hands, or alacrious diligence, should flow from a right principle, and that is faith and love.

[1.] Faith, or a sound persuasion of God's love to us in Christ, that keepeth us doing: Rom. 12:1, 'I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service;' and Titus 2:11, 12, 'The grace

of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.' Thankfulness to God is the great principle of gospel obedience.

[2.] Love: 'Thy commandments, which I have loved;' 2 Cor. 5:14, 'The love of Christ constraineth us.' Nothing holdeth up the hands in a constant obedience to God and performance of his will so much as a thorough love to God and his ways. Faith begets love, and love obedience. These are the true principles of all Christian actions.

6. This lifting up of the hands imports a right end. Commanded work must be done to commanded ends, else we lift up our hands to our own work. Now, the true end is the glory of God: 1 Cor. 10:31, 'Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God;' and Phil. 1:11, 'Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Christ Jesus, unto the glory and praise of God.' God's glory must be our main scope, not any by-respect of our own. Well, then, this is lifting up our hands to the commandments of God, not doing one good work, but all; and this with a serious diligence, in our ordinary practice, continuing therein with patience, whatever oppositions we meet with; and this out of faith, or a sincere belief of the gospel, and fervent love, and an unfeigned respect to God's glory.

Secondly, Why such a lifting up the hands, or serious addressing ourselves to our duty, is necessary? My answer shall be given in a fourfold respect—God, ordinances, graces, and the Christian, who is to give an account of himself unto God.

1. God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: Father, as a lawgiver; Son, as a redeemer and head of the renewed estate; Holy Ghost, as our sanctifier.

[1.] God the Father, who in the mystery of redemption is represented as our lawgiver and sovereign lord, and will be not only known and worshipped, but served by a full and entire obedience: 1 Chron. 28:9, 'And thou, Solomon, my son, know the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind.' He hath given us a law not to be trampled upon or despised, but observed and kept; and that not by fear or force, but of a ready mind. Though there be an after provision of grace for those that break his law because of the frailty of the creature, yet if we presume upon that indulgence, and sin much that God may pardon much, we may render ourselves incapable of that grace; for the more presumptuously wicked we are, the less pleasing unto God. The governor of the world should not be affronted upon the pretence of a remedy which the gospel offered; for this is to sin that grace may abound, than which wicked imagination nothing is more contrary to gospel grace: Rom. 6:1, 'What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid.' To check this conceit, God deterreth men from greater sins, as more difficult to be pardoned than less; they shall not have so quick and easy a pardon of them as of others; nay, he deterreth men from going on far in sin, either as to the intensive increase or the continuance in time, lest he cut them off and withdraw his grace, and pardon them not at all. Therefore he biddeth them to call upon him while he is near,' Isa. 55:6; not to 'harden their hearts, while it is called to-day,' Heb. 3:7, 8. Therefore, if we should only consider God as our lord and lawgiver, we should earnestly betake ourselves to obedience.

[2.] If we consider the Son as redeemer and head of the renewed estate, he standeth upon obedience: Heb. 5:9, he is 'the author of eternal life to them that obey him.' As he hath taken the commandments into his own hand, he insisteth upon practice, if his people will enjoy his favour: John 15:10, 'If ye keep my

commandments, ye shall abide in my love, as I have kept my father's commandments, and abide in his love.' He hath imposed a yoke upon his disciples, and hath service for them to do: he, being a pattern and mirror of obedience, expects the like from his people. He fully performed what was enjoined him to do as the surety of believers, and therefore expecteth we should be as faithful to him as he hath been to God. So John 14:21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.' No love of Christ should encourage us to cast off duty, but continue it. He taketh himself to be honoured when his people obey: 2 Thes. 1:11, 12, 'Wherefore also we pray always for you, that God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you. The work of faith is obedience, and Christ is dishonoured and reproached when they disobey: Luke 6:46, 'Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?'

[3.] The Spirit is given to make graces operative, to flow forth: John 4:14, 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life;' and John 7:38, 'He that believeth on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water: this spake he of his Spirit, which they that believe in him should receive.' Therefore, if we have an inward approbation of the ways of God, unless we lift up our hands, we resist his work.

2. With respect to ordinances: They are all means, and means are imperfect without their end. Things πρὸς ἄλλο are of no use, unless that other thing be accomplished for which they serve: as he is a foolish workman that contents himself with having tools, and never worketh; for tools are in order to work, and all the means of grace are in order to practice. We read, hear, meditate, to understand our duty.

Now if we never put it in practice, we use means to no end and purpose: 'Hear and live;' 'Hear and do.' The word layeth out work for us; it was not ordained for speculation only, but as a rule of duty to the creatures: therefore, if we are to hear, read, meditate, we must also lift up our hands.

3. All graces are imperfect till they end in action, for they were not given us for idle and useless habits. Knowledge, to know merely that we may know, is curiosity and idle speculation. So Ps. 111:10, 'A good understanding have all they that do his commandments;' Jer. 22:16, 'He judgeth the cause of the poor and the needy. Was not this to know me? saith the Lord.' That is true knowledge that produceth its effect. So James 2:22, 'By works faith is made perfect;' faith hath produced its end. So love is perfected in keeping the commandments: 1 John 2:5, 'Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected;' as all things are perfect when they attain their end and their consummate estate. The plant is perfect when it riseth up into stalk, and flower, and seed; so these graces.

4. The person or Christian is judged not only by what is believed, but what is done; not by what is approved, but what is practised. Many profess faith and love; but if it be not verified in practice, they are not accepted with God: 1 Peter 1:17, 'If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work;' and Rev. 20:12, 'I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.' God will judge men according to their works, and what they have done in the flesh, whether it be good or evil: John 5:29, 'They that have done good shall rise to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to

the resurrection of condemnation.' The redeemed sinner shall have his trial and judgment.

Use 1. For the disproof of two sorts—preachers and professors.

1. Preachers: if they be strict in doctrine and loose in practice, do they lift their hands to God's commandments? No; they are like the Pharisees, who 'bind heavy burdens upon others, and do not touch them with their own little finger,' Mat. 23:4. It is not enough to lift up our voice in recommending, but we must lift up our hands in practising, lest like a mark-stone, they show others the way to heaven, but walk not in it themselves, and contribute nothing of help by their examples.

2. Professors.

[1.] That approve the word only. There may be an idle naked approbation: Rom. 2:18, 'Thou knowest his will, and approvest the things that are most excellent, being instructed out of the law.' *Video meliora proboque*; they esteem these things better, but their hearts incline them to what is evil, and their reason is a slave to appetite.

[2.] That commend as well as approve: Rom. 2:20, 'Who hast a form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law,' but without action and practice. Have many good words; their voice Jacob's but their hands Esau's: Ps. 50:16, 17, 'What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or to take my covenant in thy mouth, since thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind me?' It pertaineth not to thee to profess religion, since thou dost not practise it, to commend the law which thou observest not, or to profess love to what thou dost not obey.

Use 2. Is to press you to lift up your hands, and to obey and do the things which God hath prescribed in his word. Do not rest in the

notional part of religion. That which will approve you to God is not a sharp wit, or a firm memory, or a nimble tongue, but a ready practice. God expecteth to be glorified by his creatures both in word and deed; and therefore heart, and tongue, and hand, and all should be employed. I will urge you with but two reasons:—

1. How easy it is to deceive ourselves with a fond love, a naked approbation, or good words, without bringing things to this real proof, whether the truth that we approve, esteem, and commend, have a real dominion over and influence upon our practice! 1 John 2:4, 'He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;' James 1:22, 'Be ye doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving your own souls.' Respect to God and his word is a true evidence of a gracious heart. Now, how shall we know this respect real, but by our constant and uniform practice?

2. That it is not so easy to deceive God: he cannot be mocked with a vain show, for he looketh to the bottom and spring of all things: 1 Chron. 28:9, 'And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.' He searcheth our hearts, knoweth our inward disposition, whether firm, strong, or productive of obedience. Now, to him you are to approve yourselves, and he will not be mocked with lying pretences and excuses: Gal. 6:7, 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked.' The all-seeing God cannot be blinded: he knoweth our thoughts afar off, and seeth all things in their causes; much more can he judge of effects. Therefore, whatsoever illuminations we pretend unto, if we do not live in the obedience of the commands of self-denial, humility, justice, patience, faith, and love, he can soon find us out. If our actions do not correspond to our profession, it is a practical lie, which the Lord can easily find out.

Doct. 2. Whosoever would lift up his hands to God's commandments, and seriously address himself to a course of obedience, must use much study and meditation. On the one side, non-advertency to heavenly doctrine is the bane of many: Mat. 13:19, 'When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not,' μὴ συνιέντος, non advertit animum, 'then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.' And so James 1:23, 24, 'If any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.' God's great complaint of his people is that they will not consider: Isa. 1:3, 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.' So Jer. 8:6, 'I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, what have I done?' The heathens have commended such recollection. On the other side, the scripture recommendeth meditation, as one great help to obedience. Lydia's conversion is described by attendancy: Acts 16:14, 'The Lord opened her heart, that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul;' because that is the first step to it; minding, choosing, prosecuting. So the man that will benefit by the word of God is he, James 1:25, 'That looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein;' that is, abideth in the view of these truths; for a glance never converted or warmed the heart of any man: 'This man being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed.' Now, more particularly, why meditation is necessary:—

1. To know the mind of God and understand our duty. A superficial knowledge hath no efficacy and hold upon us; therefore, by deep meditation, search and study, we come to be more thoroughly acquainted with the mind of God revealed in his word. We are



bidden, Prov. 2:4, to 'dig for knowledge as for silver.' Mines do not lie on the surface, but in the bowels of the earth. Every day we should get more knowledge: Rom. 12:2, 'Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God;' and Eph. 5:17, 'Be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.' Now we cannot know this without a serious search and inquiry into the rule of duty: there must be an accurate search; spiritual knowledge will not drop into our mouths. There are many clouds of ignorance and folly that yet hover in the minds of men, and they are dispelled more and more by a sound study of the scriptures.

2. To keep up a fresh remembrance of our duty. Oblivion and inconsideration is a kind of ignorance for the time. Though we habitually know a thing, yet we do not actually know a thing till we consider of it: Eccles. 5:1, 'They consider not that they do evil;' so Hosea 7:2, 'They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness.' That which we consider is always before us; but that which we consider not is forgotten, laid by, and the notions which we have about them are as it were laid asleep, they work not. But now frequent meditation keepeth these things alive.

3. Meditation is necessary to enkindle our affections. Affections are stirred by thoughts, as thoughts by objects. The truth cannot come home to our hearts till we think of it again and again. We have no other natural way to raise affection; and we must not think that grace worketh like a charm, in a way contrary to the instituted, order of nature. No; the heart of man must be besieged with frequent and powerful thoughts before it will yield to God and give entertainment to his truth and ways. There is no coming at the heart but by the mind; and the mind must be serious in what it represents to gain the heart; that is, we must meditate. The devil watcheth our postures; he

seeketh to catch these thoughts out of our mind as soon as he seeth that we begin to be serious, Mat. 13:19.

4. Meditation is necessary to show our love: 'I will lift up my hands also to thy commandments, which I have loved, and I will meditate in thy statutes;' Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night;' Ps. 119:47, 'And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.' The mind will muse upon what we love. As thoughts stir affections, so affections stir up thoughts; for in all moral things there is a *κυκλογένησις*. A pleasing object will be much revolved in our mind, and frequently thought of.

The use is for direction to us. When you have heard the word, remember what you hear, and apply it to yourselves by serious inculcative thoughts. So when you read the word, do not only understand it, but think of it again and again: Deut. 32:46, 'Set your hearts to all the words which I testify among you this day,' saith Moses to the Israelites. So Christ: Luke 9:44, 'Let these sayings sink into your hearts.' Truths never go to the quick of the affections but by serious and ponderous thoughts. You will not lift up your hands till the truth sink into the heart. You read chapters, hear sermon after sermon; they do not stir you, or it is but a little, for a fit, like a man that hath been a little warming himself by the fire, and goeth away, and is colder than he was before. O Christian! this means is not to be neglected, no more than reading and hearing, because of its great use, both for first conversion, and continual quickening.

1. For first conversion. A man cometh to himself by serious thoughts of those great and important truths which are delivered in the word of God: Luke 15:17, 'And when he came to himself, he said,' &c.; Ps. 22:27, 'All the ends of the world shall remember, and turn unto the

Lord;' Ps. 119:59, 'I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.'

2. For continual quickening. Musing maketh the fire burn. The greatest things will not move us if we do not think of them: Rom. 8:31, 'What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?' Job 5:27, 'Lo, this we have searched, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.' The benefit of sound doctrine consists in the application thereof by the hearers. When men have spent their time and strength to find a good lesson for us, shall not we think of it?

## **SERMON LV**

**Remember thy word unto thy servant,  
upon which thou hast caused me to hope.  
—VER. 49.**

IN the words observe—

1. His prayer and humble petition to God, remember thy word. God is said to remember when he doth declare by the effect that he doth remember. He sometimes seemingly forgets his promise, that is, to appearance carrieth himself as one that doth forget.

2. His argument is taken—

[1.] From his interest, thy servant.

[2.] From his trust and hope, which is expressed—

(1.) As warranted.

(2.) As caused.

(1.) As warranted by his word; that gave him ground of hope and comfort.

(2.) As caused by his influence, Upon which thou hast caused me to hope. The word his warrant, the Spirit his anchor. Would God raise up such a hope merely to defeat it? The word concurred to this hope, as it offered—

(1st.) A command to believe.

(2d.) The promise of the eternal and immutable God to build upon. The influence of his grace concurred; for he that maketh the offer in the word doth also work faith in the believer, and inclineth his heart to apply the promise and trust in it; for faith is 'the gift of God,' Eph. 2:8. In short, here is a promise believed and pleaded; and both confirm our faith in the fulfilling and granting of it.

Doct. That believers may humbly challenge God upon his word, and seek the full performance of what he hath promised.

This point, that it may be managed with respect to this text, I shall give you these considerations:—

1. That God delighteth to promise mercy before he accomplish it; which showeth these things:—

[1.] His abundant love. God's heart is so kindly affected to his people that he cannot stay till the accomplishment of things, but he must tell us aforehand what he meaneth to do for us: Isa. 42:9, 'Before they spring forth, I will tell you of them;' long before there was any sight of such things, or means that might produce them: so that his promise is an eruption and overflow of his love.

[2.] His care for our security; for by his promise he giveth his people a holdfast upon him, as he maketh himself a debtor to them by his own promise, who was otherwise free before such engagement to poor creatures: Ps. 89:34, 'My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.' The word is gone out of his lips, not to be recalled, nor reversed. The promises are as so many bonds, wherein he stands bound to us; and these bonds may be put in suit, and his people have liberty and confidence to ask what he hath promised to them. Austin saith of his mother, *Chirographa tua injiciebat tibi Domine*—Lord, she showed thy own bond and handwriting. It is a mighty argument in prayer when we can plead that we ask no more than God hath promised.

2. That there is usually some time of delay between making the promise and fulfilling the promise; for therefore God promiseth, because he meaneth to do us good, but not presently. And this delay is not for want of kindness, or out of any backwardness to our good; for so it is said, he will not tarry: Hab. 2:3, 'Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry.' Nor out of ignorance, as not knowing the fittest time to help his people; for his waiting is guided by judgment: Isa. 30:18, 'He waiteth that he may be gracious; for he is a God of judgment;' he will take hold of the fittest season or occasion. Not from forgetfulness of his promise; for 'he is ever mindful of his holy covenant,' Ps. 111:5. Not from any mutability of nature or change of counsel; for he is Jehovah, that changeth not: Mal. 3:6, 'I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' He hath a due foresight of all possible difficulties, and needeth not to alter his counsels. Not from impotency and weakness, as if he could not execute what he had promised, as the sons of Zeruiah were too hard for David, 2 Sam. 3:39; all things are at the beck and signification of his will. But (1.) Partly with respect to his own glory, he will do things in their proper season: Eccles. 3:11,

'Everything is beautiful in its time.' This is the wise providence of God in the government of the world, that everything is brought forth in its proper season, and in the time when it is most fit. God humbleth and God exalteth his people in due time: 1 Peter 5:6, 'Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.' So it is said of their enemies: Deut. 32:35, 'Their foot shall slide in due time.' Summer and winter must succeed in their seasons. (2.) With respect to us, God will try our faith, whether we can stay on his word, and hug it, and embrace it, till the blessing come. As it is said of the patriarchs ἀσπασάμενοι, Heb. 11:13, 'They embraced the promises;' Ps. 56:4, 'In God I will praise his word; I have put my trust in the Lord; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.' During this time we may be exercised with divers troubles and difficulties, so that to appearance God seemeth to forget his promises; and this he doth—

[1.] Partly to try our faith to the utmost, to see if we can trust and depend upon God for things which we see not, nor are likely to see. Faith, in the general, is a dependence upon God for something that lieth out of sight. Now, when the object is not only out of sight, but all that is seen and felt seemeth to contradict our hopes, and God seemeth to put us off, and we meet with many a rebuke of our confidence, instead of an answer, as the woman of Canaan that came to Christ at first meeteth not with a word,—then his speech more discourageth than his silence: Mat. 15:26, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs.' She turneth this rebuke into an encouragement: ver. 27, 'Truth, Lord! yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table;' ver. 28, 'Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman! great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.' Many times we come and pray for blessings promised, and the oracle is dumb and silent. Though God love the supplicant, yet he will not seem to take notice of his desires, but will

humble him to the dust. Now, to pick an answer out of God's silence, and a gracious answer out of his rebukes, showeth great faith. Job saith, chap. 13:15, 'Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him.' Faith supports us under the greatest pressures; when God seemeth to deal like an enemy, yet even then trusts in God as a friend, and that his dispensations will never give his word the lie.

[2.] To try our patience as well as our faith. God's dearest children are not admitted to the enjoyment of the mercies promised presently: Heb. 6:12, 'Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' And Heb. 10:36, 'Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye may receive the promise.' We must first do, and sometimes suffer, the will of God. The promises are to come, and at a great distance. 'And if we hope for that we see not,' and enjoy not, 'then do we with patience wait for it,' Rom. 8:25. But especially is patience tried when we meet with oppositions, difficulties, dangers, many things done, many things suffered, before we can attain what we hope for. Now, quietly to wait God's leisure is a great trial of our patience. Our times are always present with us, when God's time is not come. A hungry stomach would have meat ere it be sodden or roasted, and a sickish appetite must have green fruit; but to wait, like the husbandman, in all seasons and weathers, till the corn ripen; and to persevere in hoping and praying, that is that which God requires.

[3.] Our love, though we be not feasted with felt comforts, nor bribed with present satisfaction and benefits in hand. God will try the deportment of his children, whether they will adhere to him when he seemeth to cast them off. It is not said, 'In the way of thy mercies,' but, 'In the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of

thee,' Isa. 26:8. Love for himself, without any present benefit from him, yea, when kept under sore judgments and deep distresses.

[4.] To enlarge our desires, that we may have the greater sense of our necessities, and value for the blessings promised. A sack that is stretched out holdeth the more. Delay increaseth importunity: 'Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you,' Mat. 7:7; Luke 11:8, 'Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet διὰ τὴν ἀναίδειαν, because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.' And things promised being asked, and at length obtained, are the more valued.

3. That if we yet continue our faith, and heartily believe God upon his word, it is a great encouragement in waiting for the thing promised; for to believe is a qualification. There are in the word of God promises that we may believe, and then promises because we do believe; promises to invite faith and hope, and then promises because we believe in God and hope in his word; promises for faith, and to faith. As for instance, God hath promised to be a defence unto his people: Zech. 2:5, 'I the Lord will be unto her a wall of fire round about her, and will be the glory in the midst of her.' Now see how David pleadeth: Ps. 57:1, 'Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me; for my soul trusteth in thee; yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.' When once we believe, then we have a claim: Isa. 26:3, 'Thou keepest him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.' Trust giveth us a fresh claim or new interest: Ps. 86:2, 'O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee.' God will not disappoint a trusting soul. An ingenuous man will not fail his friend if he rely on him. We count this the strongest bond we lay upon



another, to be faithful and mindful of us: I trust you, that you will do this for me. How much more will God do so,—

[1.] For his own honour, to show himself faithful, willing, and able to succour his people in their distresses. This is the reproach cast upon the worshippers of idols, that they call upon those things which cannot help them nor relieve them in their straits: Judges 10:14, 'Go to the gods whom ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the day of tribulation.' When you trust God, the honour of his Godhead lieth at stake. By trust you own him for a God: Jonah 1:5, 'Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man upon his god.' By making good your trust he showeth himself to be a God, that they do not seek to a vain help.

[2.] With a condescension to his people. Nothing goeth so near their hearts as a disappointment of their hope in God. This will mightily damp their spirits, when God spits in their faces, and seemeth to reject their prayers: Ps. 25:2, 'O my God, I trust in thee, let me not be ashamed; yea, let none of them that wait on thee be ashamed; but let them be ashamed which transgress without a cause.' To have hopes fail which were invited and drawn forth by promises is a great temptation.

[3.] With respect to their enemies, who will be sure to cast this in their teeth, if the God in whom they trusted should not send help from his holy place. You will find God's servants often mocked for their trust: Ps. 22:8, 'He trusted in the Lord; let him now deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.' Christ himself was not free from the lash of profane tongues, he was mocked for his dependence on his Father: Mat. 27:43, 'He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him.' The world counts faith but a fancy. Now if God should deny the things promised to his people, it would seem to

countenance the slanders of their enemies. Wherefore do the children of God expose themselves to difficulties, and all manner of hard usages, but because of their hope in God? 1 Tim. 4:10, 'Therefore we suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God;' for that reason, because they look for great things from God; therefore God hath a great respect for them that trust in him.

#### 4. This trust must be pleaded in prayer.

[1.] Because prayer is one of the means by which God hath decreed to fulfil his promises; and therefore we must obtain mercies in his own appointed way. God saith, I will do thus and thus for you: Ezek. 36:37, 'But I will be inquired after by the house of Israel for this very thing.' God will do it, but prayer must give a lift; he will be sought to: Jer. 29:11, 12, 'I know the thoughts which I think towards you, saith the Lord; thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end,' that is, such an end as yourselves hope for and desire; 'then shall ye call upon me, and go, and pray to me, and I will hearken unto you,' that is, you must address and set yourselves seriously to this work. When the promise is urged by the believer, it will be performed by God. So when Daniel understood by the books and writings of the prophets that the time was come wherein God had promised to deliver his people, then he falleth a-praying in a serious manner, Dan. 9:3. When God hath a mind to work, then he sets the spirit of prayer awork, for he will have all things accomplished in his own way.

[2.] Because he hath put this office upon his people, that they are to be his remembrancers at the throne of grace: Isa. 62:6, 'Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence;' it is in the margin, 'Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers,' whose office it is to be constantly minding God, and soliciting him in the behalf of his church. Public

remembrancers are the officers of his church; but every Christian is a private remembrancer, to put God in mind of his promise. Not that God is subject to forgetfulness, as man is, who hath need of such minders; but he will be sought and solicited for the performance of his gracious promises. We have an advocate in heaven, but there are remembrancers upon earth. We come as David here, 'Remember thy word unto thy servants, on which thou hast caused us to hope.'

5. We are the more encouraged because God, that made the promise, doth also give the faith; for he pleadeth two things—the grant of the promise, and the gift of faith. Reasons:—

[1.] God would not deceive us. Would he raise a confidence to disappoint us? In such a case we might say, as the prophet Jeremiah, chap. 20:7, 'Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived;' the words seem to intrench upon the honour of God. In the general, I answer—They were spoken by the prophet in a passion. Others soften them by another rendering and interpretation, 'Thou hast persuaded me, and I was persuaded;' that is, to undertake the prophetic office, of which I was nothing forward of myself, but averse thereunto, yet found it more troublesome than I expected. But put it with a supposition, 'If I be deceived, thou hast deceived me,' there is nothing inconvenient God had told him he would make him as a brazen wall; God had raised a faith and hope in him to be borne out in his work. Now, if God hath specially excited your faith, it is not a foolish imagination or vain expectation, like as of them that dream; it is God's word you build upon, and it is by a faith of God's operation; he raiseth it in us.

[2.] The prayer of faith is the voice of the Spirit, and God heareth the voice of the Spirit always, 'who maketh requests κατὰ Θεὸν, according to the will of God;' Rom. 8:27, 'He that searcheth and

trieth the hearts, knoweth what is a groan of the Spirit,' what is a fancy of our own, what is a confidence raised in us by the operation of his own Spirit. For there may be a mistaken faith, seemingly built upon the promises, whereas it is indeed built upon our own conceits. Now God is not bound to make that faith good. But when we can appeal to the searcher of hearts that it is a faith of his own working, surely we may have confidence.

Now how shall we know that it is a faith of God's raising?

1. If the promise be not mistaken, and we do not presume of that absolutely which God only hath promised conditionally, and with the limitations of his own glory and our good, which are joined to all promises which concern the present life. In temporal things, God exerciseth his children with great uncertainties, because he seeth it meet to prove our submission in these things, for our happiness lieth not in them. Those things wherein our happiness doth consist, as remission of sins and eternal life, are sure enough, and that is encouragement to a gracious heart: 2 Tim. 4:18, 'God hath delivered me out of the mouth of the lion, and will deliver me from every evil work.' In the Old Testament, when God discovered less of heaven, he promised more of earth; but in the New Testament, where life and immortality are brought to light, we are told of many tribulations in our passage; yea, the eminent saints of the Old Testament, that had a clearer view of things to come than others had, were more exposed to the calamities of the present life, because God thought the sight of happiness to come sufficient to countervail their troubles; and if he would give them rest in another world, they might well endure the inconveniences of their pilgrimage: Heb. 11:16, 'But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city.' The holy patriarchs left their country, flitted up and down upon this hope; but

to us Christians the case is clear: Rom. 8:18, 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us;' 2 Cor. 4:17, 'For this light affliction, that is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'

2. When the qualification of the person is not clear, we must not absolutely promise ourselves the effect: Jonah 3:9, 'Who can tell whether God will turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?' So Joel 2:14, 'Who knoweth if he will return, and leave a blessing behind him?' In this clause I put believers who have sinned away their peace and assurance: 2 Sam. 12:22, 'Who can tell if God will be gracious unto me, that the child may live?' He speaketh doubtfully; Zeph. 2:3, 'It may be that ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's fierce anger;' Amos 5:15, 'Hate the evil and love the good; it may be the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.' In such cases the soul is divided between the expectation of mercy and the sense of their own deservings, and can speak neither the pure language of faith nor the pure language of unbelief—half Canaan, half Ashdod. There is a twilight in grace as well as in nature. God in these cases raiseth no other confidence, to heighten mercy, and try how we can venture upon God, and refer ourselves to his will, when we have any business for him to do for us: Mat. 8:2, 'Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean;' 2 Sam. 15:25, 26, 'And the king said to Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it, and his habitation: but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good to him.'

3. In the promises of spiritual and eternal mercies, when God's conditions are performed by us, we may be confident, and must give glory to God in believing and being persuaded that he will fulfil them

to us: 2 Tim. 1:12, 'I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day;' Rom. 8:38, 39, 'For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' I am persuaded; there is no doubt: the stronger our confidence, the better.

4. When God raiseth in our minds some particular express hope (as in some cases he may do) to these things that are of a temporal nature, and are conditionally promised, and where our qualification is clear, he will not disappoint us, 2 Cor. 1:12. Though the promises of temporal things have the limitation of the cross implied in them, and are to be understood in subordination to our eternal interest and God's glory, without which they would not be mercies but judgments, yet his usual course is to save, deliver, and supply them here: Ps. 9:10, 'And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.' And when God by his Spirit doth particularly incline his people to hope for mercy from him, he will not fail their expectations. Where the qualification is uncertain, yet the faith of general mercy wrestleth against discouragements; as in the case of the woman of Canaan: there is the plea of a dog, and the plea of a child, in grievous temptations to fasten ourselves upon God. God will make good the hope raised in them by his Spirit.

Use. For direction, what to do in all our distresses, bodily and spiritual. Our necessities should lead us to the promise, and the promise to God.

1. Be sure of your qualification; for David pleadeth here partly as the servant of God, and partly as a believer: first, 'Remember thy word unto thy servant;' and then, 'wherein thou hast caused me to hope.' There is a double qualification—with respect to the precept of subjection, with respect to the promise of dependence: the precept is before the promise. They have right to the promises, and may justly lay hold upon them, who are God's servants; they who apply themselves to obey his precepts, these only can regularly apply his promises. None can lay claim to rewarding grace but those that are partakers of his sanctifying grace. Clear that once, that you are God's servants, and then these promises, which are generally offered, are your own, no less than if your name were inserted in the promise, and written in the Bible. Let us remember our promises made to God, and then desire him to remember his promises to us. The next part of the qualification is, if you be believers, and can wait and depend upon God, though he seemeth to delay, and forget his promise: 'Our eyes must wait upon the Lord, until he have mercy upon us,' Ps. 123:2. The benefit of some promises droppeth, like the first ripe fruit, into the mouth of the eater; but others must be tarried for. It is said, Acts 7:17, 'When the time of the promise drew night, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt.' The promise is recorded, Gen. 15:5, of 'multiplying his seed like the stars of heaven.' Abraham was seventy-five years old when the promise was made, a hundred years old when Isaac was born; when Jacob went into Egypt they were but seventy souls, but at their coming forth they were 603,550. Now, if faith wait, Isa. 28:16, 'He that believeth Maketh not haste;' Lam. 3:26, 'It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of God;' Hosea 12:6, 'Keep mercy and judgment, and wait on the Lord continually.' God delayeth because he would have us make use of faith. Real believers are such as have ventured upon God's word, denied themselves for the hopes offered therein: 1 Tim. 4:10, 'Therefore we

both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God;' Heb. 6:10, 'God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed towards his name.' God's servants must wait for his promises with patience and self-denial: Rom. 2:7, 'To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life;' Luke 8:15, 'Those in the good ground are they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.'

2. Then let us plead promises; let them not lie by us as a dead stock, but put them in suit, and put God in remembrance. When the accomplishment is delayed, it is a notable way of raising and increasing our confidence: 2 Sam. 7:25, 'And now, O Lord, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant and his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said.' So ver. 28, 'And now, O Lord, thou art that God, and thy words are true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant.' So may we do with any promise of mercy and grace which God hath made with his people in his covenant.

## SERMON LVI

**This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me.—VER. 50.**

IN the former verse the man of God had complained of the delay of the promise, and that his hope was so long suspended; now in this verse he showeth what was his support, and did revive him during this delay and the sore afflictions which befell him in the meantime. The promise comforted him before performance came, 'This is my comfort in my affliction, thy word hath quickened me.'



1. Observe here, the man of God had his afflictions; for we are not exempted from troubles, but comforted in troubles. God's promise, and hope therein, may occasion us much trouble and persecution in the world. Yet—

2. This very promise which occasioneth the trouble is the ground of our support; for one great benefit which we have by the word is comfort against afflictions.

3. This comfort which we have by the word is the quickening and life of the soul. The life of our soul is first received by the word, and still maintained by the same word: James 1:18, 'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth;' 1 Peter 1:23, 'Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.'

Doct. That all other comforts in affliction are nothing to those comforts which we have from the word of God.

David confirmeth it from experience; in his deepest pressures and afflictions, his soul was supported and enlivened by the word of God. The apostle Paul doctrinally asserts it: Rom. 15:4, 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.' The general end of scripture is instruction; the special end is comfort and hope. *Id agit tota scriptura, ut credamus in Deum* (Luther)—the business and design of scripture is to bring us to believe in God, and to wait upon him for our salvation; to hope either for eternal life, which is the great benefit offered in the scriptures, or those intervening blessings which are necessary by the way, and also adopted into the covenant. The reasons are taken—

1. From the quality of those comforts which we have from the word of God.
2. From the provision which the word hath made for our comfort.
3. From the manner whereby this comfort is received.

First, From the quality of those comforts which we receive from the word of God.

1. It is a divine comfort: Ps. 94:19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.' In all the comforts we have, it is good to consider from whence it cometh. Is it God's comfort, or a fancy of our own? A comfort that is made up of our own fancies is like a spider's web, that is weaved out of its bowels, and is gone and swept away with the turn of a besom. But God's comfort is more durable and lasting; for then it floweth from the true fountain of comfort, upon whose smiles and frowns our happiness dependeth. Now God's comforts are such as God worketh, or God alloweth. Take them in either sense, they come in with a commanding or overpowering efficacy upon the soul. If God exciteth it by his Spirit, who is the comforter, Ps. 4:7, 'Thou hast put gladness into my heart.' There is little warmth in a fire of our own kindling: the Holy Ghost raiseth the heart to a higher degree of a delightful sense of the love of God than we can do by a bare natural act of our own understanding. Or whether it be of such comforts as God alloweth, if we have God's covenant for our comfort we have enough; no comfort like his comfort. In philosophy, man speaketh to us by the evidence of reason; in the scripture, God speaketh to us by way of sovereign authority: in his commands he interposeth his power and dominion; in his promises he empawneth his truth. And therefore scriptural comforts are God's comforts, and so more powerful and authoritative.

2. It is a strong comfort: Heb. 6:18, 'That the heirs of promise might have strong consolation,' ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν. Other comforts are weak and of little force; they are not affliction-proof, nor death-proof, nor judgment-proof; they cannot stand before a few serious and sober thoughts of the world to come; but this is strong comfort, that can support the soul, not only in the imagination and supposition of a trouble, when we see it at a distance, but when it is actually come upon us, how great soever it be. If we feel the cold hands of death ready to pluck out our hearts, and are summoned to appear before the bar of our judge, yet this comfort is not the more impeached; that which supported us in prosperity can support us in adversity; what supports in life can support us in death; for the comforts of the word endure for ever, and the covenant of God will not fail us, living or dying.

3. It is a full comfort, both for measure and matter.

[1.] Sometimes for the measure; the apostle speaketh of 'comforts abounding by Christ.' 2 Cor. 1:5, and Acts 13:52, 'The disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost;' and the apostle Paul, 2 Cor. 7:4, ὑπερπερισσεύομαι τῇ χαρᾷ, 'I am filled with comfort, and am exceeding joyful in all your tribulations.' Paul and Silas could sing praises in the prison, and in the stocks, after they had been scourged and whipped, Acts 16:25. And our Lord Jesus Christ, when he took care for our comfort, he took care that it might be a full comfort: John 15:11, 'These things have I spoken, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.' The joy of believers is a full joy, needing no other joy to be added to it; it is full enough to bear us out under all discouragements. If Christians would improve their advantages, they might by their full joy and cheerfulness entice carnal men, who are ensnared by the baits of the world and the delights of the flesh, once to come and try what comforts they might

have in the bosom of Christ, and the lively expectation of the promised glory.

[2.] For the matter; it is full, because of the comprehensiveness of those comforts which are provided for us. There is no sort of trouble for which the word of God doth not afford sufficient consolation; no strait can be so great, no pressure so grievous, but we have full consolation offered us in the promises against them all. We have promises of the pardon of all our sins, and promises of heaven itself; and what can we desire more? We have promises suited to every state—prosperity and adversity. What do we need, which we have not a promise of? Prosperity, that it shall not be our ruin, if we take it thankfully from God, and use it for God; for, 'to the pure all things are pure,' Titus 1:15. But especially for adversity, when we most need; there are promises either of singular assistance or gracious deliverance. In short, the word of God assureth us of the gracious presence of God here in the midst of our afflictions, and the eternal enjoyment of God hereafter; that he will be with us in our houses of clay, or we shall shortly be with him in his palace of glory; and so here is matter of full comfort.

(1.) His presence with us in our afflictions: Ps. 91:15, 'I will be with him in trouble;' and Isa. 43:2, 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee;' and many other places. Now if God be with us, why should we be afraid? Ps. 23:4, 'When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not be afraid, for thou art with me;' and in many other places. We see in the body, if any member be hurt, thither presently runneth the blood to comfort the wounded part; the man himself, eye, tongue, and hand, is altogether employed about that part and wounded member, as if he were forgetful of all the rest. So we see in the family, if one of the children be sick, all the care and

kindness of the mother is about that sick child; she sits by him, blandisheth him, and tendeth him, so that all the rest do as it were envy his disease and sickness. If nature doth thus, will not God, who is the author of nature, do much more? For if an earthly mother do thus to a sickly and suffering child, will not our heavenly Father, who hath an infinite, incredible, and tender love to his people? Surely he runneth to the afflicted, as the blood to the hurt member; he looketh after the afflicted, as the mother to the sick child. This is the difference between God and the world; the world runneth after those that flourish, and rejoice, and live in prosperity, as the rivers run to the sea, where there is water enough already; but God 'comforteth us in all our tribulations,' 2 Cor. 1:4. His name and style is, 'He comforteth those that are cast down,' 2 Cor. 7:6. The world forsaketh those that are in poverty, disgrace, and want; but God doth not withdraw from them, but visiteth them most, hath communion with them most, and vouchsafeth most of his presence to them, even to those that holily, meekly, and patiently bear the afflictions which he layeth upon them; and one drop of this honey is enough to sweeten the bitterest cup that ever they drank of. If God be with us, if 'the power of Christ will rest upon us,' then we may even glory in infirmities, as Paul did.

(2.) Of our presence with God, when our afflictions are over; that is our happiness hereafter; we shall be there where he is: John 12:26, 'There where I am shall my servant be;' and John 17:24, 'Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.' When we have had our trial and exercise, we shall live with him for ever; therefore is our comfort called everlasting consolation: 2 Thes. 2:16, 'Who hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace.' Nothing more can be added or desired, if we have but the patience to tarry for it, that we may come to the sight of God and

Christ at last. Surely this will lighten the heart of that sorrow and fear wherewith it is surcharged. Here is an everlasting ground of comfort; and if it doth not allay our fears and sorrows, the fault is not in the comfort, for that is a solid and eternal good; but on the believer's part, if he doth not keep his faith strong, and his evidences clear.

4. It is a reviving comfort, which quickeneth the soul. Many times we seem to be dead to all spiritual operations, our affections are damped and discouraged; but the word of God puts life into the dead, and relieveth us in our greatest distresses. Sorrow worketh death, but joy is the life of the soul. Now when dead in all sense and feeling, 'the just shall live by faith,' Hab. 2:4; and the hope wrought in us by the scriptures is 'a lively hope,' 1 Peter 1:3. Other things skin the wound, but our sore breaketh out again and runneth; faith penetrates into the inwards of a man, doth us good to the heart; and the soul reviveth by waiting upon God, and gets life and strength.

Secondly, The provision which the word hath made for our comfort; it might be referred to four heads.

1. Its commands.

[1.] Provisionally, and by way of anticipation. The whole scripture is framed so that it still carrieth on its great end of making man subject to God and comfortable in himself. Our first lesson in the school of Christ is self-denial: Mat. 16:24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.' Now this seemeth to be grievous, but provideth for comfort; for self-denial plucketh up all trouble by the root; the cross will not be very grievous to a self-denying spirit. Epictetus summed up all the wisdom that he could learn by the light of nature in these two words, ἀνέχου καὶ ἀπέχου—bear and forbear; to which answereth the apostle's 'temperance, patience,' 2 Peter 1:6. Certainly were we more mortified

and weaned from the world, and could we deny ourselves in things grateful to sense, we should not lie open to the stroke of troubles so often as we do. The greatness of our affections causeth the greatness of our afflictions. Did we possess earthly things with less love, we should lose them with less grief. Had we more entirely resigned ourselves to God, and did love carnal self less, we should less be troubled when we are lessened in the world. Thus provisionally, and by way of anticipation, doth the word of God provide against our sorrows. The wheels of a watch do protrude and thrust forward one another; so one part of Christian doctrine doth help another: take any piece asunder, and then it is hard to be practised. Patience is hard if there be no thorough resignation to God, no temperance and command of our affections; but Christianity is all of a piece; one part well received and digested befriendeth another.

[2.] Directly, and by way of express charge, the scripture requireth us to moderate our sorrow, to cast all our care upon God, to look above temporal things, and hath expressly forbidden distracting cares, and doubts, and inordinate sorrows: 1 Peter 5:7, 'Cast all your care upon God, for he careth for you;' and Phil. 4:6, 'Be careful for nothing.' We have a religion that Maketh it unlawful to be sad and miserable, and to grieve ourselves inordinately: care, fear, and anguish of mind are forbidden, and no sorrow allowed us but what tendeth to our joy: Isa. 35:4, 'Say to them that are of fearful hearts, Be strong, fear not;' Isa. 41:10, 'Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God.' To fear the rage, and power, and Violence of enemies, is contrary to the religion which we do profess: 'Fear not them which can kill the body,' Mat. 10:26, 28. Now surely the word, which is full fraught with precepts of this nature, must needs comfort and stay the heart.

2. The doctrines of the word do quicken and comfort us in our greatest distresses, all of them concerning justification and salvation

by Christ; they serve to deaden the heart to present things, and lift it up to better, and so to beget a kind of dedolency and insensibility of this world's crosses; but especially four doctrines we have in the word of God that are very comforting.

[1.] The doctrine concerning particular providence, that nothing falleth out without God's appointment, and that he looketh after every individual person as if none else to care for. This is a mighty ground of comfort; for nothing can befall me but what my Father wills, and he is mindful of me in the condition wherein I am, knoweth what things I stand in need of, and nothing is exempted from his care, ordering, and disposal. This is a ground both of patience and comfort: Ps. 39:9, 'I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.' So Hezekiah: Isa. 38:15, 'What shall I say? He hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it.' It is time to cease, or say no more; why should we contend with the Lord? Is it a sickness or grievous bodily pain? What difference is there between a man that owneth it as a chance or natural accident, and one that seeth God's hand in it? We storm if we look no further than second causes; but one that looketh on it as an immediate stroke of God's providence hath nothing to reply by way of murmuring and expostulation. So in loss of good children; how do we rave against instruments, if we look no further! But if we consider the providence of God, Job 1:21, not *Dominus dedit, diabolus abstulit*, but 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord,' So for contumely and reproaches; if God let loose a barking Shimei upon us, 2 Sam. 16:11, 'The Lord bid him curse.' To resist a lower officer is to resist the authority with which he is armed. So in all other cases, it is a ground of patience and comfort to see God in the providence.



[2.] His fatherly care over his people. He hath taken them into his family, and all his doings with them are paternal and fatherly. It allayeth our cares: Mat. 6:32, 'Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye hath need of all these things.' Our sorrows in affliction are lessened by considering they come from our Father: Heb. 12:5–7, 'Ye have forgotten the exhortation that speaketh upon you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is that whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons;' and so those whom God doth love tenderly, he doth correct severely.

[3.] His unchangeable love to his people. God remaineth unchangeably the same. When our outward condition doth vary and alter, we have the same blessed God as a rock to stand upon, and to derive our comforts from, that we had before: he is the God of the valleys, as well as of the hills. Christ in his desertion saith, 'My God, my God,' Mat. 27:46. Surely we deserve that the creature should be taken from us, if we cannot find comfort in God: Hab. 3:18, 'Although the fig-tree should not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, &c., yet will I rejoyce in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation;' 'Nothing can separate us from the love of God,' Rom. 8:36. Men may separate us from our houses, countries, friends, estates, but not from God, who is our great delight. In our low estate we have a God to go to for comfort, and who should be more to us than our sweetest pleasures.

[4.] The scripture showeth us the true doctrine about afflictions, and discovereth to us the author, cause, and end of all our afflictions. The author is God, the cause is sin, the end is to humble, mortify, and

correct his children, that they may be more capable of heavenly glory. God is the author; not fortune, or chance, or the will of man; but God, who doth all things with the most exact wisdom, and tender mercy, and purest love. The cause is just: Micah 7:9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him.' The end is our profit, for his chastisements are purgative medicines, to prevent or cure some spiritual disease. If God should never administer physic till we see it needful, desire to take it, or be willing of it, we should perish in our corruptions, or die in our sins, for want of help in due time: 1 Cor. 11:32, 'But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.' Now, should we not patiently and comfortably endure those things which come by the will of our Father, through our sins, and for our good?

3. The examples of the word, which show us that the dearly beloved of the Lord have suffered harder things than we have done, and with greater patience. Christ: 1 Peter 2:21, 'Who suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.' The servants of the Lord: James 5:10, 'Take, my brethren, the prophets of the Lord, who have spoken the word of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.' We complain of stone and gout; what did our Lord Jesus Christ endure when the whole weight of his body hung upon four wounds, and his life dropped out by degrees? We complain of every painful disease, but how was it with Christ when his back was scourged, and his flesh mangled with whips? We are troubled at the swellings of the gout in hands or feet; how was it with him when those sinewy parts were pierced with strong and great nails? We complain of the want of spiritual consolations; was not he deserted? We mourn when God Maketh a breach upon our relations; was not Abraham's trial greater, when he was to offer his son with his own hands? Heb. 11:17, 'By faith Abraham, when he was tried,

offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promise offered up his only-begotten son.' Job lost all his children at once by a blast of wind. The Virgin Mary near the cross of Christ, 'Woman, behold thy son,' John 19:26. She was affected and afflicted with that sight, 'as if a sword pierced through her heart.' We complain of poverty; Christ 'had not where to lay his head.' If we lose our coat to keep our conscience, others of God's children have been thus tried before us: Heb. 10:34, 'Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that you have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.' The Levites 'left their inheritance,' 2 Chron. 11:14. Thus God doth not call us by any rougher way to heaven than others have gone before us.

4. The promises of scripture. To instance in all would be endless. There are three great promises which comfort us in all our afflictions—the promises of pardon of sins, and eternal life, and the general promises about our temporal estate.

[1.] The promises of pardon of sin. We can have no true cure for our sorrow till we be exempted from the fear of the wrath of God. Do that once, and the heart of sorrow and misery is broken. Others may steal a little peace when conscience is laid asleep, but not solid comfort till sin be pardoned: Isa. 40:1, 2, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably unto Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned;' Mat. 9:2, 'Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee;' Rom. 5:1, 'Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

[2.] The promises of eternal life. Nothing will afford us so much content as one scripture promise of eternal life would do to a faithful soul. Heaven in the promise seen by faith is enough to revive the

most doleful and afflicted creature: Mat. 5:12, 'Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.' Nothing can be grievous to him that knoweth a world to come, and hath the assurance of the eternal God that shortly he shall enjoy the happiness of it: Rom. 5:2, 'We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' This comforts against troubles, sicknesses, wants. Everlasting case, everlasting joy, surely will counterbalance all that we can endure and suffer for or from God. There all our fears and sorrows shall be at an end, and all tears shall be wiped from our eyes.

[3.] The general promises concerning our temporal estate. There are many particular promises concerning the supply of all our necessities, removing of our grievances and burdens, or else that God will allay our troubles and enable us to bear them, mix with them the taste of his goodness and fatherly love. But I shall only speak of those general promises, that we may be confident that he will never utterly fail his people: Heb. 13:5, 'He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;' that he will not give us over to insupportable difficulties: 1 Cor. 10:13, 'There hath no temptation taken you but what is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.' He will dispose of all things for the best to them that love him, Rom. 8:28. These things are absolutely undertaken, and these things should satisfy us.

Thirdly, From the manner wherein this comfort is received. They are applied by the Spirit, who is a comforter, and received by faith.

1. Applied by the Spirit, which is dispensed in a concomitancy with this word: Rom. 15:13, 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of

the Holy Ghost.' The Holy Ghost is purposely given to be our comforter. If we are fit to receive it, he will not be wanting to give solid joy and delight to the penitent and believing soul.

2. It is received by faith. The word of God cannot deceive us. Faith is contented with a promise, though it hath not possession; for, Heb. 11:1, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.' Sickness with a promise, poverty with a promise, captivity with a promise, is better than health, riches, liberty without one; yea, death with a promise is better than life. What you possess without a promise you may lose when most secure: Luke 12:19, 20, 'I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee; then whose shall those things be that thou hast provided?' But in the eye of faith, that which we hope for is more than that which we possess; for we have God's word; it is set before us.

Use 1. For information.

1. How likely it is that the children of God will be exercised with afflictions, because God in his word hath laid in so many comforts before hand; a full third of the scriptures would be lost, and be as bladders given to a man that stands on dry land, and never meaneth to go into deep waters: 'Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward,' Job 5:7. Many think they come into the world not to bear crosses, but to spend their days in pleasure; but alas I how soon do they find themselves mistaken, and confuted by experience! If life be anything lengthened out, it is vexed with the remembrance of what is past, or trouble of what is present, or fear of what is to come. The first part of our life we know not ourselves; in the middle, we are filled with cares and sorrows; our last burdened with weakness and

age. But now the godly are more appointed to troubles, because God will try their faith, perfect their patience, train them up for a better world. They are now hated by the world: 2 Tim. 3:12, 'Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;' Acts 14:22, 'We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.' He that would not be exempted from the hopes of Christians, he must not look to be exempted from the troubles of Christians.

2. The excellency of the word of God and the religion it establisheth. It containeth store of sure comforts; and when all other comforts can do us no good, then the word of God affordeth us relief and support. Bare human reason cannot find out such grounds of comfort in all their philosophy; it doth not penetrate to the inwards of a man. It will tell us it is in vain to trouble ourselves about what we cannot help: Jer. 10:19, 'It is an evil, and I must bear it;' that we are not without fellows, others suffer as much as we do, &c.; but the word of God giveth us other consolations—the pardon of sin, the promises of a better life; that if we lose temporal things we shall have eternal; that we would not fear the threatenings of men, having the promises of God, &c., nor death, which hath life at the back of it; these are comforts indeed. When David was even dead in the nest, the word, that was not so clear then in these points as now, revived him. What would he have said if he had known the gospel so fully as we do? How should we be affected that live in so much light?

Use 2. For reproof to those that seek other comforts,—

1. In the vanities of the world. This is too slight a plaster to cure man's sore or heal his wound: the comforts of this world appear and vanish in a moment; every blast of a temptation scattereth them. It must be the hope and enjoyment of some solid satisfaction that can fortify the heart and breed any solid and lasting comfort, and this the

world cannot give unto us; but in the word we have it. Alas! what is a dream of honour, or the good-will and word of a mortal man? Everlasting glory is as much above all these as the treasures of a kingdom before a child's toys. May-games, vain pleasures, are gone before we well feel that we have them.

2. Or in philosophy. That cannot give a true ground of comfort. That was it the wise men of the world aimed at to fortify the soul against troubles; but as they never understood the true ground of misery, which is sin, so they never understood the true ground or way of comfort, which is Christ. That which man offereth cannot come with such authority and power as that which God offereth. The light of reason cannot have such an efficacy as divine testimony. This is a poor moonlight, that rotteth before it ripeneth anything. In short, they were never acquainted with Christ, who is the foundation of comfort; nor the promise of heaven, which is the true matter of comfort; nor faith, which is the instrument to receive comfort; so that you leave the fountain of living water for the dead puddle of a filthy ditch, if you think the writings of the heathens will comfort you and revive you, and neglect the word of God that brings rest for the soul.

3. Those are to be reprov'd that are under a spiritual institution. and profess to keep to it, and do so little honour it, either by their patience or comfort, or hope under troubles. Wherefore were the great mysteries of godliness made known to us, and the promises of the world to come, and all the directions concerning the subjection of the soul to God, and those blessed privileges we enjoy by Christ, if they all be not able to satisfy and stay your heart, and compose it to a quiet submission to God when it is his pleasure to take away your comforts from you? What! 'Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?' Will not all the word of God yield you a cordial or a

cure? Oh! consider what a disparagement you put upon the provision Christ hath made for us, as if the scripture were a weaker thing than the institutions of philosophy, or the vain delights of the world! But what may be the reasons of such an obstinacy of grief?

[1.] Sometimes ignorance. They do not study the grounds of comfort, or do not remember them; for oblivion is an ignorance for the time: Heb. 12:5, 'Have ye forgotten the exhortation that speaketh to you as children?' They are like Hagar, have a well of comfort nigh, and yet ready to die for thirst. The scripture hath breasts of comfort, so full as a breast ready to discharge itself, and yet they are not comforted.

[2.] They indulge and give way to the present malady, hug the distemper, and do not consider the evil of it; as 'Rachel refused to be comforted,' Jer. 31:15.

[3.] They do not chide themselves, ask the soul the reason, cite it before the tribunal of conscience, which is one way to allay passions: Ps. 42:5, 'Why art thou so disquieted, O my soul?' They look to the grievance, not to the comfort, as that which is of use; they aggravate the grievance and lessen the love of God: 'Are the consolations of God so small with thee?' Job 15:11. It is spoken to them who have high thoughts of their troubles, low thoughts of God's comforts.

[4.] Uncertainty in religion. Principles must be fixed before they can be improved, and we can feel their influence and power. But people will be making essays, and try this and try that. God's grounds of comfort are immutably fixed; God will not change his gospel laws for thy sake: and therefore, unless we would have a mountebank's cure, we must stand to them: Jer. 6:16, 'Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' When we have tried all, we must come home at length to these things; and our



uncertainty in religion will be none of the meanest causes of our troubles.

[5.] They look to means and their natural operation, and neglect God; and God only will be known to be the God of all comfort: 2 Cor. 1:3, 4, 'Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comforts, who comforteth us in all our tribulation.'

Use 3. To exhort us—

1. To prize and esteem the scriptures, and consult with them often: there you have the knowledge of God, who is best worth our knowing; and the way how we may come to enjoy him, wherein our happiness lieth. It is a petty wisdom to be able to gather riches, manage your business in the world. Ordinary learning is a good ornament, but this is the excellent, deep, and profound learning, to know how to be saved. What is it I press you to know?—the course of the heavens, to number the orbs and the stars in them, to measure their circumference and reckon their motions, and not to know him that sits in the circle of them, nor know how to inhabit and dwell there? Oh, how should this commend the word of God to us, where eternal life is discovered, and the way how to get it! Other writings and discourses may tickle the fancy with pleasing eloquence, but that delight is vanishing, like a musician's voice. Other writings may represent some petty and momentary advantage; but time will put an end to that, so that within a little while the advantage of all the books in the world will be gone; but the scriptures, that tell us of eternal life and death, their effects will abide for ever: Ps. 119:96, 'I have seen an end of all perfections, but thy commandments are exceeding broad.' When heaven and earth pass away, this will not pass; that is, the effects will abide in heaven and hell. Know ye not that your souls

were created for eternity, and that they will eternally survive all these present things? and shall your thoughts, projects, and designs be confined within the narrow bounds of time? Oh, no! Let your affections be to that book that will teach you to live well for ever, in comparison of which all earthly felicity is lighter than vanity.

2. Be diligent in the hearing, reading, meditating on those things that are contained there. The earth is the fruitful mother of all herbs and plants, but yet it must be tilled, ploughed, harrowed, and dressed, or else it bringeth forth little fruit. The scripture containeth all the grounds of hope, comfort, and happiness, the only remedy of sin and misery, our rule to walk by till our blessedness be perfected; but we have little benefit by it unless it be improved by diligent meditation: Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.' This must be your chief delight, and you must be versed therein upon all occasions: Ps. 119:97, 'Oh, how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.' When we love it and prize it, it will be so, for our thoughts cannot be kept off from what we love and delight in.

3. Reader, hear, meditate with a spirit of application, and an aim of profit: Job 5:27, 'Hear it, and know thou it for thy good;' as the rule of your actions and the charter of your hopes;' Rom. 8:31, 'What shall we then say to these things?' That you may grow better and wiser, and may have more advantages in your heavenly progress, take home your portion of the bread of life, and turn it into the seed of your life. It is not enough to seek truth in the scriptures, but you must seek life in the scriptures. It is not an object only to satisfy your understandings with the contemplation of truth, but your hearts with the enjoyment of life; and therefore you must not only bring your judgment to find the light of truth, but your affections to embrace the goodness of life offered. Think not ye have found all, when you have

found truth and learned it. No; except you find life there, you have missed the best treasure. You must bring your understandings and affections to them, and not depart till both return full.

## SERMON LVII

### **The proud have had me greatly in derision; yet have I not declined from thy law.—VER. 51.**

IN these words are—

1. David's temptation.
2. His constancy and perseverance in his duty notwithstanding that temptation.

First, In the temptation observe—

1. The persons from whom the temptation did arise, the proud. The wicked are called so for two reasons:—

[1.] Because either they despise God and contemn his ways, which is the greatest pride that can fall upon the heart of a reasonable creature: Rom. 1:30, 'Haters of God, despiteful, proud.'

[2.] Or else, because they are drunk with worldly felicity. In the general, scoffing cometh from pride. What is, Prov. 3:34, 'He scorneth the scorers, and giveth grace to the lowly,' is, James 4:6, 'He resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.'

2. Observe the kind or nature of the temptation; he was had in derision. This may be supposed either for dependence on God's promises, or for obedience to his precepts. Atheistical men, that wholly look to the pleasing of the flesh and the interest of the present world, make a mock of both. We have instances of both in scripture.

[1.] They make a mock of reliance upon God when we are in distress; think it ridiculous to talk of relief from heaven when earthly power faileth: Ps. 22:7, 8, 'They laugh me to scorn, saying, He trusted in the Lord.' The great promise of Christ's coming is flouted at by those mockers: 2 Peter 3:3, 4, 'There shall come in the last days mockers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the creation.' Such scoffers are in all ages, but now they overflow. These latter times are the dregs of Christianity, in which such kind of men are more rife than the serious worshippers of Christ. At the first promulgation of the gospel, while truths were new, and the exercises of Christian religion lively and serious, and great concord among the professors of the gospel, they were rare and infrequent. Before men's senses were benumbed with the frequent experiences of God's power, and the customary use of religious duties, and the notions of God were fresh and active upon their hearts, they were not heard of; but when the profession of Christianity grew into a form and national interest, and men fell into it by the chance of their birth rather than their own choice and rational conviction, the church was pestered with this kind of cattle. But especially are they rife among us when men are grown weary of the name of Christ, and the ancient severity and strictness of religion is much lost, and the memory of those miracles and wonderful effects by which our religion was once confirmed almost worn out; or else questioned and impugned by subtle wits and men of a prostituted conscience. Therefore now are many mockers and

atheistical spirits everywhere, who ask, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' question all, and think that there are none but a few credulous fools that depend upon the hopes of the gospel.

[2.] Their obedience to his precepts. And so whosoever will be true to his religion, and live according to his baptismal vow, is set up for a sign of contradiction to be spoken against. It is supposed the mocking by the heathen of the Jews is intended in these words, Lam. 4:15, 'Depart ye; it is unclean; depart, depart, touch not: when they fled away and wandered.' The words are somewhat obscure, but some judicious interpreters understand them of the detestation of the Jewish religion, their circumcision, their sabbaths, &c. But however that be, certainly the children of God are often mocked for their strict obedience, as well as their faith.

3. Observe the degree, greatly. The word noteth continually. The Septuagint translates it by σφόδρα; the vulgar Latin by usque valde and usque longe. They derided him with all possible bitterness, and day by day they had their scoffs for him; so that it was both a grievous and a perpetual temptation.

Secondly, His constancy and perseverance in the duty; that is set forth—

1. By the rule in the word, thy law. If we have God's law to justify our practice, it is no matter who condemneth it; we have God's warrant to set against man's censure. It must be God's way wherein we seek to be approved; otherwise our reproach is justly deserved, if it be for obstinacy in our own fancies.

2. The firmness and strictness of his adherence: I have not declined. The word signifies either to turn aside or to turn back. Sometimes it is put for turning aside to the right hand or to the left; as Deut. 17:11,

'Thou shalt not decline from the way which they shall show to thee, to the right hand or to the left;' sometimes for turning back: Job 23:11, 'My feet have held his steps; his way have I kept, and not declined; neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips.' As it is taken for turning aside, it noteth error and wandering; as it is taken for turning back, it noteth apostasy and defection. Now David meaneth that he had neither declined in whole nor in part. Understand it of his faith: all their scoffs and bitter sarcasms did not discourage him, or tempt him to forsake his hold, or let go the comfort of the promise. Understand it of his obedience: he still closely cleaved to God's way. A declining implieth an inclining first. Well, then, David did not only keep from open apostasy, but from declining or turning aside in the least to any hand. Testimonies we have of his integrity in scripture: 1 Kings 14:8, 'David kept my commandment, and followed me with all his heart to do only that which was right in my sight.' His great blemish is mentioned elsewhere: 1 Kings 15:5, 'David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything which he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.' However, the derision of his enemies made him not to warp.

Doct. That a Christian should not suffer himself to be flouted out of his religion, either in whole or in part; or no scorn and contempt cast upon us should draw us from our obedience to God.

In the managing of it observe—

1. That a holy life is apt to be made a scorn by carnal men.
2. That this, as it is a usual, so it is a grievous temptation.
3. That yet this should not move us either to open defection or partial declining.

First, That a holy life is apt to be made a scorn by carnal men, and they that abstain from iniquity are as owls among their neighbours, the wonder and the reproach of all that are about them. To evidence this, I shall give you an account of some of the scorns which are cast upon religion, with the reasons of them.

1. Some of the scorns are these:—

[1.] Seriousness in religion is counted mopishness and melancholy. When men will not flaunt it and rant it, and please the flesh as others do, but take time for meditation, and prayer, and praise, then they are mopish.

[2.] Self-denial, when, upon hopes of the world to come, they grow dead to present interests, and can hazard them for God, and can forsake all for a naked Christ; the world thinketh this humorous folly. To do all things by the prescript of the word, and live upon the hopes of an unseen world, is by them that would accommodate themselves to present interests counted madness.

[3.] Zeal in a good cause is in itself a good thing (Gal. 4:18, 'It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing'), but the world is wont to call good evil. As astronomers call the glorious stars by horrid names, the serpent, the dragon's tail, the greater or lesser bear, the dog-star; so the world is grossly guilty of misnaming. God will not be served in a cold and careless fashion. See Rom. 12:11, ζέοντες πνεύματι, 'fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' But this will not suit with that lazy and dull pace which is called temper and moderation in the world.

[4.] Holy singularity; as Noah was an upright man in a corrupt age: Gen. 6:9, 'Noah walked with God.' And we are bidden 'not to conform ourselves to this world,' Rom. 12:2. Now, because they would have

none to upbraid them in their sins, and to part ways, and the number of the godly is fewer, they count it a factious singularity in them that walk contrary to the course of the world and the stream of common examples.

[5.] Fervour of devotion and earnest conversing with God in humble prayers is called imposture and enthusiasm. The world, who are wholly sunk in flesh and matter, are little acquainted with these elevations and enlargements of the spirit, think all to be imposture and enthusiasm. And though praying by the Spirit be a great privilege,—(Jude 20, 'Praying in the Holy Ghost;' Rom. 8:26, 'Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself helpeth our infirmities with groanings which cannot be uttered;' Zech. 12:10, 'I will pour upon you the spirit of grace and of supplication')—yet it is little relished by them; a flat dead way of praying suiteth their gust better. Christ compareth the duties of the gospel, fasting, with prayer in the Spirit, to new wine, which will break old bottles, Mat. 9:17; but the duties of the Pharisees to old, dead, and insipid wine; there is no life in them.

[6.] Serious speaking of God and heavenly things is, in the phrase of the world, canting. Indeed, to speak swelling words of vanity, or an unintelligible jargon, betrayeth religion to scorn; but a pure lip and speech seasoned with salt, and that holy things should be spoken of in a holy manner, our Lord requireth.

[7.] Faith of the future eternal state is esteemed a fond credulity by them who affect the vanities of the world, and the honours and pleasures thereof. They are all for sight and present things, and Christianity inviteth us to things spiritual and heavenly. Now, to live upon the hopes of an unseen world, and that to come, they judge it to



be but foppery and needless superstition. Thus do poor creatures, drunk with the delusions of the flesh, judge of the holy things of God.

[8.] The humility of Christians, and their pardoning wrongs and forgiving injuries, they count to be simplicity or stupidity, though the law of Christ requireth us to forgive others, as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us.

[9.] Exact walking is scrupulosity and preciseness, and men are more nice than wise; which is a reproach that reflecteth a mighty contempt upon God himself, that when he hath made a holy law for the government of the world, that the obeying of this law should be derided by professed Christians; the scorn must needs fall on him that made the law, and gave us these commands. If he be too precise that imperfectly obeyeth God, what will you say of God himself, who commandeth more than any of us all performeth? Thus the children of God are not only reproached as hypocrites, but derided as fools; and it is counted as a part of wit and breeding to droll at the serious practice of godliness, as if religion were but a foppery.

2. The reasons of this are these:—

[1.] Their natural blindness: 1 Cor. 2:14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' They are incompetent judges: Prov. 24:7, 'Wisdom is too high for a fool.' Though by nature we have lost our light, yet we have not lost our pride: Prov. 26:16, 'The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.' Though their way in religion be but a sluggish, lazy, and dead course, yet they have a high conceit of it, and censure all that is contrary, or but a degree removed above it. From spiritual blindness it is that carnal men judge unrighteously

and perversely of God's servants, and count zeal and forwardness in religious duties to be but folly and madness.

[2.] Antipathy and prejudicate malice. The graceless scoff at the gracious, and the profane at the serious; there is a different course, and that produceth difference of affections: John 15:19, 'The world will love its own, but because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you;' and they manifest their malice and hatred this way by evil-speaking: 1 Peter 4:4, 'Speaking evil of you.'

[3.] Want of a closer view. Christians complained in the primitive times that they were condemned unheard, διὰ τὴν φήμην, and διὰ τὸ ὄνομα, without any particular inquiry into their principles and practices. And Tertullian saith, nolentes auditis, &c.—they would not inquire, because they had a mind to hate. A man riding afar off seeing people dancing, would think they were mad, till he draws near and observes the harmonious order. They will not take a nearer view of the regularity of the ways of God, and therefore scoff at them.

[4.] Because you do by your practice condemn that life that they affect: John 7:7, 'The world hateth me, because I testify that their deeds are evil;' Heb. 11:7, 'Noah by faith, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, by the which he condemned the world.' Now they would not have their guilt revived; and therefore, since they will not come up to others by a religious imitation, they seek to bring others down to themselves by scoffs, reproaches, and censures.

[5.] They are set awork by Satan, thereby to keep off young beginners, and to discourage and molest the godly themselves; for bitter words pierce deep and enter into the very soul.

Secondly, It is a grievous temptation; it is reckoned in scripture among the persecutions: Gal. 4:29, 'As he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even so is it now.' He meaneth those bitter mockings that Isaac did suffer from Ishmael: Gen. 21:9, 'And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.' When the wicked mock at our interest in God, shame our confidence, the church complaineth of it: Ps. 123:4, 'We are filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud;' the insultations of those, that live in full pomp, over the confidence and hope the saints have in God. So we read, Heb. 10:33, that the servants of God were 'made a gazing-stock by reproaches and afflictions;' again, of 'cruel mockings,' Heb. 11:36. It is more grievous when they mock and persecute at the same time; there is both pain and shame. The parties mocked were God's saints; the parties mocking were their persecutors and enemies, which sometimes proved to be their own brethren, of the same nation, language, kindred, religion. In short, these mockings issue out of contempt, and tend to the disgrace and dishonour of the party mocked; they make it their sport to abuse them. David saith, 'Reproach hath broken my heart,' Ps. 69:20.

Thirdly, This should not move us either to open defection or partial declining, for these reasons:—

1. It is one of the usual evils wherewith the people of God are tempted. Now a Christian should be fortified against obvious and usual evils. Let no man that is truly religious think that he can escape the mockage and contempt of the wicked. Jesus Christ himself 'endured the contradiction of sinners,' Heb. 12:3; and the rather, that we might not wax weary and faint in our minds. This is a part of his cross, which we must bear after him. The Pharisees derided his ministry: Luke 16:14, 'The Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard

all these things, and derided him.' They flouted at him when he hung on the cross: Mat. 27:39–44, 'They that passed by him reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself: if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests, mocking him with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others, himself he cannot save: if he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him: he trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also which were crucified with him cast the same in his teeth.' So Acts 17:32, 'Some mocked, and said, What will this babbler say?' Well, then, since it is a usual evil which God's children have suffered, it should be the less to us. Little can the wicked say if they cannot scoff, and little can we endure if we cannot abide a bad word. There needs no great deal ado to advance a man into the chair of the scorner; if they have wickedness and boldness enough, they may soon let fly.

2. This, as well as other afflictions, are not excepted out of our resignation to God. We must be content to be mocked and scorned, as well as to be persecuted and molested. It is mentioned in the beatitudes, Mat. 5:11, 'Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil falsely against you for my sake.'

3. Railing and calumniating will never prevail with rational and conscientious men to cause them to change their opinions. To leave the truth because others rail at it, is to consult with our affections, not our judgments. Solid reasoning convinceth our judgments, but raillery is to our affections; and a rational conscientious man is governed by an enlightened mind, not perverse and preposterous affections: Eph. 5:17, 'Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the

will of the Lord is.' Therefore an honest man will not quit truth because others rail; no, he looketh to his rule and warrant. A man will not be railed out of errors; nay, often they are the more rooted because ill-confuted.

4. It is the duty of God's children to justify wisdom: Mat. 11:19, 'Wisdom is justified of her children.' What is it to justify wisdom? Justification is a relative word, opposed to crimination, so to justify is the work of an advocate; or to condemnation, so it is the work of a judge. The children of wisdom discharge both parts; they plead for the ways of God, and exalt them: so much as others deny them, they value them, esteem them, hold them for good and right. When they are never so much condemned and despised, the more zealous the saints will be for them: 'I will yet be more vile.'

5. Carnal men at the same time approve what they seem to condemn; they hate and fear strictness: Mark 6:20, 'Herod feared John, because he was a just man and an holy, and observed him.' They scoff at it with their tongues, but have a fear of it in their consciences; they revile it while they live, but what mind are they of when they come to die? Then all speak well of a holy life, and the strictest obedience to the laws of God: Num. 23:10, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his;' Mat. 25:8, 'Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.' Oh, that they had a little of that holiness and strictness which they scoffed at whilst they were pursuing their lusts! How will men desire to die? as carnal and careless sinners, or as mortified saints? Once more, they approve it in thesi, and condemn it in hypothesi. All the scoffers at godliness within the pale of the visible church have the same Bible, baptism, creed, pretend to believe in the same God and Christ, which they own with those whom they oppose. All the difference is, the one are real Christians, the other are nominal; some profess at large, the others

practise what they profess; the one have a religion to talk of, the others to live by. Once more, they approve it in the form, but hate it in the power. A picture of Christ that is drawn by a painter they like, and the forbidden image of God made by a carver, they will reverence and honour and be zealous for; but the image of God framed by the Spirit in the hearts of the faithful, and described in the lives of the heavenly and the sanctified, this they scorn and scoff at.

6. Their judgment is perverse, not to be stood upon. They count the children of God foolish and crack-brained. The crimination may be justly retorted; their way is folly and madness, for they go dancing to their destruction. Though there be a God by whom and for whom they were made, and from whom they are fallen, and that they cannot be happy but in returning to him again, yet they carry it so as if there were no misery but in bodily and worldly things, no happiness but in pleasing the senses. The beginning, progress, and end of their course is from themselves, in themselves, and to themselves. They pour out their hearts to inconsiderable toys and trifles, and will neither admit information of their error, nor reformation of their practice till death destroy them. They neglect their main business, and leave it undone, and run up and down, they know not why, like children that follow a bubble blown out of a shell of soap, till it break and dissolve. Now should those that are flying from wrath to come, and seeking after God and their happiness, be discouraged because these mad and merry worldlings scoff at them for their diligent seriousness? Surely we should deride their derisions and condemn their contempt, who despise God and Christ and their salvation. Should a wise man be troubled because madmen rail at him? If they 'glory in their shame,' Phil. 3:19, we must not be ashamed of our glory, nor ashamed to be found praying rather than sinning. If they think you fools for preferring heaven before

inconsiderable vanities, remember they can no more judge of these things than a blind man of colours.

7. If some dishonour, others will honour us, who are better able to judge: Ps. 15:4, 'In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.' Some have as low an opinion of the world as the carnal world hath of the certainty of God's word. They who labour to bring piety and godliness into a creditable esteem and reputation will pay a hearty honour and respect to every good and godly man: 2 Cor. 6:8, 9, 'By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report, as deceivers, yet true; as unknown, yet well known; as dying, but behold we live; as chastened and not killed;' contumeliously used by some, and reverently by others; vilified and contemned, counted deceivers by some, yet owned by others as faithful dispensers of the truth of God; not esteemed and looked on by some, by others owned and valued: thus God dispenseth the lot of his servants.

8. A Christian should be satisfied in the approbation of God, and the honour he puts upon him: John 5:44, 'How can ye believe, that receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?' If God hath taken him into his family, and hath put his image upon him, and admitted him into present communion with him, and giveth him the testimony of his Spirit to assure him of his adoption here, and will hereafter receive him into eternal glory, this is enough, and more than enough, to counterbalance all the scorn of the world and the disgrace they would put upon us. If God approve us, should we be dejected at the scorn of a fool? Is the approbation of the eternal God so small in our eyes, that everything can weigh it down, and cast the balance with us? Alas! their scorning and dishonouring is nothing to the honour which God puts upon us.

9. There is a time when the promised crown shall be set upon our heads, and who will be ashamed then—the scoffer or the serious worshipper of Christ? God is resolved to honour Christ's faithful servants: John 12:26, 'He that honoureth me, him shall my Father honour.' He will honour us at death, that is our private entrance into heaven; but he will much more honour us publicly at the day of judgment, when we shall be owned: Rev. 3:5, 'I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels;' and Christ shall be admired for the glory he puts upon a poor worm: 2 Thes. 1:10, 'When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.' The wicked shall be reckoned with, called to an account by Christ: Jude, 14, 15, 'The Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodlily committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him;' yea, judged by the saints: 1 Cor. 6:2, 'Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?' Ps. 49:14, 'The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning;' that is, in the morning of the resurrection the saints shall be assumed by God to assist in judicature, and shall arise in a glorious manner, when the earth shall give up her dead. If this be not enough for us to counterbalance the scorn of the world, we are not Christians.

Use. To persuade us to hold on our course, notwithstanding all the scorns and reproaches which are cast upon the despised ways of God. Now, to this end I shall give you some directions.

1. Be sure that you are in God's way, and that you have his law to justify your practice, and that you do not make his religion ridiculous by putting his glorious name upon any foolish fancies of your own. A man that differs from the rest of Christians had need of a very clear light, that he may honour so much of Christianity as is owned, and



may be able to vindicate his own particular way wherein he is engaged. The world is loath to own anything of God, and needless dissents justify their prejudice. I know a Christian is not infallible; besides his general godly course, he may have his particular slips and errors; yet because the world is apt to take prejudice, we should not but upon the constraining evidence of conscience, enter upon any ways of dissent or contest, lest we justify their general hatred of godliness by our particular error.

2. Take up the ways of God without a bias, and look straight forward in a course of godliness: Prov. 4:25, 'Let thine eyes look right on, and thine eyelids straight before thee;' that is, look not askint upon any secular encouragements, but have thine eye to the end of the journey; make God as thy witness, so thy master and judge.

3. Take heed of the first declinings. God's saints may decline somewhat in an hour of temptation, and yet be sincere in the main. Now evil is best stopped in the beginning: Heb. 12:3, 'Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds.' Weariness is a lesser, and fainting a higher degree of deficiency. I am weary before I faint, before the vital power retireth, and leaveth the outward part senseless.

4. Since the proud scoff, encounter pride with humility. Mocking is far more grievous to the proud, who stand upon their honour, than to the lowly and humble. Therefore be not too desirous of the applause of men, especially of the blind and ungodly world; make no great matter of their contempt, and scorn, or slander.

## **SERMON LVIII**

# **I have remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord; and have comforted myself.—**

## **VER. 52.**

THE man of God had complained in the former verse that the proud had him greatly in derision. His help against that temptation is recorded in this verse; where observe—

1. David's practice, I have remembered thy judgments of old.
2. The effect of that meditation, and have comforted myself.

The explication will be by answering two questions:—

1. What is meant by mishphatim, judgments? The word is used in scripture either for laws enacted, or judgments executed according to those laws. The one may be called 'the judgments of his mouth,' as Ps. 105:5, 'Remember the marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth;' the other, the judgments of his hand. As both will bear the name of judgments, so both may be said to be 'of old.' His decrees and statutes, which have an eternal equity in them, and were graven upon the heart of man in innocency, may well be said to be 'of old;' and because from the beginning of the world God hath been punishing the wicked, and delivering the godly in due time, his judiciary dispensations may be said to be so also. The matter is not much whether we interpret it of either his statutes or decrees, for they both contain matter of comfort, and we may see the ruin of the wicked in the word if we see it not in providence. Yet I rather interpret it of those righteous acts recorded in scripture, which God as a just judge hath executed in all ages, according to the promises and threatenings annexed to his laws. Only in that sense I must note to you, judgments imply his mercies in the deliverance of

his righteous servants, as well as his punishments on the wicked; the seasonable interpositions of his relief for the one in their greatest distresses, as well as his just vengeance on the other, notwithstanding their highest prosperities.

2. What is meant by comfort? Comfort is the strengthening the heart against evil, when either—(1.) Faith is confirmed; (2.) Love to God increased; (3.) Hope made more lively.

Now these providences of God, suited to his word, comforted David, had more power and force to confirm and increase these graces, than all their theistical scoffs to shake them; for he concluded from these instances, that though the wicked flourish they shall perish, and though the godly be afflicted they shall be rewarded; and so his faith, and hope, and love to God, and adherence to his ways was much encouraged. Comfort is sometimes spoken of in scripture as an impression of the comforting Spirit, sometimes as a result from an act of our meditation; as here, 'I comforted myself.' These things are not contrary but subordinate. It is our duty to meditate on God's word and providence, and God blesseth it by the influence of his grace; and the Spirit may be said to comfort us, and we also may be said to comfort ourselves.

Doct. That the remembrance of God's former dealings with his people, and their enemies in all ages, is a great relief in distress.

The man of God is here represented as lying under the scorns and oppressions of the wicked. What did he do to relieve himself? 'I remembered thy judgments of old, and have comforted myself.' So elsewhere, this was his practice: Ps. 77:5, 'I considered the days of old, the years of ancient times;' again in the 11th and 12th verses, 'I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy works of old: I will meditate also of all thy works, and talk of thy

doings;' yet again, Ps. 143:5, 'I remember the days of old, I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the works of thy hands.' Thus did David often consider with what equity and righteousness, with what power and goodness, God carried on the work of his providence toward his people of old. The like he presseth on others; Ps. 105:5, 'Remember the marvellous works which he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth.' Surely it is our duty, and it will be our comfort and relief.

I shall despatch the point in these considerations:—

1. That there is a righteous God who governeth the world. All things are not hurled up and down by chance, as if the benefit we receive were only a good hit, and the misery a mere misfortune. No; all things are ordered by a powerful, wise, and just God; his word doth not only discover this to us, but his works: Ps. 58:11, 'So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth the earth;' that is, many times there are such providences that all that behold them shall see, and say that godliness and holiness are matters of advantage and benefit in this world, abstracted from the rewards to come, and so an infallible evidence that the world is not governed by chance, but administered by an almighty, all-wise, and most just providence. So elsewhere: Ps. 9:16, 'The Lord is known by the judgments which he executeth;' by some eminent instances God showeth himself to be the judge of the world, and keepeth a petty sessions before the day of general assizes. Upon this account the saints beg the Lord to take off the veil from his providence, and to appear in protecting and delivering his children, and punishing their adversaries: Ps. 94:1, 2, 'O thou judge of the earth, show thyself.' He is the supreme governor of the world, to whom it belongeth to do right.

2. This righteous God hath made a law according to which he will govern, and established it as the rule of commerce between him and his creatures. The precept is the rule of our duty, the sanction is the rule of his proceedings; so that by this law we know what we must do, and what we may expect from him. Man is not made to be lawless and ungoverned, but hath a conscience of good and evil, for without the knowledge of God's will we cannot obey him; nor can we know his will, unless it be some way or other revealed. No man in his wits can expect that God should speak to us immediately and by oracle; we cannot endure his voice, nor can we see him and live. Therefore he revealed his mind by the light of nature and by scripture, which giveth us a clearer and more perfect knowledge of his will. Certainly those that live under that dispensation must expect that God will deal with them according to the tenor of it. The apostle telleth us, Rom. 2:12, 'As many as have sinned without the law, shall perish without the law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law.' God hath been explicit and clear with them, to tell them what they should do and what they should expect.

3. In the course of his dispensations he hath showed from the beginning of the world unto this day that he is not unmindful of this law, that the observance of this rule bringeth suitable blessings, and the violation of it the threatened judgments: Rom. 1:18, 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.' The impious and the unrighteous are breakers of either table, and the wrath of God is denounced and executed upon both, if there be any notorious violation of either; for in the day of God's patience he is not quick and severe upon the world: Heb. 2:2, 'Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward;' thereby his word is owned. Execution, we say, is the life of the law; it is but words without it, and can neither be a ground of sufficient hope in the promises, nor fear in the

comminations. When punishments are inflicted it striketh a greater terror: when the offenders are punished, the observers rewarded, then it is a sure rule of commerce between us and God.

4. That the remembrance of the most illustrious examples of his justice, power, and goodness, should comfort us, though we do not perfectly feel the effects of his righteous government.

[1.] I will prove we are apt to suspect God's righteous administration when we see not the effects of it. When the godly are oppressed with divers calamities, and the wicked live a life of pomp and ease, flourishing in prosperity and power, according to their own heart's desire, they are apt to think that God taketh no care of worldly affairs, or were indifferent to good and evil, as those profane atheists, Mal. 2:17, 'Every one that doth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in him, or where is the God of judgment?' as if God took pleasure in wicked men, and were no impartial judge, or had no providence at all, or hand in the government of the world. Temptations to atheism begin ordinarily at the matter of God's providence. First men carve out a providence of their own, that God loveth none but whom he dealeth kindly with in the matters of the world; and if his dispensations be cross to their apprehensions, then his providence is not just. Nay, the people of God themselves are so offended that they break out into such words as these, Ps. 73:11–13, 'How doth God know? is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.' They dispute within themselves, Doth God indeed so discern and take notice of all this? How cometh it about that he permitteth them? for it is visible that the wicked enjoy the greatest tranquillity and prosperity, and have the wealth and greatness of the world heaped upon them: then what reward for purity of hearts or

hands, or the strict exercise of godliness? Till God doth arise, and apply himself to vindicate his law, these are the thoughts and workings of men's hearts; at least, it is a great vexation and trouble even to the godly, and doth tempt them to such imaginations and surmises of God.

[2.] I shall prove that the remembrance of his judgments of old is one means to confirm the heart, for so we are enabled to tarry till God's judgments be brought to the effect. We see only the beginning, and so, like hasty spectators, will not tarry till the last act, when all errors shall be redressed. We shall make quite another judgment of providence when we see it altogether, and do not judge of it by parts. Surely then they shall see 'there is a reward for the righteous; there is a God that judgeth the earth.' At first none seem so much to lose their labour, and to be disregarded by God as the righteous, or to be more hardly dealt withal; but let us not be too hasty in judging God's work, while it is a-doing, but tarry to the end of things. In the word of God we have not only promises which are more firm than heaven and earth, but instances and examples of the afflictions of the righteous and their deliverance; therefore let us but suspend our censure till God hath put his last hand unto the work, and then you will see that if his people seem to be forsaken for a while, it is that they may be received for ever. All is wont to end well with the children of God, let God alone with his own methods; after a walk in the wilderness, he will bring his people into a land of rest.

But more particularly why his judgments of old are a comfort and relief to us.

1. It is some relief to the soul to translate the thoughts from the present scene of things, and to consider former times. One cause of men's discomfort is to look only to the present, and so they are over

whelmed; but when we look back, we shall find that others have been afflicted before us, it is no strange thing, and others delivered before us upon their dependence on God, and adherence to him. You were not the first afflicted servants of God, nor are likely to be the last. Others have been in the like case, and after a while delivered and rescued out of their trouble: Ps. 22:4, 5, 'Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them; they cried unto thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.' In looking back we see two things—the carriage of the godly, and their success, or the salvation of God: 'The patience of Job and the end of the Lord,' James 5:11. They trusted God, and trusted him patiently and constantly in all their troubles. At last this trust was not in vain; they were delivered, and not confounded; depending on God for rescue and deliverance, they never failed to receive it. Now, in looking back we look forward, and in their deliverance we see our own; at least, you are fortified against the present temptation, whilst you see his people in all ages have their difficulties and conflicts, and also their deliverances; so that you will not miscarry, nor be over-tempted by the present prosperity of the wicked: Ps. 73:17, 'I went into the sanctuary, and there understood I their end;' that is, entering into a sober consideration of God's counsels and providences, we may easily discern what is the ordinary conclusion of such men's felicities at last; they pay full dear for their perishing pleasures.

2. Because these are instances of God's righteous government, and instances do both enliven and confirm all matters of faith. Here you see his justice. God hath ever been depressing the proud and exalting the humble, gracious to his servants, terrible to the wicked. These examples also of rescuing others who have been in like condition before us show us what the wisdom and omnipotency of God can do in performing promises. When the performance of them seemeth



hopeless, and all lost and gone, then they are infallible evidences of his tenderness, care, and fidelity towards all that depend upon him. Now, though we have nothing of our own experience to support us, yet the remembrance of what hath been done for others, the experiences of the saints in scripture, are set down for our learning, for the support of our faith and hope. They trusted in God, and found him a ready help; why may not we? God is the same that he was in former times, and carrieth himself in the same ways of providence to righteous and unrighteous as heretofore; still promises are fulfilled, and threatenings are executed. They on whose behalf God showed himself so just, powerful, wise, good, and tender, had not a better God than we have, nor a more worthy Redeemer, nor a surer covenant. If they had a stronger faith, it is our own fault, and we should labour to increase it: the saints are as dear to God as ever. And as to the wicked, they that inherit others' sins shall inherit others' judgments. It is true, we live not in the age of wonders; but God's ordinary providence is enough for our turn, and those very wonders show that he hath power and love enough to protect and deliver us. Well, then, these are instances of his righteous government, and instances which concern us, which is my second reason.

3. By these judgments of old you see the exact correspondency between his word and works. Where his voice is heard, but his hand not seen, his word is coldly entertained; but by his providence he establisheth the authority of his law. The word spoken by angels was λόγος βέβαιος, 'a steadfast word,' Heb. 2:2. A word may be said to be steadfast either in respect of the unalterable will of the lawgiver, or in respect of execution, or with respect to the party to whom it is given, who firmly and certainly believeth it. The one maketh way for the other. God is resolved to govern the world by this rule, therefore he doth authorise it, own it by the dispensations of his providence;

accordingly the world learneth to reverence it: Hosea 7:12, 'I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard.' God's word against sin and sinners will at last take effect, and end in sad chastisements; and they that would not believe their danger are made to feel it. Now his promises will have their effect as well as his threatenings: Micah 2:7, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' The word of God doth not only speak good, but do good. The word's saying of good, is indeed doing of good. The performance is so certain, that when it is said it may be accounted done. We are apt to despise the word of God as an empty sound. No; it produceth notable effects in the world. The sentences that are there, whether of mercy or judgment, are decrees given forth by the great judge of the world; whereupon execution is to follow, as is foretold. Now, when we see it done, and can compare the Lord's word and work together, it is a mighty support to our faith, whether it be in our or in former ages. For you see the word is not a vain scarecrow in its threatenings, nor do we build castles in the air, when we do depend upon its promises: the judgments of his mouth will be the judgments of his hand, and providence is a real comment upon and proof of the truth of his word.

4. God's judgments of old, or his wonderful works, were never intended only for the benefit of that age in which they were done, but the benefit of all those who should hear of them by any credible means whatsoever. Surely God never intended they should be buried in dark oblivion, but that after-ages may be the better for the remembrance of them. Witness these scriptures: Ps. 145:4, 'One generation shall praise thy works unto another, and remember thy mighty acts;' Joel 1:3, 'Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.' So Ps. 78:3-7, 'That which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us, we will not hide them from their children; showing the

generations to come the praises of the Lord, and his wonderful works which he hath done: for he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children, that the generation to come might know them, even the children to come, which should be born; who should arise and declare to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of the Lord, but keep his commandments, and might not be as their fathers,' &c. From all which places and many more I observe—

[1.] That we should tell generations to come what we have found of God in our time, and that we should use all ways and means to transmit the knowledge of God's notable and wondrous providences for his people to posterity.

[2.] That this report of God's former works is a special means of edification, for therefore God would have them recorded and told for the special benefit of the ages following.

[3.] And more particularly that this is a great means and help of faith. For in one of the places it is said 'that they may set their faith and hope in God;' and from all we may conclude that, by remembering God's judgments of old, we may be much comforted; as in remembering God's works when the church was first reformed in Luther's time, the delivering of England from the Spanish invasion, gunpowder-treason, &c., for the confirming our faith and confidence in God. All God's judgments that were done in the days of our forefathers, and in all generations, if they come to our knowledge by a true report, or record, are of use to warn us and comfort us; yea, the bringing Israel out of Egypt and Babylon, or any notable work done since the beginning of the world till now.

Use. The use is to press us to take this course as one remedy to comfort us in our distresses. In distresses of conscience the blood of Christ is the only cure; but in temptations arising from the scorn and insultation of enemies, remember what God hath done for his people of old, and let his providence support our faith: Ps. 23:4, 'Thy rod and thy staff comfort me.' *Pedum pastorale*—for the protection and guiding of the sheep and driving away the wolf, the rod and staff are the instruments of the shepherd. More particularly consider—

1. What is to be observed and remembered. All the eminent passages of God's providence, when acts of power have been seasonably interposed for the rescue of his people, judgments of all kind, public, universal, private and personal, our own experiences: 2 Cor. 1:10, 'Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' The experiences of others, not in one, but in every age; for in every place and age God delighteth to leave a monument of his righteousness, and all is for the consolation and instruction of the church. Judgments in our time, judgments in former times, blow off the dust from old mercies, and the inscription of them will be a kind of prophecy to your faith. But especially cast your eye often upon the Lord's manner of dealing with his saints in scripture, their consolations and deliverances received after trouble; partly because the word of God is a rich storehouse of these instances and examples, and partly because of the infallibility of the record, where things are delivered to us with so much simplicity and truth; partly also because of the manner and ends in which and for which they are recorded. But if I would have recourse to scripture, should I not rather make use of the promises? Ans. We must not set one part of scripture against another; but examples do mightily help us to believe promises, as they are a pledge of the justice, faithfulness, care and love of God towards his people; and—I know not by what secret

force and influence—invite us to hope for what God hath done for others of his servants.

2. How they must be considered. Seriously, as everything that cometh from God. A slight consideration will not draw forth the profitable use of them. When they are looked on cursorily, or lightly passed by, the impression of God upon his works cannot be discerned, therefore they must be well considered, with all their circumstances: Ps. 143:2, David sufficed not to say, 'I remember thy works of old,' but 'I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the works of thy hands;' Ps. 77:12, 'I remember thy works of old; I will meditate also of all thy works.' And surely this should be a delightful exercise to the children of God, as it is for the son of a noble and princely father to read the chronicles where his father's acts are recorded, or the famous achievements of his ancestors: Ps. 111:2, 'The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.' Some works of God have a large impression of his power and goodness, and they are made to be remembered, as it after followeth there. He is ready to do the like works when his church standeth in need thereof. Now they must be sought out, for there is more hid treasure and excellency in them than doth at first appear. He that would reap the use and benefit of them should take pleasure to search out matter of praise for God and trust for himself. Of all other study, this is the most worthy exercise and employment of godly men, to study and find out the works of God in all their purposes and designs; there is more pleasure in such meditations than in all other the most sensual divertisements.

3. The end is to be strengthened and confirmed in the way of our duty, in dependence upon God, and adherence to him; or that faith may be strengthened in a day of affliction, and our hearts encouraged in cleaving to the ways of God.

[1.] Dependence upon God, which implieth a committing ourselves to his power, a submitting ourselves to his will, and a waiting his leisure; all these are in trust, and all these are encouraged by remembering his judgments of old.

(1.) Committing ourselves to his power is trust and dependence: 'Our God is able to deliver us' from the fiery furnace, Dan. 3:17; Rom. 4:21, 'Being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform.' Now this is abundantly seen in his judgments of old: Isa. 51:9, 'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art not thou he which hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon; which hast dried the sea, and the waters of the great deep?' If God will but take to himself his great power, and bestir himself as in ancient days, what should a believer fear?

(2.) Submitting ourselves to God's will is a great act of dependence, submitting before the event. Now, how may a believer acquiesce in God's providence, and enjoy a quiet repose of heart? He knoweth not what God will do with him, but this he knoweth, he hath to do with a good God, who is not wont to forsake those that depend upon him; he hath wisdom and goodness enough to deliver us, or to make our troubles profitable to us. Now his judgments of old do much help to breed this composedness of mind: Ps. 9:10, 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.' They that know anything of God's wont, and have learned from others, or experimented themselves, or by searching into the records of time have found with what wisdom and power, justice and mercy, God governeth the world, will be firmly grounded in their trust and reliance on these, without applying themselves to any of the sinful aids or policies of the world for succour, or troubling themselves about success; for God never

forsook any godly man in his distress, that by prayer and faith made his humble and constant applications to him.

(3.) If you take in the third thing, tarrying or waiting God's leisure; for 'he that believeth will not make haste,' Isa. 26:16. God will tarry to try his people, to observe his enemies, till their sins are full, and tarry to bring about his providences in the best time: 1 Peter 5:6, 'Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you,' i.e. deliver you, 'in due time.' It may be he will not at all afford temporal deliverance, but will refer it to the time when he will 'judge the world in righteousness,' Acts 17:31. Now, what will relieve the soul, engage it to wait? His judgments of old; at the long run the good cause hath prevailed, the suppressed truth hath got up, the buried Christ hath risen again, and after labours and patience the fruit sown hath been reaped; therefore in due time he will look upon our afflictions; in the sanctuary we understand the end of things: the beginnings are troublesome, but the end is peace.

[2.] Adherence to God; this followeth necessarily from the former, for dependence begets observance. Till a man trusts God he can never be true to him; for the 'evil heart of unbelief' will 'draw us from the living God,' Heb. 3:12; but if we can depend upon him, temptations have lost their force. The great cause of all defection is the desire of some present sensible benefit, and we cannot tarry God's leisure, nor wait for his help in the way of our duty. Now, if God's people of old have trusted, and were never confounded, it is a great engagement in the way of his judgments to wait for him without miscarrying.

A case of conscience may be propounded: How could David be comforted by God's judgments, for it seemeth a barbarous thing to

delight in the destruction of any? It is said, Prov. 17:5, 'He that is glad of calamities shall not be unpunished.'

Ans. 1. It must be remembered that judgment implies both parts of God's righteous dispensation—the deliverance of the godly and the punishment of the wicked. Now, in the first sense, there is no ground of scruple; for it is said, Ps. 94:15, 'Judgment shall return to righteousness;' the sufferings of good men shall be turned into the greatest advantage; as the context showeth that God will not cast off his people, but judgment shall return unto righteousness.

Ans. 2. Judgment, as it signifieth punishment of the wicked, may yet be a comfort, not as it importeth the calamity of any, but either—

1. When the wicked are punished, the snare and allurement to sin is taken away, which is the hope of impunity; for by their punishments we see it is dangerous to sin against God: Isa. 26:9, 'When thy judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness,' the snare is removed from many a soul.

2. Their derision and mockage of godliness ceaseth; they do no longer vex and pierce the souls of the godly, saying, 'Aha! aha!' Ps. 40:15, 'It is as a wound to their heart when they say, Where is your God,' Ps. 42:10.

3. The impediments and hindrances of worshipping and serving God are taken away: when the nettles are rooted up the corn hath more room to grow.

4. Opportunity of molesting God's servants is taken away, and afflicting the church by their oppressions, and so way is made for the enlarging of Christ's kingdom.



5. As God's justice is manifested: Prov. 11:10, 'When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth; but when the wicked perish, there is shouting;' Ps. 52:6, 'The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him: Lo! this is the man that made not God his portion;' Rev. 18:20, 'Rejoice over Babylon, ye holy apostles and prophets, for God hath avenged you on her.' When the word of God is fulfilled, surely then we may rejoice that his justice and truth are cleared.

## SERMON LIX

### **Horror hath taken hold on me, because of the wicked which forsake thy law.—VER.**

#### **53.**

THE man of God in the former verse had showed what comfort he took in remembering God's judgments of old, meaning thereby his righteous dispensations in delivering the godly, and punishing the wicked. He now showeth that, seing God's horrible judgments on the wicked, he was seized and stricken with a very great fear.

In the words observe—

1. A great passion described.

2. The cause of it assigned.

1. A great passion described, horror hath taken hold on me. The word for horror signifieth also a tempest or storm. Translations vary; some read it, as Junius, a storm overtaking me; Ainsworth, a burning horror hath seized me, and expoundeth it a storm of terror and

dismay; the Septuagint, ἀθυμία κατέσχε με, faintness and dejection of mind hath possessed me; our old translation, I am horribly afraid. All translations, as well as the original word, imply a great trouble of mind, and a vehement commotion like a storm. It was matter of disquiet and trembling to David.

2. What is the matter? The reason is given in the latter clause, because of the wicked which forsake thy law. Now this reason may be supposed to be—

[1.] Either because of the storm of trouble raised by them, or persecution from them; and so it would note the outrageousness of those who have cast off the yoke, all fear of God, and respect to his law; and so also the imbecility and weakness of the saints, who are not able to stand against violent evils and assaults of temptation. But this is not so consistent with David's constancy and comfort, asserted in the former verses.

[2.] Because of the detriment and loss which might accrue to the public; they bring on common judgments and calamities. It is a Jewish proverb that two dry sticks will set a green one afire: 'One sinner destroyeth much good,' Eccles. 9:18, much more mercy. Now the godly, which believe God's word, are troubled when they see wickedness increaseth; they know this will turn to loss and ruin in the issue; therefore it causeth a grievous horror and indignation to seize upon them, for they have a tender and public spirit.

[3.] Besides the common calamities which they might bring upon others, the sore punishment which they would bring upon themselves was a horror to him, which showeth a charitable affection to enemies. The punishment, which had not as yet seized upon them, nor did they think of it, yet being prepared for their wickedness by the justice of God, was a grief and trouble to David, as it is to all good

men, to see the wicked run on to their own destruction and condemnation. These two last senses I prefer.

Doct. It argueth a good spirit to be grieved to see God's laws broken, and to be stricken with fear because of those judgments which come from God by reason of the wickedness of the wicked. The reasons are:—

First, Here is matter of great commotion of spirit to any attentive and serious beholder; for the cause assigned in the text is, 'because they forsake thy law.' There are two things in the law—the precept and the sanction, by penalties and rewards. Now, they that forsake the law violate the precept and slight the sanction; and so two things grieve the godly—their sin and their punishment, how grievously they sin, and what grievous punishments they may expect!

1. That the law is violated, that they should forsake God, and all thoughts of obedience to him, andso make light of his law. 'Sin is ἀνομία, 1 John 3:4, the transgression of the law;' a contempt of God's authority. If we consider the intrinsic evil of sin, we shall see that it is not a small thing, but a horrible evil in itself; a thing not to be laughed at, but feared, whether our own or others.

[1.] There is folly in it, as it is a deviation from the best rule which the divine wisdom hath set unto us. If we should look upon the law of God as a bare direction or counsel given us by one that is wiser than we, it is a contempt of the wisdom of God, as if he knew not how to govern the world, and what is good and meet for man, so much as he himself; and so a poor worm is exalted above God: Micah 6:8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good.' Now shall we slight his direction, and in effect say our own way is better? Reason requireth that they who cannot choose for themselves should obey their guides, and since they are not wise for themselves, content themselves with

the wisdom of others who see farther than they do, as Elymas the sorcerer, when he was struck blind, 'sought about for somebody to lead him by the hand,' Acts 13:11. Can a blind man feel out his way better than another who hath eyes to choose it for him? God is wiser than we, and all who would not contemn their creator should think so. He hath reduced the sum of our duty into a holy law; now for us after all this to run of our heads, and to consult with our foolish lusts and the suggestions of the devil, who is our worst enemy, is extreme folly and madness, and so doth every one who breaketh the laws of God.

[2.] Laws are not only to direct, but have a binding power and force from the authority of the lawgiver. God doth not only give us counsel as a friend, but commandeth us as a sovereign; and so the second notion whereby the evil of sin is set forth, is that of disobedience and rebellion; and so it is a great injury done to God, because it is a depreciation and contempt of his authority. As Pharaoh said, Exod. 5:2, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?' or those rebels, Ps. 12:4, 'Our tongues are our own; who is Lord over us?' We will speak and think and do what we please, and own no law but our own lusts. Now, though sinners do not say so in so many direct and formal words, yet this is the interpretation of their sinful actions. Whenever they sin, they despise the law which forbiddeth that sin, and so by consequence the authority of him that made it: 2 Sam. 12:9, 10, 'Wherefore hast thou sinned in despising the commandment?' Tush! I will do it; it is no matter for the law of God that standeth in the way, is the language of the corrupt and obstinate heart. Now no man can endure to have his will crossed by an inferior, and will God take it at their hands? And therefore the children of God, who have a great reverence of God's authority, when they see it so openly violated and contemned, are filled with horror. Will not

God be tender of his power and sovereignty? will he see his authority so lightly esteemed, and take no notice of it?

[3.] It is shameful ingratitude. Man is God's beneficiary, from whom he hath received life and being, and all things, and therefore is bound to love him and serve him according to his declared will. We continually depend upon him every moment: 'In him we live, and move, and have our being,' Acts 17:28; and surely dependence should beget observance, and therefore men should be loath to break with God, or careful to reconcile themselves to him on whom they depend every moment: Acts 12:20, 'Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon; but they came with one accord to him, and having made Blastus, the king's chamberlain, their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country.' Therefore it is extreme unthankfulness, stupidity, and brutishness for them to carry themselves so unthankfully towards God, who giveth them life and being, and all things. The brutes themselves, who have no capacity to know God as the first cause of all being, yet take notice of the next hand from whence they receive their supplies: Isa. 1:3, 'The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib;' and in their kind express their gratitude to such as feed them, and make much of them; but wicked men take no notice of the God who hath made them, and kept them at the expense and care of his providence, and hath been beneficial to them all their days; but as they slight their lawgiver, so they requite their great benefactor with unkindness and provocation.

[4.] It is a disowning of his propriety in them, as if they were not his own, and God had not power to do with his own as he pleaseth. The creature is absolutely at God's dispose, not only as he hath a jurisdiction over us as our lawgiver and king over his subjects, but as a proprietary and owner over his goods. A prince hath a more

absolute power over his lands and goods than over his subjects. God is not only a ruler but an owner, as he made us out of nothing, and bought us when worse than nothing, and still keepeth us from returning into our original nothing; and shall those who are absolutely his own withdraw themselves from him, and live according to their own will, and speak and do what they list? What is this but a plain denial of God's propriety and lordship over us? as those, Ps. 12:4, 'Who have said, With our tongues will we prevail, our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?' Surely it should strike us with horror to think that any creatures should thus take upon them. Sin robbeth God of his propriety in the creatures. If we consider his natural right, sin is such an injury and wrong to God as theft and robbery. If we consider our own covenant, as we voluntarily acknowledge God's propriety in us, so it is adultery, breach of marriage vow; and with respect to the devoting and consecrating ourselves to him, so it is sacrilege.

[5.] It is a contempt of God's glorious majesty. What else shall we make of a plain contest with him, or a flat contradiction of his holy will? For whilst we make our depraved will the rule and guide of our actions against his holy will, we plainly contend with him whose will shall stand, his or ours, and so jostle him out of the throne, and pluck the crown off his head and the sceptre out of his hands, and usurp his authority; and so slight the eternal power of this glorious king, as if he were not able to avenge the wrong done to his majesty, and we could make good our party against him: 1 Cor. 10:22, 'Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?' Isa. 45:9, 'Woe to him that striveth with his Maker; let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth.' Surely they that strive with their Maker will find God too hard for them. Now all these and many more considerations should make a serious Christian sensible, when he considereth how God is dishonoured in the world.

2. Their punishment. This relateth to the sanction by penalties and rewards. They that forsake the law have quite divested themselves of all hope, and cast off all dread of him. The law offereth death or life to the transgressors and observers of it: Deut. 30:15, 'Behold, I have set before you good and life, death and evil.' Now this is as little believed as the precept is obeyed; and thence cometh all their boldness in sinning and coldness in duty.

[1.] God allureth us to obedience by promises of this world and the next, which, if they were believed, men would be more forward and ready to comply with his will. As to the promises of the next world, he hath told us of eternal life. Surely God meaneth as he speaketh in his word, he will make good his word to the obedient; but the sinner thinketh not so, and therefore is loath to undergo the difficulties of obedience, because he hath so little sense and certainty of fulfilling the promise. The apostle telleth us, Heb. 11:6, 'That without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently serve him;' implying that if the fundamental truths of God's being and bounty were believed, we could not be so careless as we are, not so barren and unfruitful as we are; but unbelief lieth at the bottom of all our carelessness: 1 Cor. 15:58, 'Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.' They that know what a reward is prepared for the righteous, cannot but be serious and diligent themselves, and pity others, and be troubled at their neglect. Oh! what a good God they deprive themselves of, and throw away their souls for a trifle! But because the Lord knoweth how apt we are to be led by things present to sense, that work strongly upon our apprehensions; and that things absent and future lie in another world, and wanting the help of sense to convey them to our minds, make little impression upon our hearts; therefore God draws us to

our duty by present benefits. Even carnal nature is apt to be pleased with these kinds of mercies, protection, provision, and worldly comforts: Ps. 119:56, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts:' Mat. 6:33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, and all these things shall be added to you;' 1 Tim. 4:8, 'Godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.' But alas! the naughty heart cannot depend on God for the effects of his common goodness. Men distrust providence, and therefore take their own course, which is a grief and trouble to a gracious heart, to see they cannot depend on God for things of a present accomplishment.

[2.] The other part of the sanction is his threatenings and punishments. Now in what a direful condition are all the deserters of God's law! Besides the loss of heaven, there is eternal fire, which is the portion of the wicked: Ps. 11:6, 'Upon the wicked he will rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup.' They may flourish for a time, yet at length sudden, terrible, and irremediable destruction shall be the portion of their cup. God's judgments are terrible and unavoidable, both here and hereafter: Eph. 5:6, 'For these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience;' Rom. 2:9, 'Tribulation, wrath, and anguish upon the soul of man that doth evil.' Alas! these things are slighted by wicked men, or else they would not venture as they do; you cannot drive a dull ass into the fire that is kindled before him: Prov. 1:17, 'In vain is the snare laid in the sight of any bird;' and would a reasonable creature wilfully run into such a danger if he were sensible of it, and venture upon so dreadful threatenings if he did believe them? No; they think it is but a vain scarecrow, a deceitful terror, or a false flash of fire, and therefore embolden themselves in their rebellion. But God's people, that know the certainty of these things, they cannot but conceive a great horror at it



when they think of the end of these men, their judgments in this world, but especially their eternal condemnation in the world to come. Well, then, forsaking the law, despising the precept, and slighting the sanction, should be a matter of great horror to a tender and gracious spirit.

Secondly, It argueth that they have a due sense of things, though others have not.

1. They have a due sense of the evil of sin: Prov. 14:9, 'Fools make a mock of sin;' they sport at it, and jest at it, and count it nothing; but gracious and tender hearts have other apprehensions; they know that this is a violation of the holy and righteous and good law of God, and that it will be bitter in the issue, and that they which had pleasure in unrighteousness shall be damned. They look upon it with sad hearts, though it be committed by others, that the wicked go dancing to hell, and are angry with those who mourn for them, and dislike that vain course which they affect.

2. They have a due sense of the wrath of God. The prophet that threatened it saith, that 'rottenness entered into his bones, and his bowels quivered,' Hab. 3:16. A lion trembleth to see a dog beaten before him. It is a trouble to the godly to think of the horrible punishments of the wicked, which they dread not, nor dream of; but the saints have a reverence for their Father's anger. Search the scriptures, and you shall find that the godly are more troubled at God's judgments than the wicked themselves who are to feel them: Dan. 4:19, 'Daniel was astonished for an hour, and his thoughts troubled him,' when he was to reveal God's judgments against Nebuchadnezzar. So the prophet, Jer. 4:19, 'My bowels, my bowels; I am pained at the very heart;' ver. 22, 'But my people are foolish, they are sottish children;' they, that brought the evil upon themselves, are

senseless and stupid: Ps. 90:11, 'Who knows the power of thine anger? according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.' Few lay to heart the terrible effects of God's heavy wrath; but the righteous do; they are truly affected with it, and with the cause of it, which is sin. God's wrath affects men according to the reverence and fear wherewith they entertain it, but to the wicked it is but a vain and empty terror.

3. The certainty of the threatenings. God's people see wrath and judgment in the face of sin, whereas those who are drowned in sensuality and carnal delights scoff at God's menaces and jest at his judgments, neither crediting the one nor expecting the other, as if it were but a mere mockery: Isa. 5:19, 'Come, say they, let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it.' In their security they will believe nothing but what they feel.

4. The bane which cometh to communities and societies from the increase of the wicked, especially when their wickedness groweth to an height; that is, when it is committed with boldness: Isa. 3:9, 'They declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not;' when men have lost all shame and modesty, and will not be restrained by any law. Surely if we know the evil of sin, the terribleness of God's wrath, believe the truth of his threatenings, and then consider the danger that will come to our dearest country, we cannot but be greatly moved. If a man were sailing in a bark, and see it guided so that it must necessarily run against a rock and suffer shipwreck, he would be sorry and deeply affected.

Thirdly, It cometh from a good cause.

1. In the general it argueth a good constitution of soul: 2 Peter 2:8, 'For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.' Passively he was vexed with the impurity of the Sodomites, and

actively he vexed himself. So far as we are carnal we are pleased with sin, so far as we are spiritual we are vexed with it: Isa. 63:10, 'They rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit.' The better any are, the more affected with public sins and judgments. Christ weepeth over Jerusalem for their impenitency and approaching desolation: Luke 19:41, 42, 'As he came near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.' This was in the midst of the acclamations and hosannahs of the multitude, when he was welcomed with a triumph. Paul telleth the Corinthians, 2 Cor. 12:21, 'I am afraid, when I come among you, my God will humble me, and I shall bewail many which have not repented of the fornication, lasciviousness, and uncleanness which they have committed.' The more holy any one is, the more he is affected and struck at heart with the sins of others.

2. A deep resentment of God's dishonour. When his glory is obscured, it is a wound to the hearts of his children; as a child cannot endure to hear or see his father disgraced. Surely God's glory is dear to the saints: Ps. 69:9, 'The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.' Injuries done to God and religion affect them no less nearly than personal injuries which are done to themselves. So affectionately zealous are they for God's honour, which is obscured by the wickedness of the wicked, who forsake the perfect righteous law of God, and, usurping God's authority, make a new law to themselves.

3. Compassion to men. Though they are wicked men, yet they are men, made after God's image, remotely capable to know and love God, and live with him for ever, whom they should otherwise embrace as brethren; to see them treasure up wrath against the day of wrath should be a grief and a trouble to us; to think of the

everlasting destruction which they will bring upon themselves should afflict us. Thus the apostle: Phil. 3:18, 19, 'Of whom I have told you often, and now tell you weeping, that they are enemies to the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction.' To see men go by droves to hell, it should work on our bowels. If this brought Christ out of heaven to die for sinners, surely this should make us sadly resent their condition.

4. This produceth good effects; it is a disposition of great use and profit to us.

[1.] It deterreth us from sinning ourselves, and so we are kept from being tainted with the contagion of evil examples; for what we mourn for in others we will not commit ourselves. The heart is made more averse from sin every day by this practice, whereas those that take pleasure in the sins of others do the same things, Rom. 1:32, consent with them to dishonour God, and so howl among the wolves, as the Latin proverb is; but when this is a trouble to us, it maketh us avoid their example, notwithstanding terrors and allurements to the contrary; terrors from the angry world, who cannot endure that any should part company; and allurements from our commodious living among the offenders. Thus Lot escaped in Sodom, because 'his righteous soul was vexed;' and Noah 'was upright in his generation,' because he reprov'd the deeds of the wicked.

[2.] When we see their punishment in their sin, and fear a storm when the clouds are gathering, it puts us upon mourning and humiliation, which is a necessary duty in evil times: Jer. 13:17, 'If you will not hear, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride.' None do so feelingly bewail the sins of the times as those who have a tender holy heart, affected with God's dishonour, and compassion over the souls of men. Others do personate a mourning, and act a

part in a fast, as the mourning women among the Jews did at funerals, or as the boys in the streets would act their festivities and lamentations: Mat. 11:16, 17, 'Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the market, and calling to their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.' Therefore it is of great use to us to get this frame of spirit.

[3.] It maketh us more careful to reform others, so far as it lieth within our power. Certainly without this disposition a man will never seek the conversion of souls for which Christ died; but have it once, and then you will take all occasions to do good to the souls of your children, and relations, and neighbours. When Paul was stirred in spirit, παρωξύνετο τὸ πνεῦμα, exasperated within himself, because he saw the whole city given to idolatry, 'He disputed with them daily in the market-place,' and took all occasions to reclaim them. So if you were affected with the evil of sin, horribleness of wrath, certainty of the word of God, and the bane that cometh to any society by having the wicked amongst them, would you let your children, and servants, or friends go on in a damning course? Would you not have compassion on them, and pluck them out of the fire? Surely this should be the temper of every minister when he hath to do with sinners, that his ministry may not be a sleepy ministry; of every parent and householder, that all under his roof may be found in the way of the Lord; of every Christian towards his friends.

[4.] It justifieth our zeal in reproof. Surely reproof had need to be managed with great tenderness and compassion, that it may not seem to flow from hatred and ill-will to the persons reproofed, nor from petulancy of spirit, nor a desire of venting reproaches, but from pure zeal to the glory of God, grief to see him dishonoured, souls in danger to be lost, or hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;

therefore holy men, in their sharpest invectives against sin, or oppositions of it, have always mingled compassion: Mark 3:5, 'Our Lord looked about with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.' There was more of compassion than passion in our Lord Jesus Christ; he was angry, but grieved. So Paul, when he disputed earnestly against the Jews, yet telleth us, Rom. 9:2, 'I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart;' as much love to the persons of his countrymen as zeal against their errors. So flens dico, 'I tell you weeping, they are enemies to the cross of Christ,' Phil. 3:18. Though he discovereth them to be enemies to the cross of Christ, yet he wept for their sakes and the church's sake.

[5.] Those that are grieved and troubled even to some degree of horror and trembling of heart, for the prevailing of iniquity in those places and persons among whom they live, are delivered from the common judgment. So 2 Peter 2:7, 'He delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked;' and 'those that mourned and sighed for all the abominations which were committed in the midst of the land,' were marked out for preservation. The Lord hath a special care of them in times of public calamity.

Use 1. Of reproof; it condemneth—

1. Them that take pleasure in nothing so much as in the company of the ungodly, where they hear God dishonoured, his laws broken: if they were horribly afraid of the wicked which forsake God's law, how could this be? All conversation with the wicked is not forbidden, for then we must go out of the world; and to some we are bound by the law of necessity, or some civil and religious or natural bond; yet we are to eschew all unnecessary and voluntary fellowship and familiarity with them: Ps. 26:4, 'I have not sat with vain persons, nor gone in with dissemblers.' So Prov. 22:24, 25, 'Make no friendship

with an angry man; and with a froward man thou shalt not go; lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.' Certainly we are not to delight in the openly wicked as the only company that is pleasant to us, for what can a tender Christian get among them but a wound to his soul?

2. Those that are not affected with their own sins, much less with the sins of others. It is but a deceit of heart to declaim against the sins of the times, and not to mourn bitterly for our own sins: this is to translate the scene of our humiliation, and to put it far off from ourselves. Surely that grief will be most pungent and afflicting which doth most concern ourselves, and we know more by ourselves than possibly we can by other men; therefore we should often think of the merit of our own sins, their heinous nature, their dreadful consequences, if God be not the more merciful to keep us humble and thankful.

Use 2. To persuade us to be of this temper, to be deeply affected when we see God's laws broken. It requireth—

1. The general grace of a soft heart, which must be asked of God: 2 Chron. 34:27, 'Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself, when thou heardest the words of the Lord against this place.' There was a high peace and calm at that time, but a tender heart relenteth at the threatenings. Beg of God to soften thy heart.

2. There needeth eminent holiness for such a frame, that we shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, Phil. 2:15. The mourners must not be infected and tainted themselves, but save themselves from an untoward generation, condemn the sins of the times by their conversation.

3. We must have a fear animated by faith: 'By faith Noah was moved by fear' concerning things unseen, Heb. 11:7. The danger of the flood was unseen as yet, and they married and gave in marriage. We must not judge of things by the present, or by carnal appearance: there is a righteous judge in heaven. Faith in his word will show us our danger, for God's threatenings are all fulfilled, and the more we seek to establish ourselves by carnal means, the more our ruin is hastened.

4. There must be a grief set awork by a love to God and the souls of men. In calamities the true temper for humiliation is a due sense of our Father's anger, and brethren's miseries: in sins our Father's dishonour, and man's destruction; those who are the same flesh with ourselves. Now it should trouble us to see them in the way to eternal ruin: 'Of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted with the flesh,' Jude 22, 23.

## **SERMON LX**



## **Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.—VER. 54.**

DAVID had in the former verse expressed his great trouble, because of the increase of the wicked, and their defection from the law of God. Now he showeth what comforted him: the children of God have a great deal of divine consolation from the word in the midst of all their sorrows and evils of the present life. David's comfort is here expressed—

1. By the matter or object of it, thy statutes.
2. The degree of his rejoicing, intimated in the word songs. The effect is put for the cause, joy and mirth, which usually break forth into singing, or the sign and indication for the thing signified.
3. The place where he rejoiced, in the house of his pilgrimage; ἐν τόπῳ παροικίας μου, wheresoever I sojourn.

1. By God's 'statutes' is meant his word in general, more especially the precepts and promises: in the one we have the offer of life; in the other, the way and means how to attain it. In the word is both our charter and our rule; in both regards it is matter of rejoicing: Ps. 19:8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the soul.' Nothing is commanded there but what is equitable in itself, and profitable to us.

2. By 'songs,' a metonymy of the effect for the cause, or the sign for the thing signified; such pleasure, joy, and contentment as other men had in songs, David had in the word of God. Travellers use to lighten and ease the tediousness of the way by songs: Thy word doth comfort

me wonderfully. Or you may take it literally, the themes and arguments of his singing. Profane spirits must have songs suitable to their mirth; as their mirth is carnal, so the songs of carnal men are obscene, filthy and fleshly: but a holy man, his songs suit his mirth and joy; he rejoiceth in the Lord, and therefore his songs are divine: 'Thy statutes are my songs.' Singing of psalms is a delectable way of edification, which God hath not only instituted in the scriptures, but heathens saw a use of it by the light of nature. Ælian, lib. iii. Nat. Hist. cap. 39, telleth us of the Cretans, τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς ἐλευθέρους μανθάνειν τοὺς νόμους μετὰ τινος μελωδίας. It is a spiritual channel wherein our mirth may run: James 5:13, 'Is any merry? let him sing psalms,' ἐνθυμεῖ τις;—there is the harmony, that is a natural delight; the matter, that is a spiritual comfort. I cannot exclude this, because it is one way of expressing that delight which we take in the word but I prefer the former, for David speaketh of the comfort he took in keeping God's precepts when they were violated by others.

3. 'In the house of my pilgrimage.' You may take it literally for the time of David's exile, when banished by Saul, or driven from his palace by Absalom: when he fled from place to place, and wandered up and down in great distress, then God's statutes, by which his life was directed, innocency vindicated, hopes confirmed both of present support and seasonable deliverance, were as songs to him, his real and cordial solaces. Wheresoever the believer is, or whatsoever his case and condition be, he hath still matter of rejoicing in the word of God. So had David when he was exposed to continual wanderings, without any fixed habitation. Indeed the children of God in Babylon say, Ps. 137:4, 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' The meaning is not to exclude their own spiritual delight and solace; but they would not gratify the carnal pleasure of their enemies with a temple song, or subject religion to their sportive fancies and humours. Rather metaphorically for the whole course of his life,

whether spent in the palace, or in the wilderness; in whatsoever place he was, he was still in the house of his pilgrimage: so he accounted his best and his worst condition; compare ver. 19, 'I am a stranger in the earth,' and Ps. 39:12, 'I am stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were;' with 1 Chron. 29:15, 'We are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers.' Not only when hunted like a partridge upon the mountains, but also when he was at rest, and able to offer so vast a quantity of treasure for the building of the house of God.

Two points are observable:—

Doct. 1. That the godly count this world, and their whole estate therein, the house of their pilgrimage.

Doct. 2. That during this estate, and the inconveniences thereof, they find matter of rejoicing in the word of God.

Doct. 1. That the godly count, this world and their whole estate therein, the house of their pilgrimage.

I shall not handle this doctrine in its full latitude, having spoken largely thereof in the 19th verse; only now a few considerations.

1. Here is no fixed abode; there where we live longest we count our home and dwelling; not an inn which we take up in our passage, but the place of our constant residence in this world. We are only in passage, and so should consider it: Heb. 13:14, 'Here we have no abiding city, but we look for one to come, whose builder and maker is God.' Here we stay but a little while, passing through to a better country. The mortality of the body and the immortality of the soul showeth that we are all strangers here; for if here we do not live for ever, and yet we have souls that will live for ever, there must be some

other place to which we are tending. The body is dust in its composition and resolution: Eccles. 12:7, 'Then shall the body return to the earth as it was.' Nature may teach us so much, but faith, that assureth us of the resurrection of the dead, doth more bind this consideration upon us. We are mortal, and all things about us are liable to their mortality; and therefore here we must be still passing to another place.

2. Here we have no rest: Micah 2:10, 'Arise, and depart hence, for this is not your rest;' that is hereafter; Heb. 4:9, 'There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God.' Our home we count the place of our repose. Now there is no rest and content in this world, which is a place of vanity, misery, and discomfort. Yea, to the children of God there are stronger motives than crosses to drive them from the world—daily temptations, and our often falling by them. Crosses are grievous to all, but sin is more grievous to the godly; and nothing makes them more weary of the world than the constant indwelling and frequent outbreking of corruption and sin: Rom. 7:24, 'O miserable man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' The apostle was exercised with many crosses, but this doth make him complain in the bitterness of his soul, not of his misery, but of his corruption, which he found continually rebelling against God. Many complain of their crosses that complain not of sin. To loathe the world for crosses alone, is neither the mark nor work of grace. A beast can forsake the place where he findeth neither meat nor rest; but because we are sinning here, whilst others are glorifying God, this is the trouble of the saints.

3. They believe and look for a better estate after this life is over: 2 Cor. 5:1, 'We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' No man can be a right sojourner on earth

who doth not look for an abode in heaven; for that which doth most effectually draw off the heart of man from this world is the expectation of a far better state in the world to come: 2 Cor. 4:18, 'While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' Heathens could call the world an inn, but they had only glimmering conceptions of another world. A Christian, that believeth it, and looketh for it on God's assurance, he is only the joyful stranger and the pilgrim. Common sense will teach us the necessity of leaving this world, but faith can only assure us of another; they are believers and expectants of heaven.

4. They do not only look for it, but seek after it. We read of both looking and seeking: Heb. 11:14, 'They declare plainly that they seek a country;' Heb. 13:14, 'Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.' Seeking implieth diligence in the use of means. All the life of a Christian is nothing but the seeking after another country, every day advancing a step nearer to heaven; and therefore their πολιτευμα, their 'conversation' is said to be 'in heaven,' Phil. 3:20. This is their great business upon earth, to do all to eternal ends: all other works and labours are but upon the bye, and subordinate to this. Their main care is to obtain this blessed condition; therefore they use word and sacraments, that they may grow in grace, faith, repentance, new obedience. Every degree in grace is another step towards heaven: Ps. 84:5, 'Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee, in whose hearts are the ways of them;' ver. 7, 'They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.' Some of the saints are in patria, others in via, still bending homeward.

5. Because they are so, the children of God are dealt with as strangers. Difference of scope and drift will procure alienation of affection: 1 Peter 4:4, 'Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you;' and John 15:19, 'If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.' Other cannot be expected but that the servants of the Lord should be ill rewarded and treated here, not only out of the world's ignorance—they know not our birth, breeding, expectations, hope: 1 John 3:2, 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God; but it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is'—but enmity, as the different carriage of the one puts a disgrace upon the course of life which the other doth affect; the one fixeth their home here, the other looketh for it elsewhere; and the world is sensible this is an excellency, and therefore those that are at the bottom of the hill, envy and malign those that are at the top.

Use. Are we thus minded? There are two sorts of men in the world—the one is of the devil and the other is of God; for all men seek their rest and happiness on earth, or rest in heaven. Naturally men were all of the first number, for the rational soul without grace accommodateth itself to the interests of the body; but when sublimated and transformed by grace, the world cannot satisfy it, and it can find nothing there which may finally quiet its desires, for the new life infused hath other aims and tendencies. As saints are new-born from heaven, so for heaven; and therefore the new nature cannot satisfy itself in the enjoyment of the creature, with the absence of God. The apostle saith, 'While at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord,' 2 Cor. 5:6, 7. In this life we are not capable of the glorious presence of God; it is not consistent with our mortality; and our being present with him in the spirit is but a taste that doth

provoke rather than cloy the appetite: Rom. 8:23, 'Ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.' These tastes do but make us long for more; they are sent down from heaven to draw us up to that place of our rest where this glory and blessedness is in fulness. Now which sort are ye of? the city of God, or under the dominion of Satan and the power of worldly lusts?

1. There are some that take up here, and never consider whence they are, nor whither they are going; as Christ saith, 'I know whence I am, and whither I go.' They look altogether for the present, and if they be well for the present, they are contented. Alas! in what a miserable case are these men, though they mind it not! they seem to me to be like men that are going to execution. A man that is going to the gallows for the present is well, hath a great guard to attend him, an innumerable multitude of people to follow him: you would think that hardly could a man be such a sot and fool as to think all this should be done for his honour, and not for his punishment, and should only consider how he is accompanied, but not whither he goeth. Many such fools there are in the world, that only consider how they are attended and provided for, but never consider whither they are going. O wretch! whither goest thou? may we say to one that should pride himself in the resort of company to his execution. Dost thou not see thou art led to punishment, and after an hour or two these will leave thee hanging and perishing infamously as the just reward of thine offences? So many that shine now in the pomp and splendour of worldly accommodations, and are merry and jocund as if all would do well, alas! poor creatures, whither are they going? Job 21:12, 13, 'They take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ; they spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down into hell.' Ye still live, and are going to punishment, but

mind it not; but your wealth, and honours, and servants, and friends will all leave you to your own doom; and yet you are merry and jocund as if your journey would never end, or not so dismally; as if you were hastening to a kingdom, and not to an eternal prison: one moment puts an end to all their joy for ever.

2. There are others that wean their hearts from this world, and make it their care that they may carry themselves becoming their celestial extraction. As their souls were from above by creation, so all their hopes, and desires, and endeavours are to attain to that region of spirits; much more as being renewed by grace do they aim at the perfection and accomplishment of that life which is begun in them; and so being 'made partakers of the divine nature, do they escape the corruption that is in the world through lust,' 2 Peter 1:4, they are convinced of a better estate than the world yieldeth, and believe it, and look for it, and long for it, and labour for it. Now of which number are you? or, if you cannot decide that—because more goeth to the assuring of our interest than the world usually taketh to be necessary for that end and purpose—of which number do you mean to be? Will you be at home in the world, or seek the happiness of the world to come? that is, in other terms, do you mean to be pagans under a Christian name, or Christians indeed? You have but the name if you be not strangers and pilgrims here upon earth. All Christ's disciples indeed are called to sit loose from the world, and to have a high and deep sense of the world to come. As to the other world, they are 'no mere strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God,' Eph. 2:19. They are of a family, part of which is in heaven and part on earth: Eph. 3:15, 'Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.' Some of their brethren have got the start of them, and are with God before them, but the rest are hastening after as fast as they can. They are sufficiently convinced that the earth is no place for them; they are



strangers there, and the contentments thereof uncertain and perishing; but they are no strangers to heaven and the blessed society of the saints, whose privileges they have a full right to now, and hope one day to have as full a possession, and an intimate communion with their Father and all their brethren.

Now, that you may resolve upon this, and carry yourselves suitably, I shall—

1. Give you some motives.

2. A direction or two.

1. Motives.

[1.] He that taketh up his rest in this world, or any earthly thing, is but a higher kind of beast, and unworthy of an immortal soul. The beasts have an instinct that guideth them to seek things convenient for that life which they have, and therefore a man doth not follow the light of reason that seeketh to quiet his mind with what things the world affordeth, and only relisheth the contentments of the carnal and bodily life, that is satisfied with his portion here, Ps. 17:14. All their business and bustle is to have their wills and pleasure for a little while, as if they had neither hopes nor fears of any greater things hereafter: Ps. 49:20, 'Man, that is in honour, and void of understanding, is as the beast that perisheth,' because he merely inclineth to present satisfactions; for reason is as a middle thing between the life of faith and the life of sense. It were no great matter whether you were men or dogs or swine, if reason be only given you for the present world and present satisfactions; all your sense of the world to come and conscience is as good as nothing.

[2.] None are of so noble and divine a spirit as those that seek the heavenly kingdom. Amongst men, the ambitious who aspire to crowns and kingdoms, that aim at perpetual fame by their virtues and rare exploits, are judged persons of greater gallantry than covetous muck-worms and brutish epicures; yet their highest thoughts and designs are very base in comparison of Christians, 'who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for life, glory, and immortality,' Rom. 2:7, and whom nothing less will content than the enjoyment of God himself. Their desires are after him: Ps. 73:25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and who is there on earth I desire besides thee?' So that as man, being immortal, should provide for some place of perpetual abode, so herein the Christian excelleth other men, that nothing less will satisfy him than what God hath promised his people hereafter. The threshold will not content him—nothing but the throne.

[3.] What a sorry immortaluy, mock eternity, do they choose, instead of the true one, when they neglect the pursuit of this heavenly country! If they look no higher than this world, all that they can rationally imagine is perpetuating themselves, and their names, and posterity, by successive generations: Ps. 49:11, 'Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations; they call their lands by their own names.' This is styled *nodosa eternitas*, when they live in their children after death. But alas! to how few men's share can this fall! and those who may in likelihood expect it, who are lords of fair rents, fair lands, houses and heritages, how often are they disappointed! But if their hopes should succeed, and they should make themselves this way eternal, yet when the pageantry of this world is over, the great ungodly men of the world, who have names, lands, families in the general resurrection shall be poor, base, contemptible; whereas he that made it his business to look after the world to come shall be glorious for ever.

[4.] When once our qualification is clear, every step of our remove out of this world is an approach to our abiding city: Rom. 13:11, 'Our salvation nearer than when we first believed;' and 2 Cor. 4:16, 'Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.'

[5.] Every degree of grace makes your qualification clearer: Col. 1:12, 'Giving thanks to the father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light;' and 1 Tim. 6:19, 'Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life.' Evidences are increased when ripening for heaven more and more.

2. Let us carry ourselves as such as count our best estate in this world as the house of our pilgrimage.

[1.] Let us with great joy and delight of heart entertain the promises of the life to come, resolving to hold and hug them, and esteem them, and make much of them till the performance come: Heb. 11:13, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.'

[2.] Let us take heed of what may divert us and besot us, and hinder us in our heavenly journey: 1 Peter 2:11, 'Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.' A relish of the pleasures that offer themselves in the course of our pilgrimage spoileth the sense that we have of the world to come, and weakens our care and pursuit of it.

[3.] Let us be contented with those provisions that God in his providence affordeth us by the way, though they be mean and scanty: 1 Tim. 6:8, 'Having food and raiment, let us be content, for we

brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.' We came into the world contented with a cradle, and must go out contented with a grave; therefore, if we want the pomp of the world, let it not trouble us: we have such allowance as our heavenly Father seeth necessary for us till our great inheritance cometh in hand.

[4.] If the world increase upon us, we should take the more care that we may have the comfort of it in the world to come: Rev. 14:13, 'Their works follow them;' Luke 16:9, 'Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations.' There is no other way to show our weanedness in a full estate, nor to keep our hearts clean, or to express our deep sense of the world to come, but this.

Doct. 2. That during this estate, and the inconveniences thereof, God's children find matter of rejoicing in his word.

1. Let us consider how this point lieth in this text.

[1.] The Psalmist had a sufficient sense of the inconveniences of the house of his pilgrimage, his absence from God, for therefore he counts it a pilgrimage; the many affronts and dishonours that are done to God in the world, which go near to a gracious heart who espouseth God's quarrel and interest; therefore he saith, 'Horror hath taken hold upon me, because men keep not thy law.' Nay, and possibly his own afflictions and troubles, for many interpreters suppose him now expelled from Jerusalem, and driven to wander up and down in the forests and wildernesses; yet then could he comfort himself in God, and pass over his time in meditating on his precepts and promises. The troubles and inconveniences of our pilgrimage are easily disregarded by them that have no sense of them, or are slight-hearted, or whose time of trial is not yet come; but then is strength of

grace seen when we can overcome sense of trouble by the encouragements which the bare naked word of God offereth. If David were now in exile, it was a trouble to him not to enjoy the ordinances and means of grace with the rest of God's people; but to deceive the tediousness of it by God's word, that is the trial. If we can depend upon the promise, when nothing but the promise is left us, there are no difficulties too great for the comfort of God's word to allay.

[2.] The Psalmist speaketh not of what he would do, but what he had done: 'Thy statutes have been my songs.' Experience of the comfort of the word is more than a resolution to seek it there. In his resolution he would have been a pattern of duty, but now he is a precedent of comfort. That which hath been may be; God, that hath given a promise and comfort to his saints before, will continue it in all ages.

[3.] The Psalmist speaketh not of an ordinary joy, but such as was ready to break out into singing, which noteth the heart is full, and can hold no longer without some vent and utterance; as Paul and Silas were so full of joy that they sang at midnight in the stocks.

2. Now I come to the reasons why God's pilgrims find matter of rejoicing in his word during the time of their exile and absence from God, and all the inconveniences that attend it.

[1.] Some on the word's part.

[2.] Some on the part of him that rejoiceth.

[1.] On the word's part, God's pilgrims can rejoice in it.

(1.) There they have the discovery and promise of eternal life. It telleth them of their country. A firm deed and conveyance is a

comfort to us before we have possession: 2 Peter 1:4, 'To us are given exceeding great and precious promises, that being made partakers of the divine nature, we may escape the corruptions that are in the world through lust.' In the word there are promises neither of small things, of things of a little moment, nor of things that we have nothing to do with, but of great moment and weight, and given to us. The promises make the things promised certain to those to whom they do belong, though they be not yet actually in their possession; and therefore the children of God are delighted in them, and so far as that their hearts are drawn off from worldly things. They that adhere to them, and prize the comfort which they offer, have something in them above natural men, or the ordinary sort of those that live in the world.

(2.) There they have sure direction how they may attain this blessedness which the promises speak of, and that is a great comfort in the midst of the darkness and uncertainty of the present life. The word of God is said to be 'a light that shineth to us in a dark place,' 2 Peter 1:19. The love of the world will mislead us, our own reason will often leave us comfortless, the examples of the best are defective, but the word of God will give comfortable direction to all that follow the direction of it, under all their crosses, confusions and difficulties: Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a light unto my feet, and a lantern to my paths.' Light is comfortable; it is no small satisfaction that I am in God's way, and have his word for my warrant.

(3.) It propoundeth the examples of their countrymen, and sets forth their heroical acts, and encourageth us to imitate their fortitude and self-denial: Heb. 6:12, 'Be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises;' many things are to be done and suffered before we attain the end. Now, it is a great comfort to trace the footsteps of the saints all along in the way in which we go: Heb.

12:1, 'Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.' If God did call us to walk in an untrodden path, it might be cumbersome and solitary. Now it is very obliging and encouraging to consider in what way they have been brought to heaven before us.

(4.) It hath many seasonable cordials against fainting by the way. Alas! when we are in deep pressures, our hearts are apt to sink; but the word assureth us that we shall have all things necessary for us, and that our heavenly Father seeth what is best for us, and that if we faithfully wait upon him, our afflictions and rubs in the way shall be a means to bring us to our journey's end: 2 Cor. 4:17, 'Our light affliction, that is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;' and that for the present our trials are not inconsistent with his love.

[2.] On the believer's part there are reasons of this comfort and rejoicing.

(1.) There needeth a spiritual frame of heart, for a carnal man's rejoicings and relishes are suitable to the constitution of his mind: Rom. 8:5, 'They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit.' It is an infallible rule to the world's end. Every one cannot say, 'Thy statutes are my songs.' No; they must have other solaces; and a man's temper is more discerned by his solaces than by anything else. They that have not purged their taste from the dregs of sense, the trash of the flesh-pots of Egypt will ever be pleasing to them in the heavenly pilgrimage; and being inveigled with the baits of the flesh, the

promises are like withered flowers to them, or as dry chips; it is the spiritual heart that is refreshed with spiritual songs.

(2.) This word must be received by faith, for it is faith that enliveneth our notions of things, and maketh them work with us: Heb. 11:13, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth.' Our affections follow persuasion: 1 Peter 1:8, 'Whom having not seen we love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;' Rom. 15:13, 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.'

(3.) This word must be improved by reading and hearing, but especially by meditation and singing.

(1st.) Meditation, when it is sweet and lively, stirreth this joy. Delight begets meditation, and meditation begets delight. There is a *κυκλογένεσις* in moral as well as natural things: Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night;' and Ps. 119:97, 'Oh, how love I thy law! it is my meditation day and night;' and ver. 15, 16, 'I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways: I will delight myself in thy statutes; I will not forget thy words.' These follow one another. Affections are not excited but by deep and pondering thoughts.

(2d.) By singing psalms we draw forth this delight: Col. 3:16, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord;' Eph. 5:18, 19, 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.' Drunkards,



when filled with the spirit of wine, sing wanton songs; and those who are filled with the wine of the Spirit will praise God with spiritual songs. This is a duty of importance, a delightful way of being instructed by our refreshment. God would give us strength, but this is neglected, or cursorily performed by Christians. We will complain of the want of a spirit in prayer; we should do so in singing. Coldness in this holy exercise argueth a deadness of faith and a coldness in true religion. We should express our joy this way.

(4.) Above all, this comfort is found in ready practice and obedience. There is a comfort, I confess, in speculation, but not so deep and intimate as in practice. The one is but a taste inviting to the other, which giveth us a fuller draught. The bare contemplation and view of any concerning and weighty truth is very ravishing to those that bend their minds to knowledge: Prov. 24:13, 14, 'My son, eat thou honey, because it is good, and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be to thy soul.' Every truth is *objectum intellectus*, much more divine truth; but now in practice the impression is doubled: we get comfort and joy raised in our consciences; our lives and light do not jar; we are at full quiet in our minds, apprehending ourselves to be in God's way: Ps. 119:14, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches.'

Use 1. To show you that the people of God need not envy the wicked for their delights and pleasures; they have chaster and sweeter delights; God's statutes are their songs. Where the heart is spiritual, they can find delight enough in the word, both as their charter and their rule, and need not turn aside to vain mirth; a portion in the promises will yield pleasure enough: ver. 111, 'Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.'

2. To reprove those that reckon these things a burthen. The holy talking of heaven and godliness maketh worldly men ever heavy and out of humour; it is not their delight. But it should not be so with the children of God. A child of God should only be heavy when he displeases God, but delight in all the means that enable him to live to God.

3. When we are saddened by the evil of the present world, let us make use of this remedy; let us meditate on God's statutes. We shall find case and refreshing by exercising ourselves to know God in Christ.

4. To refute the vain conceit which possesseth the minds of men, that the way of godliness is a gloomy way. As soon as a man beginneth to think of salvation, or the change of his life, or the leaving of his sins, embracing the service of God, presently his mind is haunted with this thought: Seest thou not how those that serve God are melancholy, afflicted, sorrowful, never rejoyce more? and wilt thou be one of them? This is the opinion of the world, that they can never rejoyce nor be merry that serve God. But certainly it is a vain conceit. No men do more and more truly rejoyce than they which serve God. Consult the scriptures, who have more leave, shall I say, or command, to rejoyce? Ps. 37:4, 'Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart;' Phil. 4:4, 'Rejoyce in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoyce.' Ask reason who have more cause or matter to rejoyce than they that have provided against the fears or doubts of conscience by reason of sin? What is more satisfactory to a soul in doubts and fears than the knowledge of pardon and reconciliation with God? For the satisfaction of the desires of nature which carry us after happiness, who have a more powerful exciter of joy than the Holy Ghost? Acts 13:52, 'The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost.' Who more

qualified with joy than those who have a clear right to the pardon of sin, and so can see all miseries unstinged? Rom. 5:1–3, 'Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God; and not only so, but we glory in tribulation also.' How joyful are those that see themselves prepared for everlasting life! 2 Cor. 5:1, 'For we know that if our earthly tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' Yea, when a Christian knoweth his duty, his way is plain before him; it is a mighty satisfaction: Ps. 19:8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.' Look into the lives and examples of the saints; who have more true joy than they? The disciples esteem the grace of the gospel such a great treasure, that though they suffer persecution for it they are filled with joy: Acts 8:8, 'And there was great joy in that city;' 1 Thes. 1:6, 'Having received the word with much affliction and joy in the Holy Ghost;' 2 Cor. 7:4, 'I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.' Preachers, though with great hazard they perform their office, should be joyful: Acts 20:24, 'Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy;' Phil. 2:17, 18, 'Yea, and if I be offered for the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all; for the same cause also do ye joy and rejoice with me.' The world will reply—I know not what this spiritual consolation meaneth; it seemeth hard to relinquish that which I see, that which I feel, that which I taste, for that which I see not, and it may be shall never see.

Ans. 1. By concession, the joy of the saints is the joy of faith. God is unseen, Christ is within the heavens, great hopes are to come: 1 Peter 1:8, 'In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;' 2 Cor. 5:7, 'For we walk by faith, not by sight.'

2. Thus you see that the world cannot alway rejoice in those things which they take to be the proper objects of joy: they have alternative vicissitudes, now rejoice, now mourn; nor can it be otherwise, for they rejoice in things which cannot always last. If they rejoice when their worldly comforts increase, they are sad when they wither; if they rejoice when their children are born, they weep when they die: but a Christian hath always his songs, for he must always rejoice in the Lord, who is an eternal God: Phil. 4:4, 'Rejoice in the Lord always;' in Christ, who 'hath obtained eternal redemption for us,' Heb. 9:12; in the promises, which give an eternal influence: Ps. 119:111, 'Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.' The flesh cannot afford anything so delightful as a Christian hath; the word will hold good for ever.

3. We cannot altogether say that a Christian doth rejoice in that which he cannot see; for all that they see is their everlasting Father's wealth: 1 Cor. 3:21, 'All are yours, for you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' If they look to heaven, they can rejoice and say, Glory be to thee, O Lord, who hast prepared this for our everlasting dwelling-place. If they look to the earth, Glory be to thee, O Lord, who dost not leave us destitute in the house of our pilgrimage. If they consider their afflictions, they rejoice that God is not unmindful of poor creatures, who are beneath his anger as well as unworthy of his love: Job 7:17, 18, 'What is man that thou shouldst magnify him, and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him, and that thou shouldst visit him every morning, and try him every moment?'—that God should trouble himself about us, that we may not perish with the ungodly world. The same love that sendeth them prosperity sendeth adversity also, which they find by the seasonableness of it.

## **SERMON LXI**

# **I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law.—VER.**

## **55.**

WE often read and sing David's psalms, but we have little of David's spirit. A man's employment is as the constitution of his mind is, for all things work according to their nature. A man addicted to God, that is to say, one who hath taken God for his happiness, his word for his rule, his Spirit for his guide, and his promises for his encouragement, his heart will always be working towards God day and night. In the day he will be studying God's word; in the night, if his sleep be interrupted, he will be meditating on God's name; still entertaining his soul with God. The predominant affection will certainly set the thoughts awork. The man of God had told us in the former verse what was his chief employment in the day-time, and now he telleth us how his heart wrought in the night. Night and day he was remembering God and his duty to him. In the day the statutes of God were his solace, and as songs to him in the house of his pilgrimage; in the night the name of God was his meditation: 'I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law.' In which words observe—

1. David's exercise, I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night.
2. The effect and fruit of it, and have kept thy law.

The one may be considered as the means, the other as the next and immediate end. Remembering and thinking is but a subservient help and means to promote some higher work.

1. In the first branch you have—

[1.] The act of his soul, I have remembered.

[2.] The object about which it was conversant, thy name, O Lord.

[3.] The season, in the night.

[1.] For the act of his soul, 'I have remembered.' Remembrance is an act of knowledge reiterated, or a second agitation of the mind unto that point unto which it had arrived before. Or, more plainly, remembering is a setting knowledge awork, or a reviving those notions which we have of things, and exercising our thoughts and meditations about them.

[2.] The object was God's 'name;' that is, either God himself, as Ps. 20:1, 'The name of the God of Jacob defend thee;' or that by which God is known, his wisdom, goodness, and power, especially those notions by which he hath manifested himself in the word.

[3.] The season, 'In the night.' some take the night metaphorically for the time of trouble and affliction. It is often a dark time with the people of God, a very dark night, and then it is comfortable to them to think of his name, according to that of the prophet, Isa. 50:10, 'He that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him stay himself upon the name of his God.' I think it is meant literally; that the man of God took such pleasure in the name of God, that what time others gave to sleep and rest he would give to the contemplation of his glory. In the solitude and darkness of the night he sustained and supported his spirit with the thoughts of God, and thereby took up a courage and constancy of resolution to keep his law.

2. The other branch, 'I have kept thy law;' that is, with a good and sincere heart set himself to the keeping of it; this is spoken partly to

intimate his own seriousness in this work, and partly God's blessing upon his endeavours therein.

[1.] His seriousness and sincerity in the work. There is a twofold remembrance of things:—

(1.) Notional and speculative.

(2.) Practical and affective.

The notional and speculative remembrance of things is when we barely think of them, without any further profit or benefit; but the practical, powerful and affective remembrance is to be affected with matters called to mind as the nature of them doth require: as when we remember God so as to love him, and fear him, and trust in him, and make him our delight, and cleave to him, and obey him. And we are said to remember his commandments, when our hearts are set upon the practice of them. *Verba notitiæ connotant affectus*: we must not think of God indifferently, and by the by, but we must be answerably affected, and act accordingly. Thus did David, 'I remembered thy name, and kept thy law.'

[2.] God's blessing upon his endeavours; for he presently addeth in the next verse, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts.' Our heavenly Father, who 'seeth what is done in secret, will reward it openly,' Mat. 6:6. And the blessing of time well-spent in secret, or a few serious thoughts of God in the night, will publicly appear in their carriage before men. If we be frequently and seriously with God when we are solitary, the fruit and benefit of it will be manifest by our holiness and heavenliness when we are in company. Your most private duties do not lose their reward. As a man's pains in study will appear in the accurate order, strength, and rationality of his discourse, so his

converse with God in private will be seen in the fruits of it, in his holy, profitable and serious conversation.

The points are three:—

Doct. 1. Remembering God is an especial help to the keeping of his law.

Doct. 2. God is best remembered when his name is studied.

Doct. 3. Those that have spiritual affections will take all occasions to remember his name. 'I have remembered thy name in the night season,' saith holy David.

Doct. 1. That remembering God is an especial help to the keeping of his law.

First, What it is to remember God.

1. It supposeth some knowledge of God, for what a man knoweth not he cannot remember. The memory is the cofferer and treasurer of the soul; what the understanding taketh in, the memory layeth up; and actually we are said to remember when we set the mind awork upon such notions as we have formerly received. And particularly to remember God is when we stir up in our minds clear and heart-warming apprehensions about his nature and will.

2. It supposeth some faith, that we believe him to be such as the word describeth him to be; for spiritual remembrance is the actuation of faith, or, in this case, the improvement of that wisdom, power, goodness, holiness, justice, and truth, which we believe to be in God. Otherwise, without faith, those thoughts which we have of the greatest matters affect us no more than a dream doth a sleeper.



These things are supposed in remembrance.

3. It expresseth a reviving of these thoughts, or an erection of the mind to think upon what we know and believe. Man, that hath an ingestive, hath also an egestive faculty, and can lay out as well as lay up, bring forth truths out of the mind when it is useful for us, and whet and inculcate them upon the heart; he may call to mind or ponder upon them.

4. Let us see the kinds of this remembrance.

[1.] I must repeat that distinction; it may be done notionally and speculatively, or else affectively and practically. Notionally, when men have a few barren notions, or dry sapless opinions or speculations about the nature of God; always men's remembrance is as their knowledge is, and faith is. Now there is *μὀρφωσις της γνῶσεως*, a form of knowledge, Rom. 2:10, and 'dead faith,' James 2:20. Affectively and practically we remember God when there are such lively and powerful impressions of his name upon our hearts as produce reverence, love, and obedience. It is not enough to grant the doctrine, own the opinions that are sound and orthodox concerning God, but we must have a reverential and superlative esteem of him. All men confess a God with their mouth, and think they believe in him; but 'the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God,' Ps. 14:1. What testimony do their hearts and actions give? A man's course of life and conversation is like an eye-witness; his profession is as a testimony by report. Now one eye-witness deserves more credit than many by hearsay. *Plus valet unus oculatus testis, &c.* How would you walk if you believed there were no God? Could you be more neglectful of God, and careless and mindless of heavenly things, than you are? Now your transgressions speak louder than your professions in the eye of an understanding believer: Ps. 36:1, 'The

transgression of the wicked saith within his heart that there is no fear of God before his eyes.' Practice belies profession: Titus 1:16, 'They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him.' Cold and dead opinions are easily taken up, and men talk by rote one after another, yea, and study to defend them, and yet count God an idol. Denial in works is the strongest way of denial, for actions are more weighty and deliberate than speeches.

[2.] There is a threefold remembrance of God for practical uses.

(1.) There is a constant remembrance. We should carry the thoughts of God along with us to all our businesses and affairs, and ever walk as in his eye and presence: Prov. 23:17, 'Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long;' not only in prayer, but at all times, in all our other occasions. Some graces, like the lungs, are always in use; so Ps. 16:8, 'I have set the Lord always before me.' He that liveth always in the sight of God cannot be so secure and senseless as others are. A drowsy inattentive mind is easily deceived into sin, but he that doth often remember God, his conscience is kept waking; for he is all eye, and seeth all things; all hand, and toucheth all things; all foot, and walketh everywhere; all ear, and heareth all things. Sic agamus cum hominibus tanquam Deus videat; sic loquamur cum Deo tanquam homines audiant. The latter clause was the least that a heathen could think of; but surely, if there be any weight in the former part of the direction, the latter is needless. Thus we should never forget God.

(2.) Occasional, when God is brought to mind either by some special occasion offered, or by some notable discovery of himself in his word or works. Occasion offered; as when Ahasuerus could not sleep, Esther 6:1, it was the providence of God he should read in the chronicles, and so come to the knowledge of Mordecai. So it befallerh God's children; they cannot sleep sometimes, and so occasion is

offered in the silence and solitude of the night to invite them to holy thoughts of God, which may be of great use and comfort: Job 37:7, 'He sealeth up the hand of every man, that all men may know his work.' In deep snow or rain their work is hindered, that they, sitting at home, may have time to consider of God and his providence. Sometimes it falleth out so that we know not what to do with our thoughts, and it will look strangely in the review if we should prostitute them to vanity rather than give them to God, like the act of a spiteful man, that will rather destroy and waste a commodity than let another have it. Or when some notable discovery of God is in his ordinances and providences, word, or works; we should always season our hearts with the thoughts of God, we should see him in every creature, and observe him in his daily providences. The name of God is upon all things that he hath made, but especially any notable providence that falleth out, which is an especial demonstration of his wisdom, justice, and power: Ps. 111:4, 'He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered.' So in his ordinances, when God maketh any nearer approach to us by way of conviction, counsel, or comfort: 1 Cor. 14:25, 'And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest, and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.' Many times our minds in reading or hearing are illustrated with a heavenly light, or our hearts touched with some delightful relish, and the word cometh in with more than ordinary authority and power upon the heart; these are especial occasions which we must take to consider God and the great affairs of our souls.

(3.) Set and solemn, when from the bent, purpose, and inclination of our own hearts, without any outward impulsion, we set ourselves to remember the God that made us. From first to last there is great use of meditation and serious thoughts of God in the spiritual life. Our first awaking is occasioned by them: Ps. 22:27, 'They shall remember

and turn to the Lord.' For a great while we live without God in the world, till we recollect ourselves, and consider where we are and whither we are going. We are like men drunk or asleep, and do not make use of our reason and common principles that may be learned from the inspection of the creature and everything about us; and when once we are brought into the communion of the life of God, and have grace planted in our hearts, it cannot be carried on unless we take time to remember God. Our faith, our love, our desires, our delight, they are all acted and exercised by our thoughts; so that the spiritual life is but an imagination, unless we do frequently and often take time for serious meditation of him. It is not consistent with any of the three vital graces, faith, hope, and love, that a man should be a stranger to the remembrance of God; therefore God complaineth of it as a strange thing: Jer. 2:32, 'My people have forgotten me days without number;' do no more regard me than if they had never known me, Besides, the habits of grace are so weak, and our temptations so strong, and the difficulties of obedience so great, that I cannot see how we can keep afoot any interest of God in ourselves, if we seldom think of God, and do not sometimes sequester ourselves to revive this memorial upon our souls. Can a sluggish heart be quickened, or weak and inconstant resolutions be strengthened, or the sparks of love ever blown up into a flame, and fainting hopes cherished, unless we seriously set our minds awork to consider of God and our obligations to him? Will a sleepy profession, without constant and lively thoughts do it? It cannot be. Oh, no! If you mean to keep in the fire, you must ply the bellows and blow hard. Whet truths upon the understanding, and agitate your minds in this holy work.

Secondly, My next work is to show that this is a notable help to godliness; and that appeareth enough in that forgetting God is assigned as the cause of all mischief, and remembering God the

engagement to all duty. We forget God, do not meditate upon his name, and so fall into sin: Ps. 9:17, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.' Some deny God, but most forget him; they cast away the knowledge of God out of their minds. So Ps. 50:22, 'Consider this, all ye that forget God;' that is the description of the wicked. So it is the charge upon Israel, as their great sin and cause of their defection: Deut. 32:18, 'Thou art unmindful of the rock that begat thee; thou hast forgotten the God that formed thee.' Oblivion is an ignorance for the time. Truths lose their efficacy when not remembered. On the other side, remembering God is made to be the immediate and next cause of our duty: Eccles. 12:1, 'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.' Youth would not miscarry so shamefully if they did oftener remember God, nor be led away by vain and sensual delights, if the thoughts of God did more dwell in their minds. So Deut. 8:11, 12, 'Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments.' Our lives will declare whether we do remember God. Those that do often and seriously keep God in their thoughts, will be most careful to keep his commandments.

Thirdly, The reasons of the point.

1. It doth encourage us, and quicken us to diligence in our work. As soldiers fight best in their general's presence, and scholars ply their books when under their master's eye, so by living always in the sight of God we study to please him. The oftener we consider him the more we see no service can be holy and good enough for such a God as he is; a God not to be provoked and resisted, so not to be neglected and slighted: Mal. 1:14, 'Cursed be the deceiver that hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth to the Lord a corrupt thing; for I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen;' implying that when they came with a sickly

sacrifice, they did not remember his excellency and greatness. Either they had no or mean thoughts of God; but if they had remembered what an one he is, they would employ the best of their strength, time, and affection in his service.

2. The madness of our natures is bridled and restrained by thoughts of God: 3 John 11, 'He that doth evil hath not seen God.' 'Will he force the queen before my face?' Esther 7:8. You will not sport with sin, nor play with the occasions of it, nor dare to venture upon God's restraints. It is said of an archangel, οὐκ ἐτόλμησε, 'he durst not bring against him a railing accusation,' Jude 9, because they beheld the face of God. So if we had a deep sense of God impressed upon our hearts, we would be more awe-ful. You make very bold with God when you dare knowingly venture upon the least sin. Will you affront God to his face? Children that are quarrelling or falling out, when the father or mother cometh, all is hush and silent.

3. It comforts and reviveth us in the midst of our faintings and discouragements, because of the evils of the present world: Jonah 2:7, 'When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord.' When the burden of affliction presseth us sore, the stoutest hearts are broken and lose all courage; but when we come to ponder seriously what God is, or what he will be to his people, or hath at any time been to ourselves, it cheereth and reviveth the heart. So Ps. 42:6, 'O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore will I remember thee.' By this way the saints recover themselves, Ps. 77:10, 'And I said, This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.' So also, Mat. 16:9, 'Do ye not remember the five loaves of the five thousand, nor the seven loaves of the four thousand?'

Use. To press us to remember God more. When we will not look upon another, we take it to be a great sign of aversion and hatred. The devils, that are most opposite to God, abhor their own thoughts of God, for they 'believe and tremble.' God thinketh of us; he is not far from every one of us; why are we so far from him? We cannot open our eyes but one object or other will represent God to us. What dost thou see, hear, and feel, but the effects of his power and goodness? He is before thee, behind thee, within thee, round about thee; and shall he not find room in thy heart, when every trifle findeth room there? He that filleth every place, shall thy heart be empty of all thoughts of him? To press you to this—

1. Consider we are naturally apt to forget God, do not like to retain him in our knowledge, Rom. 1:28, backward to any remembrance of him: Ps. 10:4, 'The wicked, through the pride of their countenance, will not seek after God; God is not in all their thoughts.'

2. How much God hath done to put us in remembrance of him, by creatures, providences, ordinances, and his Spirit.

[1.] Creatures, all of them, sun, moon, stars, worms, grass, put us in mind of him: Ps. 19:1, 2, 'The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork; day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge.' The creatures have a double use—their natural use and their spiritual use. Their natural use is the special end for which they were made; their spiritual use is to set forth God to us. We look upon them amiss if we look upon them as separated from and independent of God. Our food is not only to nourish nature, but that we may taste the sweetness and goodness of God in it. All the creatures bring this message to our consciences: Remember God that made us and all things else. They all read a divinity lecture to those that have a mind to hear it, and

preach the goodness, power, and wisdom of God by a loud and audible voice. It is true we are deaf, but they cease not to cry to us: Job 12:8, 'Speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and to the beasts of the field, and they shall declare to thee. Not only the shining heavens, but the dull earth, that heaviest and grossest element; the brute creatures that have no reason, the mute fishes that can make no sound, we must ask them, parley with them by our own thoughts; and so, though they have neither voice nor ears, they will answer us, and resolve our consciences the question we put to them, Is there a God? Yea, and declare his excellent attributes, that he is eternal, infinite, wise, powerful, and good. We may easily make out these collections. Christ saith the stones would cry if these held their peace. We should hear the creature as we would hear God himself speaking to us. They speak to all countries in their own language. At first God spake to the world not by words but things. Thus hath God engraven his name upon his works, as those that make watches, or any curious pieces, write their names upon them; as he that carved a buckler for Minerva had so curiously inlaid his own name that it could not be rased out without defacing the whole work. So the creatures are but a draught and portraiture of God's glory.

[2.] Providences, these do more awaken us. God's daily benefits should bring him to our remembrance: Acts 14:17, 'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness;' Deut. 8:18, 'But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for he it is that giveth thee power to get wealth.' Especially the sanctified remembrance of God's dealing with his people is the way to keep the heart in the faith, love, and fear of God; and the forgetting his works is the cause of all defection and falling off to carnal courses and confidences: Ps. 78:11, 'They forgat his works and wonders that he



showed them,' Ps. 106:21, 'They forgot God their Saviour, which had done great things in Egypt;' Judges 8:34, 'And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies on every side.' It is a base ingratitude not to remember, prize, and esteem God for all this.

[3.] Ordinances. Ministry was instituted to put you in remembrance, and give you still new and fresh occasions to think of God: 2 Peter 1:12, 'I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance.' Our business is not always to inform you of what you know not, but to inculcate and revive known truths, there being much forgetfulness, stupidity, and senselessness upon our spirits: 2 Peter 3:1, 'That I may stir up your minds by way of remembrance.' The impressions of God on our minds are soon defaced; we need to quicken and awaken your affections and resolutions to choose and cleave to God: 1 Tim. 4:6, 'If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ.' So sacraments are instituted to bring God to remembrance: 1 Cor. 11:24, 'This do in remembrance of me;' that we may remember his love and our covenanted duty. The sabbath was instituted for a remembrance and memorial of his creating, redeeming goodness.

[4.] The great office and work of the Spirit is to bring to remembrance: John 14:26, 'He shall bring all things to your remembrance.' We are apt to forget God, and instructions, and rebukes in their season: the Holy Ghost is our monitor.

3. God will not forget them that remember him. He will remember them at every turn: Mal. 3:16, 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name.' If he do not openly reward

you with temporal deliverances, yet he taketh notice of every thought and every word you speak for him, and taketh pleasure in you. It is upon record; if you have not the comfort of it now, you shall have it in a little time. Because they thought of him they spake of him, and owned him in an evil time; and therefore God is represented as hearing and booking: and the books shall one day be opened, and then you shall have your public reward.

Doct. 2. God is best remembered when his name is studied.

First, When is his name studied? In the general, when we look upon him as he hath manifested himself in his word and works. More particularly, God is discovered sometimes by the name of his essence, sometimes by his attributes.

1. By the name of his essence. When Moses was very inquisitive to know his name—and God can best tell his own name—let us see what answer was made him: Exod. 3:12, 13, 'When they shall say unto me, What is his name? and God said, I am that I am.' God was sending Moses upon a strange message; he was giving him commission to go and speak to a king to dismiss and let go six hundred thousand of his subjects, to lead them to a place which God should show. Now Moses thought for such a message he had need have good authority, therefore desireth a significant name. 'I am that I am.' The form of the words showeth it was a wonderful incomprehensible name: 'Ask not my name, for it is Wonderful,' Judges 13:18. This is enough to satisfy sober inquiry, though not wanton curiosity, enough for faith to work upon: the great I AM hath sent me. It showeth his unsearchableness. It is our manner of speech when we would cover anything and not answer distinctly, we say, It is what it is; I have said what I have said. Finite understandings cannot comprehend him that is infinite, no more than you can empty the sea with a cockleshell. He

is the great and only being, in comparison of whom all else is nothing: Isa. 40:17, 'All nations before him are nothing, they are counted less than nothing and vanity.' You have not a true and full notion of God if you conceive him only as the most eminent of all beings: no being must appear as being in his sight and in comparison of him. As long as you only conceive God to be the best, you still attribute something to the creature, for all comparatives include the positive. The creature is nothing in comparison with God; all the glory, perfection, and excellency of the whole world do not amount to the value of a unit in regard of God's attributes: join never so many of them together, they cannot make up one number, they are nothing in his regard, and less than nothing. All created beings must utterly vanish out of sight when we think of God. As the sun doth not annihilate the stars, and make them nothing, yet it annihilates their appearance to our sight; some are of the first magnitude, some of the second, some of the third, but in the day-time all are alike, all are darkened by the sun's glory: so it is here; there are degrees of perfection and excellency if we compare one creature with another, but let once the glorious brightness of God shine upon the soul, and in that light all their differences are unobserved. Angels, men, worms, they are all nothing, less than nothing to be set up against God: this magnificent title, I AM, darkeneth all, as if nothing else were. God did not tell Moses that he was the best, the highest, and the most glorious, but 'I am, and there is none else besides me;' nothing that hath its being of itself, nothing that can be properly called its own. Thus the incomprehensible self-existence of God puts man into his original nothing: none but God can say, I am, because all things else are but borrowed drops of this self-sufficient fountain; other things are near to nothing. God most properly is, who never was nothing, never shall be nothing, who may always in all difference of time say, I am, and nothing else but God can say so. The heaven and earth six thousand years ago could not say, We are. Adam could

once have said, I am, as to his existence in the compounded nature of man, but now he cannot say it. All the generations past were but are not, and the present is but will not be; and within a little while who of us can say, I am? No; our 'place will know us no more;' but God eternally saith, 'I am;' not, I have been, or I shall be, but 'I am.' Look a little backward, and you shall find man's beginning; step a little forward, and you shall overtake his dissolution. But God is still I am; he is one that is before all, after all, and in all. He beholdeth from the mount of eternity all the successions and changes of the creature, and there is no succession or mutation in his knowledge. Well, then, here is an answer for Pharaoh, and the Israelites, and all of you to study on, 'I am that I am.' I am the fountain of all being, that do unchangeably and eternally exist in myself, and from myself.

2. God hath described his name by his attributes. To go over all, the compass of a sermon will not permit. I shall single out three from all the rest—his power, wisdom, and goodness; they are manifested in all that God doth.

[1.] In creation. Basil, Ἐποίησεν ὡς ἀγαθὸς τὸ χρήσιμον, ὡς σοφὸς τὸ κάλλιστον, ὡς δυνατὸς τὸ μέγιστον—the goodness of God is seen in the usefulness of the creatures to man; the power of God in the stupendousness and wonderfulness of his works; his wisdom in the apt structure, constitution, and order of all things: first he createth, then distinguisheth, then adorneth. The first work was to create the heavens and earth out of nothing; there is his power: his next work is a wise destination and ordination of all things; he distinguisheth night from day, darkness from light, waters above the firmament from waters beneath the firmament, the sea from the dry land; there is his wisdom: then he decketh the earth with plants, and furnisheth it with beasts, and storeth the sea with fishes, the firmament with

stars; there is his goodness. Let us examine these more particularly, beginning—

(1.) With his goodness. The creation is nothing else but an effusion of the bounty and goodness of God. He made the world, not that he might be happy, but that he might be liberal; he made the world not by necessity, but at his pleasure: Rev. 4:11, 'Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.' God was happy enough without us; he had a fulness and absolute sufficiency within himself; his great aim was to raise up objects out of nothing, to whom he would communicate his goodness. The heavens and earth were made that man might have a place for his exercise, and a dwelling for his rest, and in both might love, honour, serve, and glorify his Creator. God sits in his palace among his best creatures, and thither also will he translate man at length, if he be obedient, and observe the ends of his creation: thus his goodness appeareth.

(2.) His power. He brought all things out of the womb of nothing. The powerful fiat was enough: Isa. 40:26, 'Lift up your eyes on high, who hath created these things, and bringeth out their host by number, and calleth all things by their names, by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power?' The force of the cause appeareth in the effect, and God's power in the life and being of the creature. There is no artificer but he must have matter to work upon, or else his art will fail him and he can do nothing; all that man can do is to give some shape and form, or to fashion that in some new model which had a being before: but God made all things out of nothing; the inclination and beck of his will sufficeth for his great works. We have great toil and sweat in all things that we do, but behold what a great work is done without any pain and travail! It is troublesome to us to carry up a little piece of stone or timber to any building of ours,

but God stretched out all these heavens in such an infinite compass by the word of his power, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.

(3.) His wisdom. The admirableness and comely variety of God's works doth easily offer it to our thoughts. In the frame of the work you may easily find out a wise workman: Ps. 136:5, 'Sing praises to him that by wisdom hath made the heaven and the earth, for his mercy endureth for ever;' so Prov. 3:19, 'The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth, by understanding hath established the heavens:' the wisdom of God appeareth in the order of making, and order of placing all the creatures. In making them, in simple things God began with those that were most perfect; as his first creature was light, which of all qualities is the most pure and defecate, and is not stained by passing through places most impure: then all the other elements. In mixed bodies God took another method, from imperfect to perfect; first things that have a being, as the firmament, then life, as plants, then sense, as beasts, then reason, as men: first God would provide the places of heaven and earth, then the creatures to dwell in them; first the food, then the creatures to be sustained by it. Provision was made for the inhabitants of the earth, as grass for beasts, and light for all living and moving creatures. Plants have a growing life, beasts a feeling life. Then man was made, last of all creatures, as most excellent. Thus God would teach us to go on from good to better. Man's palace was furnished with all things necessary, and they were placed and disposed in their apt cells for the beauty and service of the whole, and then like a prince he was sent into the world to rule and reign. There are not so many animals in the earth as in the sea, to avoid the great waste of food which would be consumed by the beasts of the land to the prejudice of man. But there is no end of these considerations. Only let me tell you, power is most eminently discovered in the creation: Rom. 1:20, 'The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being

understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.' The first apprehensions which we are possessed with, and which are most obvious, are the infinite greatness and power of the Creator.

[2.] These are manifested in the whole structure of his word; his power in the histories and prophecies, which declare what God hath and shall do; his wisdom in the precepts and counsels, and discovery of such mysteries; his goodness in promises, institutions, and provisional helps. More particularly in the law part of his word, his goodness; that showeth man what is good: Micah 6:8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good;' his power, in threatening such punishments and promising such rewards, and in the wonderful efficacy of his word in the conscience; his wisdom, in stating such a rule, that hath such an admirable fitness for the governing and regulating of mankind. But though all three shine forth in the law, and all in each part, yet his wisdom is most eminent: Deut. 4:6, 'Keep these statutes, for this is your wisdom and understanding.' In the gospel, still these three attributes appear—the wonderful wisdom, power, and goodness of God. His wisdom in the orderly dispose of the covenant of grace: 2 Sam. 23:5, 'Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.' And contriving the excellent design and plot of salvation by Christ: 1 Tim. 3:16, 'Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached to the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up to glory.' His power in the incarnation, resurrection, and miracles of Christ; therefore Christ is called 'the wisdom and power of God.' But above all his love is magnified in the gospel: Rom. 5:8, 'God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us: 1 John 4:9, 10, 'In this

was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him: herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins;' Titus 3:4, 'But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeareth.'

## SERMON LXII

**I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law.—VER.**

**55.**

[3.] THESE are discovered in daily providence. To rub up and revive our thoughts, God is pleased anew to set before us the glorious effects of his wisdom, goodness and power; his wisdom in the contexture of providence, his power in the management of it, his goodness in the effects of it. His wisdom in the beauty and order of his works, in guiding the course of nature, and disposing all things about his people. He doeth all things well: Eccles. 3:11, 'He hath made everything beautiful in its time,' or in the true and proper season; therefore, we that look upon providence by pieces, stumble at the seeming confusion and uncertainty of what falleth out, as if the affairs of the world were not under a wise government; but stay a little while till all the pieces of providence be put together in one frame, and then you will see a marvellous wisdom in them. In the work of creation, all things were 'very good,' Gen. 1:31; so for these six thousand years, as well as for the first six days. Those things which seem confused heaps when they lie asunder, when put together will appear a beautiful structure and building. So for his goodness. What part hath God been acting in the world for so long a



time but that of mercy? He may be traced more by his acts of goodness than vengeance: Acts 14:17, 'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, ἀγαθοποιῶν, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with joy and gladness.' The whole world is a theatre of mercy. If at any time we wrest punishment out of his hand, it is with an aim of mercy: as he threateneth that he may not punish, so he punisheth that he may not punish for ever. For his power, that is notably discovered to us every day. If we would draw aside the covering of the creature, you might soon see the secret almighty power of God which acteth in everything that falleth out; the same everlasting arm that made the creatures is under them to support them: Heb. 1:3, 'He upholdeth all things by the word of his power.' As they started out of nothing by his command, so they are kept from returning into nothing by the same powerful word, command, and decree of God: 'Thou hidest thy face, and they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, and they die; thou sendest out thy Spirit, and they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth,' Ps. 104:29, 30, 'All things hold their life of him. If God withdraweth in any measure the wonted influence of his power from them, they presently find a change in themselves. It is even with the being and faculties of the creature as with the image of the glass, which, when the face removeth, it is seen no more. The Lord doth as it were breathe into them a being, and when he taketh in his breath they perish, and when he sendeth it out again they are renewed. Now, though God doth constantly discover his wisdom, power, and goodness, yet in some providence one of these doth more especially appear; his wisdom in some notable contrivance and chain of causes, which to a common eye seemed to have no tendency to such effects as are produced by them; as when out of the sins and perverse doings of men, or the disorders and confusions of the world, he raiseth his own glory, or by some unthought-of, unheard-of means bringeth about the deliverance of his people, taking the wise

in their own craftiness. Sometimes his power, when by weak and contemptible means he bringeth great things to pass, and a straw becometh a spear in the hand of the Almighty. Sometimes in his goodness, in filling us with blessings, or doing notable acts of grace for his people's sake.

[4.] These three attributes suit with God's threefold relation to us. By his almighty power he becometh our creator; as most wise, our supreme governor; as most good, our gracious benefactor. We depend upon him for our present supplies, and from him we expect our future hopes. His creation gives him a right to govern us, his wisdom a fitness, and his bounty doth encourage us voluntarily to give up ourselves to his service.

[5.] These three attributes do most bind our duty on us, as they beget in us love, fear, and faith, or esteem, reverence, and trust, which are the three radical graces that result from the very being and owning of God, and are the *cultus naturalis* enjoined in the first commandment. His wisdom as a lawgiver begets reverence and fear; his goodness is the object of love, and his power of trust. If he be most wise, there is all the reason in the world that he should rule and govern us; for who is fitter to govern and make laws than he that is most wise? If he be most good, infinitely good, there is all the reason in the world that you should love him, and no show of reason why you should love the world and sin before him. If powerful and all-sufficient, there is all the reason you should believe in him, as one that is able to make good his word, either by promise or threatening. Faith goeth upon that: Rom. 4:21, he was 'strong in faith, being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform.' He is God all-sufficient, therefore his promises are not to be distrusted, his threatenings not to be slighted. There is no resisting or standing out against him, in the twinkling of an eye he can tear you in pieces,

pluck away the guilty soul from the embraces of the unwilling body. A spark of his wrath makes thee a burthen to thyself. So for promises; one word of his mouth can accomplish all the good that is contained in them. And it is observable that the respects of the creature, that are peculiarly due to one of these attributes, are sometimes in scripture directed to another. It is said, Hosea 3:5, 'They shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days;' and love him for his power and greatness, and believe in him for his wisdom. Again, they trust him for his goodness, love him for his wisdom, fear him for his power; all these changes are in scripture.

Secondly, Why God is best remembered when his name is studied? The reason is, because the study of his name doth increase those three fundamental radical graces before mentioned.

1. The studying of his name increaseth our love: 'Thy name is as an ointment poured forth, therefore the virgins love thee,' Cant. 1:3. Ointment kept close in the box doth not diffuse its savour, but ointment poured forth is full of fragrancy and reviving, it perfumeth the whole house: John 12:3, 'The house was filled with the odour of the ointment.' So when the name of God is not considered, we are not comforted and strengthened and quickened; but pour it forth, take it abroad in your serious thoughts and believing meditations, and that doth attract and draw hearts to him. When we consider the mercy, grace, power, wisdom, truth, and justice of God, these affect all those that have any spiritual discerning. This is the way to draw esteem from carnal hearts; he hath authority to make laws, for he is the wise God; power to back this authority, for he is the almighty Creator, who can frown thee into nothing; but yet he is good and gracious, ready to receive you, and pardon, and do you good, though you have rebelled against him. To pour out this name is our duty, and then poor creatures will be prevailed with: it is our duty to do it

in the discoveries of the gospel, your duty to ponder upon it in your private meditations. The wisdom of God in the word showeth your duty, his power what need you have to bind it on your hearts; and your case is not without hope, for you have to do with a good God: there is no mercy to such as fear not his powerful justice, and no justice for such as flee from it to his mercy. See how God poureth out his name: Exod. 34:5-7, 'And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord; and the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children unto the third and fourth generation.'

2. The studying of God's name increaseth our faith and trust: Ps. 9:10, 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.' God is first known, and then trusted, and then served. If God were known more he would be more trusted, and if he were more trusted we would not be so double-minded and unstable in the profession and practice of godliness. We little study God, and because we study his name so little, our faith is weak, and therefore we are so uncertain in our conversations. It is well when all our comfort and duty is immediately fetched out of the name of God, or his nature considered by us.

3. The studying of God's name increaseth our reverence and fear: Ps. 111:9, 'Holy and reverend is thy name;' Ps. 86:11, 'Unite my heart to the fear of thy name.' The more you study the nature of God, the more awe-ful, serious, humble, watchful will you grow. Thus you see serious and becoming thoughts of God do much increase our faith, fear, and love.

Use. The use is to exhort you more—

1. To study the name of God, and to dwell upon the meditations of the Almighty, and to possess your mind with him till no place be left for sin or vanity.

[1.] The name of his being. God is not only the best of beings, but properly that which is; because he is a self-being, that gave being to all things else, and from everlasting to everlasting. We are but as it were of yesterday, and our being is from him, and our life in his hands; we cannot live an hour without him, nor fetch a breath without him, nor think a thought, nor speak a word, nor stir a hand or foot without him. There is a continual providential influence and supportation: as the beams of the sun vanish as soon as the sun is clouded, so do we fail when God suspends his influence. A watch goeth of itself, a mill of itself when the workman taketh off his hand from them: it is not so with us and God; for, Acts 17:28, 'In him we live, move, and have our being.' What Paul said of spiritual life, Gal. 2:20, is true also of life natural, 'I am, yet not I, but God is all in all.' He is in us, and liveth in us, or we could not subsist for a moment. We need not seek God without in the workmanship of heaven and earth, for we have God within ourselves, and may feel him and find him in our own life and motion; as the child in the womb liveth by the life of the mother, before it is quickened and liveth apart by a life and soul of its own; or as a pipe sounds by the blowing of the musician; if he stop his breath it is altogether silent; so we live and breathe in God, and all the tune-able variety of our motions cometh from his breathing in us. Now, if God be so near us, shall we not take notice of his presence, and carry ourselves accordingly? Shall we offend him and affront him to his face, and displease him without whom we cannot live? But alas! how seldom do we reflect upon this! How is it that we move and think not with wonder of the first mover

in whom we move? How is it that we live and persevere in being, and do not consider of this fountain and self-being who gave our life to us, and still continues it? Oh, the negligence of many souls professing the knowledge of God and godliness! We speak, walk, eat, and drink, and go about all our business, as if we had a self-being and independent, never thinking of that all-present and quickening Spirit that acts us, moveth in us, speaketh in us, maketh us to walk, eat, drink, and do all the functions of nature; like the barbarous people who see, hear, speak, and reason, and never once reflect upon the principle of all these—a soul within.

[2.] Let us think often of the name of God, his attributes.

(1.) Of his wisdom, that we may compose ourselves to worship, adore him, serve him according to his will and pleasure, and may admire him in the justice and equity of his laws, and the excellent contrivance of his providence, that so we may submit to the directions of the one and the determinations of the other. To the directions of his word: Can we count God to be a wise God, and refuse his counsel? Doth not our practice give our profession the lie when we rather walk after our hearts' counsels, and the examples and fashions of the world, than observe the course God hath prescribed to us in the word? Who, then, is thought wise—God or men? So for submission to the determination of his providence. The flesh would fain be pleased, and therefore quarrelleth many times at God's dispensations as harsh and severe; but in good earnest who is wiser—God or men? Do we think we are fitter to sit at the helm, and govern and steer all affairs, than the wise Creator of heaven and earth? Shall we sit as judges upon his actions, and think that might have been prevented, this might have been better ordered, either for God's interest or our own comfort? Men will be teaching God how to govern the world; for we prescribe to him as if he did not understand

what were fit for us: he pleaseth us not in his wisest dispensations, and we bear it out as if we could mend his works: Job 21:22, 'Shall any teach God knowledge?' Those that disallow of God's proceedings take upon them to be God's teachers. It was a blasphemous speech of Alphonsus, *Si Deo a consiliis adfuisset in creatione mundi, multa se consultius ordinaturum*—if he had been of God's counsel when he made the world, he would have ordered many things better. Many abhor such a gross speech, yet think almost to the same effect. If they had the governing of the world, such men should not prosper; such and such things should not be done.

(2.) The name of his power. Oh! think often of that almighty power that maketh and conserveth all things, that giveth a being to you and every creature, and will do so to his promises, though never so unlikely; for what cannot he do that bringeth all things out of nothing by his word? Therefore our confidence in him should be more strong and steadfast; for why should we have any jealousies and distrusts of him who is omnipotent? In your greatest wants he is all-sufficient, and can supply you: Gen. 17:1, 'I am the almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.' In your greatest dangers he can deliver you: Dan. 3:17, 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.' In your lowest estate he is able to raise you up: Rom. 11:23, 'And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in; for God is able to graff them in again.' Whatever difficulties oppose themselves against the thing promised, he can remove them, for nothing is too hard for the Almighty: Phil. 3:21, 'He is able to subdue all things to himself.' How weak and despicable soever the visible means be, God can work by them: 2 Chron. 14:11, 'It is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or them that have no power.' All is alike to omnipotency. Instruments or means

may be too great for God's honour to be used, never too small or weak for him to work by.

(3.) The name of his goodness. God is infinitely good, effectually good, independently good, and all-sufficiently good. If good be amiable in our eyes, so should God be. He hath all that is lovely in the creatures in a more eminent degree, and therefore our affections, that are scattered to them, should be united in God. He is the supreme good, and the fountain of all goodness. Oh! how should we love this God, and that above all things in the world, or else we do not love him aright. This is that which draweth in your hearts to him, and upon this should your thoughts dwell. He showed his goodness to you in creation, when he made you a little lower than the angels; but much more in redemption, when he preferred you above the angels; for 'he did not take hold of angels, but took hold of the seed of Abraham.' What should you be doing but admiring of this, and showing forth the virtue and force of this love? 'God is love, and dwelleth in love,' 1 John 4:16. Oh! shall the paltry things of this world draw off your love from God, who is goodness itself? Let this prevail with you to lay down all your doating upon the creature, that you may no more follow the shadow, but cleave to the substance. We owe all that we are, all that we have, all that we hope for, to his goodness; and therefore let us consecrate and dedicate ourselves to his service and glory.

2. To study it so as some good may come of it. We should keep our thoughts on this holy subject—

[1.] Till we admire God. The degree of the saints' knowledge here below is only to proceed to admiration: Ps. 8:1, 'O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!' When we have studied God, silence will be the best eloquence, and admiration advance him



more than speech. Admire the name of his being. Creatures in their highest glory may be described, an account may be given of them; but his nature is Wonderful, can be admired, but not told. Admire his wisdom: Ps. 104:24, 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all.' Admire his love: Oh, how excellent is thy loving-kindness! Ps. 36:7; 'Oh, how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!' Ps. 31:19. The name of his power: Ps. 145:3, 'Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.' The object is too big for the faculty: it is a contempt of God when we think of him and do not admire him. Oh, the riches of his wisdom, height of his power, breadth of his love!

[2.] Till we make some practical improvement of him; otherwise to know God is but a vain speculation, a work of curiosity rather than of profit. By the sight of God the heart must be—

(1.) Drawn off from the creature, self, and sin.

(2.) Drawn unto God.

(1.) Drawn off—

(1st.) From the creature. That is a true sight of God which abaseth all things beside God, not only in opinion but affection; that attracteth and uniteth the soul to God, and draweth it off from all created excellences. The sight of God's purity darkens the purity of the angels, and staineth the pride of all created glory: Job 4:18, 'Behold, he put no trust in his servants, and his angels he charged with folly.' So that is a true sight of God's excellency that draweth off the heart from the vain, changeable, and empty shadow of the creature; and God is not truly amiable to us till this effect be in some measure wrought in us: 1 John 2:15, 'Love not the world, neither the things

that are in the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' So that our love to God will be known by the decay of our love to earthly things.

(2d.) From self. A sight of God will best discover thyself unto thyself, that in the light of God's glorious majesty thou mayest distinctly behold thine own vileness and misery. Esaias, when he saw God in vision: Isa. 6:5, 'Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, and mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts.' That is the use he made of this glorious sight: he knew, doubtless, something of this before, but now is affected as if he had never seen it. The glory of God shining on him doth not lift him up in arrogancy and conceit of the knowledge of such profound mysteries, but he is more abased in himself; this light made him see his own uncleanness. So Job 42:5, 6, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; therefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes.' As long as it was hearsay, Job thought himself something, and might reflect upon himself and actions with a kind of complacency and delight; but now he could not look upon himself with any patience. Self-love maketh us loathe other men's sins more than our own, and hindereth us from representing ourselves to ourselves in a true shape. It is the mere speculative knowledge of God, and science falsely so called that puffeth up; but a true knowledge of God breedeth self-loathing.

(3d.) From sin: it draweth off the heart. This remembrance will represent filthiness as filthiness without a covering. Sin is a deformity to God, as contrariety to his laws, the purity and goodness of his essence, and wisdom of his laws; yea, an act of rebellion and disloyalty against his sovereignty. Sin still is greatened by the consideration of God and a reflection upon his nature; as against his

authority, purity, goodness, so there is unkindness, disobedience, and a blot in it. Well may the apostle say, 3 John 11, 'He that doth evil hath not seen God.'

(2.) The heart must be drawn unto God by love, fear, and trust; for unless we meditate upon God to this end, 'Though we know God, we do not glorify him as God,' Rom. 1:21, till your hearts be moved and inclined to love, fear him, and obey him. His being calls for it, that we should seek after communion with God, who is such a self-sufficient, all-sufficient, and eternal being. Whom would we own, or whose favour would we seek? The favour of poor creatures, who are now one thing, now another? or the favour of God, who can still say, I am that I am! what I was I am, and I will be what I am? Friends are changeable, their affections dry up, and they themselves die, and their favour and all their thoughts of doing us good perish. There is no end of his duration or affection. His attributes call for love; his power rendereth him the most desirable friend and dreadful adversary. What more dreadful than power that cannot be resisted, wisdom that none can be hid from? and what more lovely than his love? Surely if we did study his name, his promises, and threatenings, it would have more power with us: how would we seek to him, and submit to his blessed will, and depend on him, as those that have nothing in ourselves, nor anything else in the world had being without him! We would then believe all opposite powers to be nothing, and wink at either the dreadfulness or loveliness of the creature, while the eye of our souls is wholly taken up with the sight of God; our desires would be to him, and our delights in him, and being deadened to the creature, would wholly cleave to him.

Doct. 3. Those that have spiritual affections will take all occasions to remember God's name. In adversity, for their comfort: Isa. 26:8, 9, 'Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee:

the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee: with my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early;' Isa. 50:10, 'Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.' In prosperity, for a regulation and restraint to their affections, that they might not too freely run out on the creature to the wrong of God. It is said of the wicked, Ps. 55:19, 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God;' but God's children remember him in their comforts: Deut. 8:10, 11, 'When thou hast eaten and art full, thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee; beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God;' so ver. 18, 'Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for he it is that giveth thee power to get wealth.' In company they will be speaking of God: Eph. 5:4, 'ἀλλὰ εὐχαριστία, but rather giving of thanks.' Alone they will be thinking of God; so that when they are alone, they are not alone; God is with them in their solitude: John 16:32, 'Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered every one to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.' By day they redeem time, God's statutes are their songs; by night when they cannot sleep: 'When I awake I am still with thee,' Ps. 139:18. Oh, what an advantage it is to have the heart thus thronged with thoughts of God in the night! When others sleep, good men are awake with God.

1. Observe this, that which David speaketh of himself was a secret duty. Those duties which we perform in secret, and wherein we avoid the applause of men, are most sincere, and by them many times we obtain most blessing: Mat. 6:6, 'Thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.' David was the same in secret that he was in the light. Other witnesses of our respect to God we need not than God himself: it is enough that he seeth us and approveth us. Our

desire and scope should be to please him, not to appear devout to men, or to be esteemed as such by them. Therefore, besides public ordinances, we should give ourselves to spiritual exercises in secret.

2. This was a spiritual duty transacted in the heart by his thoughts. The darkness of the night doth not hinder the delight of the soul; it is day within though night without. When a child of God shall see God, and be seen of him, though the sun shineth not upon the world, it is enough, their hearts are enlightened with God's Spirit.

3. It was a duty done ἀκαιρως, unseasonably to a vulgar eye. When others were buried in sleep, David would awaken sometimes to remember God. It is their solace; and spiritual affections and heroical grace must not be limited to the ordinary dull way of expressing duty to God. They have special affections and special dispensations: Ps. 63:6, 'My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, when I remember thee on my bed, and meditate of thee in the night-watches.'

4. It is not unseasonable. In the night, without distraction, we can more freely command our thoughts, for the senses being exercised, scatter the mind to several objects: Job 35:10, 'None saith, Where is God, my maker, who giveth songs in the night?' That is matter of rejoicing and comfort to poor oppressed creatures. So Ps. 42:8, 'I will sing of his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me.' Day and night he was filled with a sense of God's love. The reasons are—

[1.] They are fitted for it, having knowledge and a deep impression of the majesty of God upon their hearts: 'My reins instruct me in the night-season,' Ps. 16:7. These things that make a deep impression in the day, the thoughts will return upon in the night; now God and his words are impressed upon them.

[2.] They delight in it: Ps. 104:34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord.' They delight themselves in beholding the face of God, though not by immediate vision, yet by meditation. They are so affected with thoughts of his excellency, goodness, kindness, that it is their solace to draw their hearts off from all things and persons in the world to that divine object.

[3.] They profit by it. (1.) As to comfort, it easeth us of many sorrowful, troublesome, and weary thoughts. We must fetch our comforts from God; the divine nature is the first fountain of them, therefore called 'the God of all comfort,' 2 Cor. 1:3. (2.) As to duty and obedience. The reasons of our duty and subjection are most enforced from the nature of God; therefore the more we remember the nature of God, the more we are quickened to obedience: there we see his infinite power, supreme authority, exact holiness, tender love: 'Let the potsherds of the earth contend with one another,' Isa. 45:9. Our business is to keep God our friend. He hath two properties that make him most comfortable or most terrible, according as he is at peace or war with us—eternity and omnipotency.

Use. Let us take more occasions to think of God, and that with admiration. Many take no more notice of him than if he were not at all; but let us take all occasions: Ps. 4:4, 'Commune with your own hearts upon your bed.' All the time we can spare from our necessary, civil, and natural actions should be employed in calling to mind what we have seen, or heard, or felt of God. A loathness and backwardness to this duty is an ill sign.

## **SERMON LXIII**

## **This I had, because I kept thy precepts.— VER. 56.**

IN this psalm the dependence of the verses is neither to be neglected, nor too curiously sought after. Many of the sentences have no other connection than pearls upon the same string, though some are as links in the same chain, fastened one to the other by an apt method and order. The design of the penman was to cast all his experiences into the order of the Hebrew alphabet; and as there are in the Hebrew twenty-two letters, so twenty-two parts or octonaries. Each octonary beginneth with the same letter. This sentence which I have read seemeth to be independent of the preceding verse, and is the sudden effusion or eruption of a gracious heart engaged in the meditation of the fruit of obedience: 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts.' In the words you have—

1. David's assertion of his integrity, I have kept thy precepts.
2. The gain of this course indefinitely proposed, this I had.
3. The link between both in the causal particle, because. David doth not here tell you what he had, but this and that: this hope, this comfort, this quickening, this deliverance; all this I had; that is, whatever is good and comfortable. The feminine pronoun Zeth is put neutrally, the Hebrew wanting the neuter gender.

The points are two:—

First, He that continueth faithful in a course of obedience will find at length that it will turn to a good account.

Secondly, That it is of great use to observe what good cometh to us by keeping close to God's ways.

For the first point, he that continueth faithful in a course of obedience will find at length that it will turn to a good account. Here, three things are to be explained:—

1. What it is to keep God's precepts.
2. What is the good that accrueth to us thereby.
3. The connection between both these, or the reasons and grounds upon which we may expect this good.

1. Let us inquire what it is to keep God's precepts. The phrase is often used in scripture, implying a diligent observance of it, and obedience thereunto. The term keep relateth to a charge or trust committed to us. Look, as on our part we charge Christ with our souls—2 Tim. 1:12, 'I know that he is able to keep that I have committed to him'—so Christ chargeth us with his word, that we may be chary and tender of it. We charge him with our souls, that he may sanctify and save them in his own day; so he chargeth us with his precepts, that we may lay them up in our hearts, and observe them in our practice. As we would have Christ to be faithful to his trust, so should we be in ours, and that even to a tittle: James 2:10, 'Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in point, he is guilty of all.' Now, there is a twofold keeping of God's precepts—legal and evangelical.

[1.] The legal keeping, that is when we keep and perform the commandments so exactly as is answerable to the rigour of the law. What is that? The law requires perfect and absolute obedience, without the least failing in any one point: Gal. 3:10, 'Cursed is he that continueth not in all things that is written in the book of the law to



do them.' The least offence, according to that covenant, layeth us open to the curse; as for one sin once committed the angels were turned out of heaven, and Adam out of paradise. In this sense there is no hope for us.

[2.] There is an evangelical keeping God's precepts, and that is filial and sincere obedience; and so they are said to keep God's precepts,—not they who have no sin in them, but they who study to be free from sin, and desire to please God in all things. David had many failings, and some of them of a high nature; yet he saith, I have kept thy precepts. His purpose and endeavour was to please God in all things. The apostles had many failings; they were weak in faith, passionate, full of revenge, calling for fire from heaven; a great many failings we may find upon record against them; yet Christ returneth this general acknowledgment: John 17:6, 'They have kept thy word.' God accepteth of our endeavours; when our defects are repented of, he pardoneth them: James 5:11, 'You have heard of the patience of Job;' and we have heard of his impatience too, his cursing the day of his birth, and his bold expostulation with God; but God putteth his finger upon the scar, and mentions that which is commendable. This sincere obedience is known by our endeavours after perfection, and our repentance for defects. For let me tell you here, that perfect obedience is required under the gospel: the rule is as strict as ever it was, but the covenant is not so strict. The rule is as strict as ever it was; we are still bound to perpetual, personal, and perfect obedience, otherwise our defects were no sins: 'For where there is no law, there is no transgression,' Rom. 4:15. But the covenant is not so strict. This perfect obedience is not so indispensably required under the sanction and penalty of the old covenant; for the gospel, though it alloweth or approveth of no sin, yet it granteth a pardon of course to some sins as they are retracted by a general repentance. As sins of infirmity, such as are sins of ignorance, which had we known we

would not have committed; and sins of incogitancy and sudden surreption, which may escape without observation of them; and sins of violent temptation, which by reason of some sudden assault sway our passions against the right rule; such sins as do not arise out of an evil purpose of the mind, but out of human frailty; they are consistent with an interest in this covenant, which alloweth a means of recovery by repentance, which the law doth not. The law for one offence once committed doth condemn a man without leaving him any way or means of recovery; but the gospel saith, 'I came to call sinners to repentance,' Mat. 9:13. It accepteth repentance, and doth not cast men off for sins of infirmity. Where there is a general purpose to please God, and a hearty sorrow when we offend him, this is the sincerity which the gospel accepteth of. In the law, complete innocence is required; in the gospel, repentance is allowed: and so he is said to keep God's statutes that doth not voluntarily and impenitently go on in a course of known sin.

2. Let me now show the good that cometh to us thereby. David saith indefinitely, 'This I had;' not telling us what good or privilege it was, only in the general it was some benefit that accrued to him in this life. He doth not say, This I hope for, but, This I had. And therefore I shall not speak of the full reward in the life to come. In heaven we come to receive the full reward of obedience. But a close walker, that waiteth upon God in a humble and constant obedience, shall have sufficient encouragement even in this life. Not only he shall be blessed, but he is blessed; he hath something in hand as well as in hope. As David saith in this 119th Psalm, not only he shall be blessed, but he is blessed. As they that travelled towards Zion, they met with a well by the way: Ps. 84:6, 'Who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well: the rain also filleth the pools.' In a dry and barren wilderness through which they were to pass, they were not left wholly comfortless, but met with a well or cistern; that is, they had some

comfort vouchsafed to them before they came to enjoy God's presence in Zion, some refreshments they had by the way. As servants, that beside their wages have their vails, so, besides the recompense of reward hereafter, we have our present comforts and supports during our course of service, which are enough to counterbalance all worldly joys, and the greatest pleasures that men can expect in a way of sin. Let me instance in the benefits that believers find by walking with God in a course of obedience, that every one can say, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts.'

[1.] Peace of conscience, a blessing not to be valued; and this we have because we keep his precepts: Isa. 32:17, 'The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.' They shall be free from those unquiet thoughts wherewith others are haunted. A wicked man's soul is in a mutiny, one affection warreth against another, and all against the conscience, and conscience against all; but in a heart framed to the obedience of God's will there is peace. *Pax est tranquillitas ordinis*—when everything keeps its place there is peace; when the elements keep their place, and the confederacies of nature are preserved, then there is peace: so when a man walketh in a holy course there is peace; when the thoughts and affections are under rule and government, there is a serenity and quiet in the soul. Now, this is never brought to pass in the soul but by obedience and holy walking according to the rule of the new creature: Gal. 6:16, 'As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy shall be upon them, as upon the whole Israel of God.' Such an accurate and orderly life is the only way of obtaining this peace and harmonious accord in the soul. So Ps. 119:165, 'Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them;' not only peace, but great peace—a peace that passeth all understanding, a peace better felt than expressed; and this resulteth from obedience, or the government of our hearts and ways according to the will of

God. Look, as cheerfulness and liveliness accompanieth perfect health, or the tunable motion of the spirits in the body, so this serenity and quiet in the soul, the regular and orderly motion of our faculties; there is a sweet contentment of mind resulting from it. 'The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.' In a troublesome world we need to have our hearts and minds kept and guarded from assaults of temptations, and diffident vexing cares and fears; and therefore it is mightily necessary in those times to get the peace of God, without which the soul is upon the rack. Oh, this sweet peace and calm that is in our hearts in the midst of all tempests and tossings from without! A man is provided and fortified against the apprehension of injuries, troubles, dangers, and those heart-cutting cares which otherwise are apt to seize upon us. This a believer can say, This peace of conscience I had in the midst of all the troubles from without. Now this peace others cannot have: Isa. 57:21, 'There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked;' they have not this inward tranquillity and serenity of mind; their affections are so unruly, and their consciences so unquiet, they are never able to rest.

But how can this be? None seem to be less troubled than wicked men. I answer—There is a difference between a dead sea and a calm sea; a stupid conscience they may have, but not a quiet conscience: their consciences are stupefied by drenching their souls in worldly delights and pleasures; but the virtue of this opium is soon spent, their consciences are easily awakened by the convictions of the word, the sting of afflictions, the agonies of death. Well, then, this may the composed heart say, I had this peace, this serenity of mind, because I kept thy precepts.

[2.] Next to peace of conscience there is joy in the Holy Ghost; this is the fruit of peace, as peace is the fruit of righteousness: Rom. 14:17, 'The kingdom of God consisteth not in meat and drink, but in

righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' First righteousness, and then peace, and then joy in the Holy Ghost. As joy of heart and gladness is the fruit of temporal or civil peace, when every man may sit under his own vine and his own fig-tree, and reap the fruit of his labour without the danger of annoyance; so now, when a man can enjoy himself as being reconciled to God, or being at peace with him, and hath tasted of the clusters of Canaan, he can 'rejoice in hope of the glory of God,' Rom. 5:11. This is that joy in the Holy Ghost which God doth graciously dispense to those that obey his word and hearken to the motions of his Spirit. Oh! how may a believer triumph and say, 'This I had because I kept thy precepts!' Joy is the fruit of holiness, and the oil of grace maketh way for the oil of gladness: Ps. 119:14, 'I rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches.' David experienced the joys of obedience, and the joys of a crown: now saith David, 'I rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches;' not in the contemplation, but in the way. This was a joy that did result from practical obedience, which is more than the possessions and treasures of the world. Many picture religion in their fancies with a sour and austere face, and think it inviteth men to nothing but harsh and unpleasant courses. Oh, no! It inviteth you to the highest contentment the creature is capable of, the joy in the Holy Ghost, which is 'unspeakable and glorious.' A sensualist, that runs after the dreggy delights of the flesh, is the veriest fool in the world; for he can never have any true joy, it is but frisks of mirth (while conscience is asleep), but when it is gone, it leaveth a sting behind it.

[3.] Increase of grace. This is another benefit we get by keeping God's precepts: 'They go from strength to strength,' Ps. 84:7; as they that went to the feast at Jerusalem; they went from troop to troop; so they are brought forward in their way to heaven. God, that punisheth sin with sin, rewardeth also grace with grace. The one is the most

dreadful dispensation that God can use. When men have gone on in a course of sin, God often punisheth one sin with another, so that they are plunged deeper and deeper every day in the gulf of profaneness. But it is most comfortable when godliness increaseth upon our hands, and God is still perfecting his own work in us: Rom. 6:19, 'As you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity, so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.' It standeth us upon to observe the growth of grace, as we were formerly conscious of the growth of sin. Shall we be more earnest to damn ourselves than to save ourselves? There is no man but in his carnal estate might observe how he departed from God by degrees, and his heart was hardened by degrees. At first he had some light and conscience, till he sinned it away and turned his back upon the ordinances, which might revive it and keep it awake; and then his sin betrayed him further and further into a customary course of profaneness. I say, a carnal man may trace the growth of sin in his own heart step by step, and say, 'This I had because I slighted such a check of conscience, despised such an ordinance, fell into such an enormous practice;' for God forsaketh none till they first forsake him. So may a child of God trace his gradual increase in holiness: this I had by hearkening to the counsel of God at such a time against the reluctancy of my flesh. There is no duty recovered out of the hands of difficulty but bringeth in a considerable profit to the soul: Prov. 4:18, 'The way of the just is a shining light, which shineth more and more to the perfect day.' Look, as the day decreaseth the night increaseth, till it cometh to thick darkness; so by every sin men grow worse and worse, till at last they stumble into utter darkness. But the way of the just is a growing light; it increaseth always into more durable resolutions and exact practice of godliness, till it come to the high noon of perfection. David taketh notice of the fruit of obedience: Ps. 18:24, 'The Lord accept of me according to the cleanness of my hands.'

[4.] Another benefit that we have is many gracious experiences and manifestations of God vouchsafed to us in the way of obedience. In the present world God and believers are not strange to one another; a man that walketh close with him will meet him at every turn: Ps. 17:15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.' The Psalmist there preferreth his present condition before the greatest happiness of carnal men. Why? Because he had opportunity of beholding the face of God, or enjoying the comforts of his presence. But how? In righteousness, in a strict course of obedience. If God be a stranger to others, they may thank themselves: John 14:21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me is loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him.' Holiness is the only way to clear up our right to these great comforts of the gospel; and if you would get experience of them, make conscience of obedience, and be exact and punctual with God, and you will not want your refreshments and visits of love, and expressions of his grace and favour to you: those sensible proofs and manifestations God will not give to us but in a way of obedience; so the promise runneth, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, to him will I manifest myself;' so ver. 23, 'If a man love me, and keep my commandments, my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and take up our abode with him.' These are taken into sweet fellowship and communion with God, and the blessed Trinity will take up their abode in his heart. But pray, mark, Christ, that is so tender and willing to communicate the influences of his grace, yet standeth upon his sovereignty, and therefore still insisteth upon keeping his precepts, if they would partake of his comforts.

[5.] Protection in their work. They are under the special care and conduct of his providence while they keep his precepts: 'He keepeth them as in a pavilion; thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy

presence from the pride of men,' Ps. 31:20. And who are they that are kept? 'Those that fear him and trust in him,' ver. 19. Pray, mark, when they had no visible defence, when they seemed to be left open as a prey to the oppressions and injuries of their potent adversaries, yet there is a secret guard about them, and they are kept, the world knoweth not how: God's favour and providence is their sure guard and defence. Whatever contentious and proud men design and threaten against them, yet they never have their full will upon them. Many a child of God hath ridden out the storm, and may come and say, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts.' This it is to keep close to God and hold fast our integrity. Elsewhere the Lord expresseth himself to be 'a wall of fire round about his people,' Zech. 2:5, which should affright at a distance, and consume near at hand. In those countries, when they lay in the fields, they made fires about them to keep off the wild beasts; so God, when he seeth it fit to excuse his people from trouble, he can in the most unsafe times, and when they are weakest, protect them by his secret hand, bridling their enemies, and making their attempts ineffectual. Satan is sensible of this privy guard: Job 1:10, 'Hast thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?' The world seeth not this invisible guard, but the devil seeth it. There is no gap open for mischief to enter and break in upon them. This can God do when he pleaseth; and a man that holdeth fast his integrity, and goeth on in his duty, referring himself to God's keeping, shall have experience of it, and when the danger is over, say, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts.'

[6.] In public and common judgments God maketh a difference; and some of his choice ones are marked out for preservation, and are as brands plucked out of the burning, whilst others are consumed therein. This is done oftentimes, I cannot say always. The Jews have a proverb that two dry sticks may set a green one on fire: a good man



may perish in the common judgment, that is the meaning of the proverb. And sometimes their condition may be worst; as Jeremiah: the whole city was besieged, and he in the dungeon. Chaff and corn is threshed in the same floor, but the corn is ground and baked. But this is the best way we can take to be hid in the common calamity, though there be not an absolute certainty; for the comfort is but propounded with a possibility: Zeph. 2:3, 'Seek righteousness, seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.' Though God hath a peculiar eye to the godly, yet their temporal safety is not put out of all doubt; it may be, or it may not be; but their eternal comforts are sure and safe. Yet strict and humble walking is the only way; and in some cases God showeth that there shall be a distinction between his people and others, and when others are overwhelmed, they shall be preserved; as Eccles. 8:12, 'Surely I know it shall be well with them that fear the Lord, which fear before him; but it shall be ill with the wicked;' and Isa. 3:10, 'Say unto the righteous it shall be well with him, for they shall eat of the fruit of their doings; but say unto the wicked it shall be ill with them, for the work of his hands shall be given to him;' and Jer. 15:11, 'Verily it shall be well with this remnant: I will cause the enemy to treat them well in the day of evil and affliction.' All these places speak of delivering them from trouble, or moderating the trouble to them. If there be an uncertainty in the thing, yet a probability; but whenever it is done, it is a singular favour, and we must own it as the fruit of obedience: 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts.' We must expect the temporal reward of godliness with much submission, and venture upon his providence.

[7.] So much of sanctified prosperity as shall be good for them: Mat. 6:33, 'First seek the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, and these things shall be added.' God will cast them into the bargain; and though he may keep them low and bare, yet 'no good thing will

he withhold,' Ps. 84:11. So that a child of God surveying all his comforts may say, This and that and the other mercy I had from the Lord's grace; these comforts and these deliverances came in 'because I kept thy precepts.'

3. The next thing is to show you what connection there is between these two, obedience and this good, or the reason of the Lord's dealing thus.

[1.] God doth it partly out of his general justice, as he is governor of the world: his holy nature doth delight in holiness, and therefore it is requisite, ut bonis bene sit, et malis male—that it should be well with them that do well, and evil with them that do evil, and such dealing a man should have from God as he dealeth out to God: Ps. 18:25, 26, 'With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful, and with the upright thou wilt show thyself upright, and with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure, and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward.' In the general, that it should be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked; there is an argument in the governing justice of God: but then, to come to particulars, that it should be so ill with the wicked, here is exacta ratio justii; but that it should be so well with men imperfectly righteous, this is moderate justice mixed with undeserved mercy.

[2.] There is his gracious promise and covenant; heaven and earth are laid at the feet of godliness: 1 Tim. 4:8, 'Godliness hath the promise of this life and that which is to come.' Something during our service in this world.

The second point is, that it is of no small benefit to see and observe what good we have by obedience to God.

1. It will increase our esteem of his grace. That the little and slender obedience that we yield to his law should have such respect and acceptance with him as to be recompensed with so much peace, and comfort, and protection, and so many blessings: 'Lord, what am I, and what is my father's house?' Oh, what a good master have we! When the saints are crowned, they cast their crowns at the Lamb's feet, Rev. 4:10. We hold all by his mercy: Luke 17:10, 'When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants;' not in compliment, but in truth of heart, we are unprofitable servants. That God should respect us, it is not for the dignity of the work, but merely for his own grace.

2. It is of use that we may justify God against the reproaches and prejudices of carnal men, who think God is indifferent to good and evil, and that all things come alike to all, that it is in vain to be strict and precise, that there is no reward to the good: Mal. 3:14, 'It is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances?' Yea, the temptation may befall God's own children, and be forcibly borne in upon their hearts: Ps. 73:13, 'Verily I have cleansed my hands in vain.' We think all is lost labour. Now, to produce the sweet consolations of God, and his temporal supplies, and the manifold blessings bestowed upon us, it is a good stay to our hearts, and enables us to justify God against the scorns and reproaches of the world.

3. It is of use to check our murmurings. If we endure anything for God, we are apt to repine, and pitch upon that evil we receive from his hand, passing over the good. A little evil, like one humour out of order, or one member out of joint, disturbeth the whole body; so we, by poring upon the evil we endure, pass over all his other bounty: Mal. 1:2, 'Wherein hast thou loved us?' God cannot endure to have his love suspected or undervalued; and yet people are apt to do so when dispensations are anything cross to their desires and

expectations. But now it is a great check, to consider that if we have our troubles, we have also our consolations; and we should rather look upon the good that cometh to us in pleasing God, than the temporal and light afflictions we meet withal in his service: Job 2:10, 'Shall we receive good at the hands of God, and not evil?'

4. It is an encouragement to us in well-doing, the more proofs and tokens we have of his supportation. We are wrought upon by the senses; as Jer. 2:19, 'Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings reprove thee: see what an evil and bitter thing it is to forsake the Lord;' and ver. 23, 'See thy way in the valley, and know what thou hast done.' As parents, when their children smart for eating raw diet, they upbraid them with it: It is for eating your green fruit; so doth the Lord come to his people: Now you see the evil of your doings. So, on the contrary, it doth engage us to strict walking to see how God owneth it; so doth God appeal to us by experience: 'Have I been a land of darkness to you, or a barren wilderness?' Jer. 2:31; Micah 2:7, 'Do not my words do good to them that walk uprightly?' Look about you, survey all your comforts; did sin procure these mercies, or godliness? Have you not found sensible benefit by being sincere in my service?

Object. But is this safe, to ascribe the comfort and blessings that we have to our own obedience? Is it not expressly forbidden, Deut. 9:4, 'Say not in thy heart, For my righteousness hath the Lord brought me to possess the land'?

Ans. 1. David doth not boast of his merits, but observeth God's mercy and faithfulness in the fruits of obedience. There is his mercy in appointing a reward for such slender services: Gal. 6:16, 'As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them.' All the comfort we have is from mercy; yea, undeserved mercy. Those that

walk according to this rule stand in need of mercy. Their peace and comfort floweth from mercy; they need mercy to cover the failings they are conscious to in their walkings. And then consider his truth and faithfulness. The reward of well-doing cometh not by the worthiness of the work, but by virtue of God's promise: 'His word doth good to them that walk uprightly,' Micah 2:7. God hath made himself a debtor by his promise, and oweth us no thanks for what we can do; it is only his gracious promise.

Ans. 2. David speaketh not this to vaunt it above other men, but to commend obedience, and to encourage himself and invite others by remembering the fruits of it. There is a great deal of difference between carnal boasting and gracious observation. Carnal boasting is when we vaunt of our personal worth; gracious observation is when, for God's glory and our profit, we observe the fruits of obedience, and the benefits it bringeth along with it. That God never gave us cause to leave, but to commend his service, and, by what we have found, to invite others to 'come and taste that the Lord is gracious.'

Use 1. To encourage us in the ways of the Lord and keeping of his precepts. It is no unprofitable thing: before we have done we shall be able to say, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts.' Two things God usually bestoweth upon his people—a tolerable passage through the world, and a comfortable going out of the world; which is all a Christian needeth to care for: here is only the place of his service, not of his rest.

1. He shall have a tolerable passage through the world. A child of God may have a hard toilsome life of it, but he hath his mixtures of comfort in his deepest afflictions; he hath peace with God, that keeps his heart and mind, and maketh his passage through the world tolerable, because God is engaged with him: 1 Cor. 10:13, 'Faithful is

he that hath called you, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able to bear.' He is freed from wrath, and hath his discharge from the curse of the old covenant; he is taken into favour with God, and hath as much of temporal relief as is necessary for him; his condition is made comfortable to him.

2. A comfortable passing out of the world: Isa. 38:3, 'Remember, O Lord,' saith Hezekiah, 'I have walked before thee with an upright heart.' When you lie upon your death-beds, and in a dying hour, how comfortable will this be, the remembrance of a well-spent and well-employed life in God's service! They that wonder at the zeal and niceness of God's children, when they are entering into the other world, they cry out then, Oh, that they had been more exact and watchful! Oh, that they might die the death of the righteous! They should live so. Men then have other notions of holiness than ever they had before. But, Christians, here is your comfort; the word of God, that hath been your rule, is now your comfort and cordial, and stands by you to the very last.

Use 2. To persuade us to observe the difference between the ways of God and the ways of sin. When a man cometh to cast up his account on the one side and on the other, oh what a difference is there! Certainly there will a time come when you must cast up your account and use this recollection, either when your eyes are opened by grace in conversion, or when your eyes are opened by punishment. On sin's side consider, when you look back to what is past—(the Lord grant you may make this reflection!)—Rom. 6:21, 'What fruit had you in those things whereof you are now ashamed?' You cannot look back without horror of conscience; as the unclean person, when he looketh back, and considereth that his flesh and body is consumed by sin, Prov. 5:11–13. He speaketh there of some noisome disease that hath gotten into his body. But then, on the other side, the side of

godliness, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts,' Oh! what peace, what serenity of mind, what hopes of eternal life, what comfortable entertainment shall you have in heaven! Determine beforehand what it will come to. Thus you see the difference between a sinful and godly course.

## SERMON LXIV

### **Thou art my portion, O Lord: I have said that I would keep thy words.—VER. 57.**

DAVID doth in this place make out his right and title, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord,' &c. Here is—

1. David's protestation, thou art my portion, O Lord.
2. David's resolution, I have said that I would keep thy words.

In the first of these, in David's protestation, you may take notice of his claim, and of the sincerity of it.

1. Of his claim to God, 'Thou art my portion.' A part or portion, in the original use of the word, signifies a less quantity taken from a greater; a part is used in opposition to the whole. But with respect to the matter in hand, it is not used in such a sense, but for our lot and happiness; not sensu mathematico, not with reference to a whole, but politico et forensi, with respect to choice, interest, and possession; and the allusion is taken either from the distribution of

the land of Canaan, where every one had his portion appointed to him by lot, and measured to him by rod and lines: therefore it is said, 'The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage;' or else it is an allusion to the partage of an ordinary estate, where every child hath his portion assigned him to live upon. Thus he lays claim to God himself.

2. The sincerity of this claim may be gathered, because he speaks by way of address to God. He doth not say barely, 'He is my portion,' but challengeth God to his face, 'Lord, thou art my portion.' Elsewhere it is said, Lam. 3:24, 'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul.' There he doth not speak it by way of address to God, but he adds, My soul saith. But here to God himself, who knows the secrets of the heart. To speak thus of God to God argues our sincerity, when to God's face we avow our trust and choice; as Peter, John 21:17, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee;' he appeals to God's omniscieny; such an appeal is there to God for the truth of this assertion; as in that other place, when the believing soul lays claim to God, the integrity of that claim is also asserted, not only by the lips or mouth, but also the soul. There is *oratio mentalis*, *vocalis*, *vitalis*: there is the speech of the heart, in the real inclination of it; and the speech of the tongue, in outward profession; and the speech of the life, by answerable practice. All three must be joined together; what the tongue utters, the heart and life must consent to. All will say, God is their portion; but it is not what the tongue says, but what the heart saith; and what the heart saith will appear in the course of your actions; there is the real proof and evidence of it. Thus much for David's protestation, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord;' he speaks to God himself.

Secondly, Take notice of David's resolution, 'I have said that I would keep thy word.' It is good to see what kind of inference the saints



draw from this principle, that God is their portion. Sometimes they infer thence dependence upon God, sometimes subjection and obedience to him; for this principle doth not only establish our comfort, but our duty. Sometimes to establish dependence: Lam. 3:24, 'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.' I will look for all from him, live upon him as a man doth upon his portion. But here David infers duty and obedience: 'I have said that I would keep thy words.'

In this resolution we may observe—

1. The formality or manner of making, I have said: it is by way of practical decree.

2. The matter of it, I will keep thy words.

1. For the formality or manner of it, 'I have said,' I decreed within myself, I have fully concluded; here was not a light or inconsiderate purpose, but such as was deliberate, fixed, a practical decree upon a debate. Whoever would enter upon a strict course displeasing to flesh and blood, must seriously consider and then fixedly determine: deliberation and determination are both necessary. There must be consultation or deliberation, that he may sit down and count the charges; otherwise, if profession of godliness be lightly taken up, it will be as lightly left. Then there must be determination, or binding the heart by firm purpose; and if we join the next verse, supplication or begging God's strength, then all is done. Now this firm purpose I have said will help against inconstancy, or against backwardness or unreadiness of heart. Against inconstancy: Many good motions we start, but they die away for want of coming to a resolution, or issuing forth a practical decree for God: James 1:8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' But David, when he had considered all things, then 'I have said that I will keep thy words;' he was fully

resolved. Then it will help against laziness, listlessness, and backwardness of heart. David, when he was grown shy of God, and his heart hung off from him, some great distemper was upon his soul, and he was loath to look God in the face, what course did he take then? He issues forth a practical decree: Ps. 32:5, 'I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord.' He thrusts himself forward, and charges himself to go to God: I am resolved I will break off silence, and open my case to God. Thus we must excite ourselves by renewing a decree in the soul; determine, I will do thus and thus for God, whatever comes of it.

2. For the matter, 'I will keep thy words.' Keeping God's word notes an exact and tender respect, when a man keeps it as a jewel, as a precious treasure, that it may not be hazarded; or keeps it 'as the apple of his eye,' Prov. 7:2. The eye is soon offended with the least dust; so when we are chary of the word of God, loath to offend God in anything, then are we said to keep his word.

Two points lie clear in the text:—

1. That God alone is the godly man's portion.
2. That those which have chosen God for their portion will manifest it by a fixed resolution and strict care of obedience.

It must needs be so; if God be his portion, his great business will be to keep in with him.

Doct. 1. That God alone is the godly man's portion.

This will appear by scripture and by reason.

1. By scripture: Ps. 16:5, 'The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup.' There is a double metaphor; first, an allusion to the

shares of the land of Canaan, so God is the portion of mine inheritance, saith David; and an allusion to the manner of a feast, where every man had his allowance of meat set by his cup: but snares and brimstone are said to be the portion of a wicked man's cup. As every man had his allowance set by his flagon of wine, especially in a solemn feast, so God is the portion of my cup. So Ps. 73:26, 'The Lord is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever, when my flesh and my heart faileth,' that is, when my body yields to the decay of nature; yea, when all our courage seems to be lost, borne down by difficulties that we endure in the flesh, God is a portion that will never fail.

2. To give some reasons of it. It will appear to be so—

[1.] By considering what is requisite to a man's portion.

[2.] Why a godly man looks upon God under this notion.

First, If a man were left to his free choice, what he would choose to take for his portion; not what is his portion in his strait, when he can have no better, but if he were left to his free choice:—

1. He would require that it be something good, or apprehended to be so.

2. That it be something to which he hath a title and interest, to which he can lay claim, or is in possession or expectation of according to right.

3. He would choose that which is suitable to the capacities, necessities, and desires of him whose portion it is.

4. That it be sufficient to supply all his wants, so as he may live upon it.

5. That it be such a thing wherein he may find satisfaction and acquiescence, so that he needs seek no more and ask no more.

6. Such a thing wherein he may take complacency and great delight, where he may be well pleased and rejoiced.

Now, all these things are to be found in God, and with good reason the saints make this choice, and say, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord.'

[1.] That which is to be chosen for our portion must be good: 'There is none good but one, and that is God,' Mat. 19:17. It is Christ's own proposition: he is good of himself, good in himself, yea, good itself. There is no good above him, besides him, or beyond him. But if anything else be good, it is either from him or with him. But that I may more distinctly speak to this—

(1.) God is primitively and originally good; the creature is but derivatively good. He is good of himself, which nothing else is, the fountain-good, and therefore, is called 'the fountain of living waters,' Jer. 2:13. The creatures are but dry pits or broken cisterns. Other things, what good they have it is of him. God must needs be infinitely better and greater than they, for all things which are good they have from God.

(2.) God is the chiefest good, and other things are only good in subordination. All creature goodness is but a stricture of that perfect good which is in God; and therefore, if we find any good in them, that should lead us to the greater good, even to the Creator. Who would leave the substance to follow the shadow? or desire the picture to the dishonour and neglect of the person whom it represents? Certainly so they do that run after the creature and neglect God, that seek happiness in sublunary enjoyments, to the wrong and neglect of God. That small good which the creatures have is not to hold us on to

them, but to lead us to him, as the streams will direct us to the fountain, and the steps of the ladder are not to stand still upon, but to ascend higher. If your affections be detained in the creature, you set the creature in God's stead; you pervert it from its natural use, which is to set forth the invisible things of God, his excellency, his goodness, his godhead, and his power to do you good, and to send you to him that made them. But how usually doth that which should carry us to God divert and detain us from him! If a prince should woo a virgin by a messenger, and she should leave him, and cleave to the messenger, and those he sent as spokesmen and servants, this were an extreme folly. By the beauty and sweetness of the creatures, God's end is to draw us to himself as the chiefest good; for that which we love in other things is but a shadow and an obscure resemblance of that which is in him. There is sweetness in the creature, mixed with imperfection; the sweetness is to draw us to God, but the imperfection is to drive us from setting our hearts on them. There is somewhat good in them: look up to the Creator; but there is vanity and vexation of spirit, and this is to drive us off from these sublunary things.

(3.) He is infinitely good. In this portion one hath not the less because another enjoys it with him. Here is a sharing without division, a partaking without prejudice of a co-partner, for every man hath his portion whole and entire; it is no less to us because others enjoy it too. We straiten others in worldly things so much as we are enlarged ourselves; for these things are finite, and cannot be divided but they must be lessened, and therefore are not large enough. But this good is infinite, and sufficeth the whole world, and every one possesseth it entire; as the same speech may be heard of all, yet no man heareth less because another heareth it with him; or as the same sun shines upon all; I have not the less light because it shines upon another as well as me. So God is all in all. If there be any difference,

the more we possess him the better; as in a choir of voices, every one is not only solaced with his own voice, but with the harmony of those that sing in concert with him. Worldly inheritance is lessened by a multitude of co-heirs. In outward estates many a fair stream is drawn dry or runs low by being parted and dispersed in several channels; but God, that is infinite, cannot be lessened.

(4.) He is an eternal good, and so the most durable portion: 'He is my portion for ever,' Ps. 73:26. The good things of this life tire but like flowers; they be for a season and then they wither, they are perishing and of a short continuance; we carry away nothing of it in our hands when we go to the grave. When we leave all other portions and inheritances, then we begin to take possession of this portion; yea, at that time when men see the vanity of making other things their portion, a child of God sees the happiness of his portion—at death. Death blows away all vain deceits; then carnal men begin to perceive their error. When their portion comes to be taken away from them, then what indignation have they upon themselves for the folly of their choice, how the world hath deceived them! A godly man hath the beginning here, then he comes to have a consummate and most perfect enjoyment of it. Death cannot separate us from our portion. Indeed it separates us from all things that withhold us from it, but it is a means to perfect our union with God, and make way for our full fruition of him. Well, then, if this be that which is required in a portion, that it be good, there is none good but God; he is originally, independently, chiefly, infinitely, and eternally good, and therefore there is reason why we should choose God for our portion.

[2.] That a thing be our portion, it is necessary that we have an interest in it and title to it; not only that it be good, but that we may claim it as ours; for that is that which sweeteneth everything to us, that it is ours to use. Now God is not only good, but he is also ours;

he makes over himself to us in covenant, Gen. 17; therefore we may lay claim to him, as a man to his patrimony or inheritance to which he is born, and say, Lord, thou art mine: Zech. 13:9, 'I will say, It is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God.' As God owns an interest in them, so they own him: He is my God; 'I will be thy God;' so saith God in the covenant. It is more than if God had said, I will be thy friend, thy father; these are notions of a limited sense. But 'I will be thy God,' that hath an infinite importance, a greater weight and efficacy in that expression: 'I will be thy God,' that is, I will do thee good in the way of infinite and eternal power. And that is the reason why Christ proves the resurrection from thence: Mat. 22:32, 'I am the God of Abraham,' &c.; for to be a God to any is to be a benefactor to them, and a benefactor becoming an infinite and eternal power. Therefore certainly it assures us of greater things than this life affords, something becoming a God to give. If God be Abraham's God, a God to his whole person (his soul is not Abraham), then it strongly proves the resurrection of the body; then Abraham, both body and soul, must have a happiness greater than this life can afford. Hence that expression of the apostle, Heb. 11:16, 'God is not ashamed to be called their God.' These words seem as if they did express God's condescension, as if he would be called the God of a few patriarchs. No; the meaning of the words is this, in regard of the slenderness of their present condition, God could not with honour. What! be a God to Jacob, and suffer him to have such a wandering life? He might be ashamed to be their God if he had not better things to bestow upon them, 'But he hath provided for them a city,' a heavenly kingdom. Not only given them that which they enjoyed in houses, their flocks and herds, which were multiplied; these were slender things to take up the whole significancy of that expression, I will be their God. But now God is not ashamed to be called their God; that is, God can with honour and without shame take that title upon him, for he hath everlasting happiness in the world to come to

bestow upon them. Thus whatever God is, hath, or can do, it is thine. Look, as the apostle saith, Heb. 6, that 'when God had no greater thing to swear by, he swore by himself,' so we may say, when he had no greater thing to bestow upon his people, he gives and bestows himself, as fully and wholly makes over himself to every believing soul, so that they have as full a plea and sure right to God as any man hath to his patrimony to which he was born. I will act answerably, becoming an infinite power and goodness, for thy good. This is the significancy of that ample and glorious expression which God useth in the covenant of grace. As when a covenant was made between the king of Israel and the king of Judah, the tenor of it was, 'My horses are as thy horses, my strength as thy strength,' 1 Kings 22:4. So whatever is God's is ours for our benefit, and what is ours is God's for his service. Mark, God not only saith, I will be yours, but, be a God, that is, I will act like a God. In pardon of sin: Hosea 11:9, 'I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man.' He will not pardon as a man, but, as a God. Man's patience is soon spent and soon tired. What! seven times a day forgive my brother? But he will pardon as a God. And so, when he sanctifies, he will sanctify as a God: 2 Peter 1:3, 'By his divine power he hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.' And so in defence and maintenance, which is part of the covenant: I will feed, maintain, protect thee as a God; that is, not as one that is to be limited in the course of second causes. When he pleases he can give us water, not only out of the fountain, but out of the rock; when there is nothing visible to supply and maintain you, then, I will be a God; then he will glorify us like a God, like an infinite and eternal power. For as God is an infinite God, so he gives us a far more exceeding weight of glory; and as an eternal God, he gives us an eternal weight of glory, 2 Cor. 4:17. The glory he bestows upon us suits with the infiniteness and eternity of his essence. As it is said of Araunah, that was of the royal extraction of the Jebusites, 'He gave like a king to a king,' worthy of



his blood and descent; he had a generous mind: so God will give like a God; therefore, he not only saith, I will be thine, but, be thy God. You think it much when you view a large compass, and can look abroad and say, All this is mine; but one that hath chosen God for his portion hath much more to say: God is mine.

[3.] That which a man would make his portion if he were free to choose, it should be a proper and suitable good, our own good. The heart of man aims at not only bonum, good in common, but also bonum congruum, a suitable fitting good. Every element moveth to its own place, and every living creature desires food proper to itself. So man is not only carried to good, but good that suits to his capacity and necessity. The soul, being a spirit, must have a spiritual good. Indeed, as it acts in the body, and accommodates itself with the necessities of the body, and seeks the good of the body, so it may be carried out to honours, pleasures, and profits, for these are the conveniences of the bodily life: but as it is a spirit, and can live apart from the body, it must have something above these, a spiritual object; and as it is immortal, it must have an immortal good. Now, for a spiritual immortal good do we grope and feel about until we find it, and then there is a great deal of satisfaction: Acts 17:27, 'That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him.' So we are groping and feeling about, as the blind Sodomites did for Lot's door, for some good that may suit the capacity of our souls: we were made for God, and therefore cannot have full contentment without God. But I speak not now of man as man, but suppose him to have a new nature put into him, that carries him after satisfaction: 'We are made partakers of the divine nature,' 2 Peter 1:4. It is called so because it comes from God and tends to him. Now, there must be something suitable to this nature. Pleasure is when those things are enjoyed that suit with us, when the object and the faculty are suited. When every appetite hath a fit diet to feed upon, then a marvellous

deal of pleasure and contentment results from thence: Rom. 8:5, 'They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit.' All things seek a suitable good. Now, they that are after the spirit, that have a new spiritual divine nature put into them, renewed souls, they must have an object proper, and therefore must have something above the concerns of the body, and above the fleshly nature; for everything delights in that which is suitable, as a fish in the stream, and an ox to lick up the grass; and man must have a suitable good as a rational being; but as a spiritual being, must have another good. Grace restores us to the inclinations of nature when it was innocent; therefore the soul, that came from God, must centre in God, and it cannot be quiet without him.

[4.] That which a man would make his portion, it must be sufficient to supply all his wants, that he may have enough to live upon. Now, saith the Lord, 'I am God all-sufficient,' Gen. 17:1; sufficient for the necessities of this life, and that which is to come. He is the fountain of all blessings, spiritual, temporal, eternal; not only their power for ever, but their portion for ever, satisfied with him now and in the life to come: Ps. 142:5, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord, in the land of the living.' They expect all from him; not only peace and righteousness, grace and glory, but food, maintenance, defence, to bear them out in his work. The creature is but God's instrument, or as an empty pipe, unless God flow in by it. If God help them not, the creature cannot help them. These are streams that have water only so long as the spring fills them. Well, then, here is a portion that is every way sufficient. All other portions are accompanied with a want, but this alone sufficeth all. Some things give health, wealth, but not peace; some things give peace, but not honour. But God is all to us—health, wealth, peace, honour, grace, and glory: 'All things are yours, because you are Christ's, and Christ is God's,' so runs the Christian

charter; there is omne bonum in summo bono—all things in the chiefest good. So Rev. 21:7, 'He that overcometh shall inherit all things.' How so? 'For I will be his God.' He that hath God hath him that hath power and command of all things, and therefore shall inherit all things, 'For I will be his God.' And that is the reason of the apostle's riddle, 2 Cor. 6:10, 'As having nothing, yet possessing all things;' that is, all things in God, when they have nothing in the creature. Many times they are kept bare and low, but God carries the purse for them; all things are at his dispose; and we are kept more bare and low that we may be sensible of the strange supplies of his providence. Alas! without him in the midst of our sufficiencies we may be in straits.

[5.] That a man would choose that for his portion wherein he may be contented, satisfied, and sit down as having enough. Now this is only in God. When we choose other things for our portion, still our sore runs upon us; there are some crannies and vacuities of soul that are to be filled up; if we could satisfy our affections, we cannot satisfy our consciences; nothing can content the desires of the soul but God himself; other things may busy us, and vex us, but cannot satisfy us: 'All things are vanity and vexation of spirit.' If a man would make a critical search, as Solomon did; he set himself to see what pleasures and honours would do to content the heart of man, and what riches and learning would do; he had a large estate and heart, and so was in a capacity to try all things, to see if he could extract satisfaction from them; yet he concludes, 'All is vanity and vexation of spirit.' Whosoever will follow this course will come home with disappointment. But in this portion there is contentment; we need no more but God, and there is nothing besides him worth our desire. Necessities that are not supplied by him are but fancies; it is want of grace if we want anything else when we have God for our portion: Ps. 17:14, 'From the men of the world, which have their portion in this

life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure.' A carnal man's happiness is patched up with a great many creatures; they must have dainty fare, costly apparel, this and that, and still their sore runs upon them; they have a fulness of all things, and yet they are not filled. But now, saith David, ver. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' Though God do not make out himself in that latitude and fulness as he will hereafter, yet at present to have communion with God is enough: 'I shall be filled.' There are some desires that are working after God, but they will be filled hereafter. It is true we are not now perfect, but that is no fault of our portion, but the defect of our capacity. Though we have not that fulness that we shall have hereafter, yet we have it initially. Here we have the first-fruits, have it virtually, hope and look for it; there is something begun in the soul that will increase towards this satisfaction. Certainly this is a portion that can alone be possessed with content. God is satisfied with himself and sufficient to his own happiness, therefore surely there is enough in him to fill the creature. That which fills an ocean will fill a bucket; that which will fill a gallon will fill a pint; those revenues that will defray an emperor's expenses are enough for a beggar or poor man. So, when the Lord himself is satisfied with himself, and it is his happiness to enjoy himself, there needs no more; there is enough in God to satisfy. If our desires run out after other things, they are desires not to be satisfied, but to be mortified. If we hunger after other contentments, they are like feverish desires, not to be satisfied, but to be abated in the soul; for he that fills all things hath enough to fill up our hearts.

[6.] Complacency and delight. That which a man would take pleasure in, there where he may have abundant matter of rejoicing and delight, this a man would choose for his portion. Now in God he hath the truest and sincerest delight. This is matter of rejoicing; as David

saith, Ps. 16:5, 6, 'The Lord is my portion.' What then? 'I have a goodly heritage.' Here is that which will revive and refresh my heart enough. There is no rejoicing that is sincere but this. As the discomforts of the new creature are more real than all other discomforts, and pierce deeper—'a wounded spirit who can bear?'—so the joys of the new creature, none go so deep: Ps. 4:6, 'Thou hast put more gladness into my heart,' &c. Others do but tickle the senses, a little refresh the outward man, please the more brutish part, but this the heart. And this is such a joy as can be better felt than uttered: 2 Peter 1:8, it is 'unspeakable,' and none can know the strength and sweetness of it till it be felt: 'a stranger' cannot conceive it, 'doth not intermeddle with his joy,' Prov. 14:10. One drop of this is more than an ocean of carnal pleasure. When we have other things without God, we can never be serious. Take the merriest blades in the world, and dig them to the bottom; still there is something of sadness and remorse that doth sour all their content: conscience is secretly repining, and ready to embitter their joy. Though men strive to bear it down, yet it is ever returning upon them; therefore they cannot be truly cheerful. The most jolly sinners have their pangs that take off the edge of their bravery. Carnal rejoicing makes a great noise, like thorns under a pot, but it is but a blaze and gone. But this is a solid joy and comfort, wherewith a man may look death in the face with cheerfulness, and think of the world to come and not be sad. Alas! a little thing puts the merriest sinner into the stocks of conscience. He that makes it his business to add one pleasure to another, and spend his days in vanity, how soon is his mirth removed! Therefore, if a man would choose a portion to have joy at the highest rate, he should choose God for his portion.

Secondly, How comes a godly man to look upon God under this notion, that no less will content him but God himself? Why, he hath another apprehension, and another manner of heart to close with

him, than carnal men; his understanding is enlightened, and his heart inclined by grace.

1. He sees more into the worth of spiritual and heavenly things. He hath faith, which is the evidence of things not seen, of things that do not lie under the judgment of sense and present reason; he can spy things under a veil, and his eyes are opened to see 'what is the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,' Eph. 1:17, 18; and therefore he is convinced of the fulness and sufficiency that is in God, and the emptiness and straitness that is in the creature; God hath given him counsel, his reins instruct him, Ps. 16:7. All by nature are blind, ignorant, apt to dote upon the creature; but by grace their eyes are opened, that they have another manner of discerning, that they do not see things only by discourse, but their hearts are affected. Others may discourse, but they have not this divine light and spiritual understanding, by which spiritual things may be discerned; as matters of opinion they may, but not as matters of choice. A carnal man may argue out with reason the worth and excellency of God, but he hath not a refined apprehension and persuasive counsel, which is in God's people.

2. Their hearts are inclined to choose him for their portion. They do not only see an alluring worth in the object, but there is an attracting virtue, by which the heart is drawn unto God: John 6:44, 'No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.' The great article of the covenant of grace is to take God for our God. Now all the articles of the new covenant are not only precepts but promises. The conditions of the covenant are conditions in the covenant; God gives what he requires. And therefore, as the great article of the covenant is to take God for our God, so the great blessing of the covenant is to have a new heart, or a new placing of our desires and affections. Sin lieth in a conversion from God to the

creature; grace, in turning us to God again. The change is mainly seen in fixing our chiefest good and our last end. God gives his people a heart to close with him, and accept of him as their portion, to fix upon him as their chiefest good and their last end.

Use 1. To reprove them that do not take God for their portion. Godly men must have God himself; they prefer him above all, and saving grace above other benefits, Ps. 4:6, 7. There is the disposition of the godly and the carnal. 'The many say, Who will show us any good?' But, 'Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us.' A carnal man is for good in common, any good, but not for the light of God's countenance; nothing will satisfy the saints but the light of God's countenance; they prefer him above his gifts, and among his gifts they prefer saving graces and renewing mercies, such as begin and confirm them in their union with God in Christ. But carnal men go no further than the world; they choose not God, but his gifts; and among these not the best, but the common sort, such as suit with the appetite of the fleshly nature, and the more brutish part of these—riches, pleasures, and honours; and these too, not as coming from God, but as coming to them by chance. They not only say good in general, but 'who will show me,' &c. As they look after uncertain blessings, so they look after an uncertain author, as they fall out in the course of second causes. If they have these, they bless their hearts, and content themselves. To convince these men of the baseness of their choice, and make them bethink themselves, their choice is part of their punishment. There cannot be a greater punishment than that they should have what they choose, that they should be written in the earth, Jer. 17:13; they shall have this and no more; that God should say to them, Silver and gold you shall have, but 'in this matter no lot nor portion,' Acts 8 Their bellies shall be filled with hid treasure, they shall have gorgeous apparel, dainty fare, substance enough to leave to their babes, but be deprived of heaven.

It is the greatest misery that can be, to be condemned to this kind of happiness; that we should thus degrade ourselves, and sit upon the threshold when they might sit upon the throne, and lick only the dust of his footstool. But wicked men will not be sensible of this now, but one day they shall, of the misery of this their foolish choice; at death usually: Jer. 17:11, 'At his latter end he shall be a fool.' Then his heart will rave against him: O fool, madman! that thou wert not as careful to get the favour of God, as to get this worldly pelf! when he must go into another world, and he is launching out into the great gulf of eternity. And in hell they will be sensible: Luke 16:25, 'Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things,' &c. The conscience of their foolish choice is a part of their torment, when their heart shall return upon them and say, This was because thou wouldst look after temporal things; when snares, and brimstone, and a horrible tempest is poured out upon them. What thoughts have they of their portion when they are cast out with the devil and damned spirits! Carnal men think the difference between them and others will ever hold out when they glitter in the world. Oh, but the time is coming when death will undeceive them! And at the day of judgment they will be sensible of it, when they shall be refused as the outcasts of the world, and when the saints shall have their portion, when the Lord shall take the godly to himself, receive them into his bosom, and welcome them to heaven, and call them to his right hand; and they shall be banished out of his presence with a 'Go, ye cursed;' when they shall become the loathing of God, the scorn of angels and blessed spirits; when it shall be said, as in Ps. 52:7, 'Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness.' Oh, then, how will conscience return upon the wretchedness and folly of their hearts, and be exercised upon it! This will vex and gall them in hell, with anxious thoughts of it to all eternity. As by the fire that never shall be quenched is signified the



wrath of God, so by the worm that never dies the violent working of conscience upon the folly of choosing perishing vanities.

Use 2. It exhorts us to this necessary duty, to choose God for our portion. It is not a slight thing, but that upon which your eternal happiness doth depend; it is the fundamental article of the covenant of grace: and the question God puts you to is, whether you will choose him for your portion? therefore he begins the commandments with this, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' God is not your God unless he be set uppermost in your souls; he cannot be your portion unless he be your chiefest good. There is no possibility of entering into covenant with God unless you subscribe to this main article. Again, as it is a very necessary work, so it is an evidence and fruit of God's election; if a man would come to know the thoughts of God concerning him before all the world, what his destiny is. God's election or choosing of you is manifested by your election or your choosing of God, for all God's works leave an impression upon the creature. He chooseth us that we might choose him: 'I will say, You are my people, and you shall say, I am your God.' Again, you must have something for your portion. There is no man hath a sufficiency in himself. The soul is like a sponge, always thirsting, and seeking of something from without to be filled—a chaos of desires. Man was made to live in dependence. Now, of all portions in the world, there is none worth the having but God himself; nothing else can make you completely blessed, and satisfy all the necessities and all the capacities of soul and body. When you have outward things, what have you for your conscience? If these things could fill up your affections, they bear no proportion with conscience; your sore will run upon you, and your inward griefs will not be cured. But this is such a portion, that besides internal grace, there shall be a competent measure of outward things. God will provide for you: Ps. 23:1, 'The Lord is my shepherd.' What then? 'I

shall not want.' This interest will give you temporal things and the comforts of this life, so that you have the fountain of all other mercies. While others do but drink of the streams, and of streams where they are muddy, where they partake of the soil through which they run, you go to the clear fountain. Alas! others do but pluck the leaves and flowers, but you have the fruits and very root itself, the perpetual fountain and well-spring of comfort, and root of all the blessedness the heart can wish for. Again, all other comforts grow upon this interest, and when all other things are lost, this can supply you again. All worldly things, when we have them, yet they have not a root; but you have the root, so that when other things fail, this will yield you all manner of supplies. Yea, this is that which seasons and makes all other things comfortable, when we have them and the love of God with them. This man of God had a kingdom and a great deal of wealth; he was a victorious king, as we may see by his offering, 1 Chron. 29, what cart-loads of gold and silver he offers to God: yet in the midst of all this fulness he saith, 'Thou art my portion.' Other portions may turn to a man's hurt, as they are occasions of sin, as they expose to envy and danger. Many a man is undone both here and hereafter by making the creature his portion; but never any man was undone by making God his portion. It was the end of our creation. God, passing by all other creatures, set his heart upon man. He made all things for man, and man for himself. All other things were either subject to our dominion, or created for our use; but man was made immediately for God, for the enjoyment of God; made for himself, and for none else besides himself. We should have no rest in ourselves until we come to the enjoyment of God. God was not refreshed from his work, he rested not until he made man; therefore man should not rest until he comes to God. God takes us for his portion, and therefore you should take God for your portion: Deut. 32:9, 'For the Lord's portion is his people;' Zech. 2:12, 'And the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose

Jerusalem again.' If God shall choose a company of men to be his portion, certainly it becomes them again to choose him. God is willing to communicate his goodness, therefore why should we be satisfied with other things? He reasons with us, is angry that we will run to other things. Why will you lay out your time and strength in that which will not satisfy you? Isa. 55:2. He doth invite you to come and choose him. He complains, and takes it grievously when he offers himself in the gospel: Ps. 81:11, 'Israel would none of me.' Oh! shall the God that made us thus passionately offer himself to us, and shall he be refused? Let this persuade you to choose God for your portion.

Use 3. For trial. Have you chosen God for your portion? This will be seen—

1. By your endeavours to get anything of God into your hearts. No man seeketh after God; there is the great complaint. If you did choose God, you would pursue all ways and means that you might gain him, and count all things but dung for Christ, as the apostle doth; then nothing would detain you from him, you would not be satisfied: Oh! I must have God; and God would be followed after: Ps. 73:25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee?'

2. By your prayers. What do you pray for? When you come to God, what do your hearts run upon? what do you seek for from God? Is it God himself? To seek to God and not for God is but a carnal design upon God: Hosea 7:14, 'They howl upon their beds for corn, and wine, and oil.' They are but brutish desires, that terminate in other things, that are carried out more after them than God's favour and grace; therefore his favour must be sought in the first place.

3. By your behaviour under trouble when other things fail: Lam. 3:24, 'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore I will hope in

him.' When they were driven from their other portions (for that is spoken of), when all manner of calamities did befall them, and they were cast out, and their inheritance turned to strangers, then, 'Lord, thou art our portion.' When you have nothing left but God, can you live upon God? and can he be all in all to you? 1 Sam. 30:6, 'David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.' When the Amalekites carried away all, yet this was his comfort, God was left still. And so Hab. 3:18, 'When the labour of the olive shall fail,' &c. What then? 'Then I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.' When you can count yourself happy enough in God, Deus meus et omnia—if I have God, I have all; then you have chosen God for your portion.

4. By your delight in God: Ps. 37:4, 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.' When this is the great rejoicing of your souls, that you can get but one beam of God's love and his favour darted upon your consciences, this is that which revives more than all other temporal things whatever.

5. In mourning for his absence; if your God be gone, that is the grief of your souls. God can supply the want of the creature, but no creature can supply the want of God; therefore it is ground of trouble if he hide his face. This lamenting and mourning after a withdrawn God is frequently spoken of in scripture. But the great evidence lies in the words, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord!' What then? 'I have said, that I would keep thy words.' Hence observe—

Doct. 2. Those which have chosen God for their portion will manifest it by a fixed resolution and strict care of obedience.

They are loath to break with God, rather break with anything else. It must needs be so, because—

1. Holiness is a means of maintaining communion between us and God, and keeping up an interest in him as our only happiness: 1 John 1:6, 7, 'If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another: but if we walk in darkness, and say we have fellowship with him, we lie, and do not the truth.' Unless there be a care to please him, certainly you do not choose him for your portion; for if all your comfort and happiness lies in God, all your diligence and care will be to please God. God was the portion of the Levites, it is said, because they ministered before him, Num. 18:20. So it is true of the spiritual Levites, they that are careful to walk with God, minister before him, and keep close with him; God will be their portion. All sincere Christians are purified as the sons of Levi.

2. Because this is the only evidence. They that love God will love his word, and if they love it they will live by it, and square their actions accordingly. By careless walking you blot your evidences, and so weaken your comfort.

3. Because God is your portion, therefore it should encourage us to keep his word: Gen. 17:1, 'I am God all-sufficient; walk before me and be thou perfect.' If we have an all-sufficient portion, all our business should be to keep in with God. All warping comes from doubting of God's all-sufficiency, as if God alone were not enough for us. Carnal fear, love, hope, doth draw us off from God to the creature, we are afraid to lose worldly enjoyments, so break with God. Therefore, if we look upon God as all-sufficient, it will necessarily follow we should encourage ourselves to serve him.

4. If we do not keep his word, our lusts will carry us forth elsewhere. There are certain corrupt principles within you will draw you off from God to another portion: Ezek. 14:5, 'They are all estranged from me through their idols.' What kind of idols were these? Idols of wood

and stone? No; the prophet explains them, 'They have set up their idols in their heart,' ver. 3. Christians, a man may be an idolater in opinion, and grossly, when he worships stocks and stones; and he may be an idolater spiritually and in practice. And which is most incurable of these two, think you? Certainly the spiritual idolater. A man may easily be convinced of his false worship by reason and argument, what a brutish thing it is to worship stocks and stones, things that have no life, nor can help him; but he cannot be convinced of his spiritual idolatry, or cured of that but by grace. Covetousness is idolatry, because it draws off our love, fear, trust, from God and his service, to riches, and so proves a snare to the soul. Idolatry in our affections is more dangerous than gross idolatry in our opinions and outward worship, when our affections carry us out to another good.

5. Again, out of gratitude, when God doth all for us, can we deny him anything? Dost thou love God as the chiefest good, and wilt not thou fear to offend him? Whoever chooseth God for his portion will have David's disposition, 'I have said I will keep thy words;' he will be exact and punctual to keep in with God.

## SERMON LXV

**I entreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word.—VER. 58.**

IN the former verse I took notice of two parts—David's protestation, 'Thou art my portion;' and his resolution, 'I will keep thy words.' To either of the branches this verse may be supposed to have respect. To the former thus, as a second evidence: if we make God our portion,

this will necessarily follow, we shall desire his favour above all things else. Our portion is that good which we choose, renouncing all things else; therefore, when our hearts are set upon it, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee?' Ps. 73:25. When you entreat his favour with your whole heart, that is the evidence God is your portion. Or you may refer it to the latter clause thus, 'I said I will keep thy words,' therefore I entreat thy favour. We cannot carry on a good purpose without God's favour, unless he assist us therein. When we are most resolved, we must expect opposition and assaults both from within and without. The devil will seek all he can to oppose you, and to shake your resolutions, and your lusts will rage anew upon a severe restraint. Therefore those that resolve to enter into a strict course must seek relief from God's favour and mercy, as David here, 'I entreated thy favour with my whole heart.' In the words we have an account of David's practice upon a choice and resolution; he betook himself to prayer.

Here you have—

1. The object or principal thing sought, God's favour.
2. The manner, with my whole heart, with a sincere affection. He doth not say, with his lips only, but his heart; and not with his heart only, but with his whole heart.
3. The sum of his request, or the fountain of all that he expected from God, be merciful to me.
4. The rule or ground of his expectation, according to thy word. The meaning is, that God, according to his promise, would graciously help him.

First, For the first, 'I entreated thy favour;' or, as it is in the Hebrew, 'I painfully sought thy face;' meaning that he did with importunate and humble suit beg the smile of God's countenance. By face is meant favour: Prov. 29:26, 'many seek the ruler's favour;' it is, the ruler's face, that he may look cheerfully upon them: and I painfully sought, so the word signifies; it notes such importunity as is necessary for so great a blessing. The note is this—

Doct. God's people, those that have made him their portion, they earnestly and constantly, above all things, desire his favour.

1. This God calls for: Ps. 105:4, 'Seek the Lord, seek his face evermore.' None have such communion with God but they need seek more: Ps. 27:8, 'Thou saidst, Seek my face; thy face, Lord, will I seek.' 'Thou saidst;' it is that which God speaks in all his ordinances; the whole drift of the word is to press us to get and keep the sense of God's love ever fresh in our hearts.

2. The nature of the saints carries them to it. This is the difference between them and carnal men, Ps. 4:6, 7. The light of his countenance is spoken of either with allusion to the sun, whose light displayed cheers the plants; or with allusion to the smiles of a friend. One good look from God the children of God prefer above all the world. All earthly things cannot please them so much as a smile from God, nor put such gladness in their hearts. But more especially do they seek it most painfully—

[1.] When they have never as yet attained any sense of it, but lie under doubts, fears, and anxious uncertainty; then, if God will but look upon them, make out his love to their consciences, what a comfort will that be to them! A man may want assurance and have grace, but he cannot slight assurance and have grace. He that is without it may be one of God's children, but he that doth not look



after it, and is satisfied without it, certainly is none of that number. Therefore this is the desire and earnest prayer of all God's people in common, that God would cause his face to shine upon them: Ps. 80:1, 'Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth;' that is, that sittest upon the mercy-seat. Oh, that he would be good to them in Christ! for between the cherubims there was the mercy-seat, where God sat. The meaning is, that he would a little dart in beams of comfort to their consciences.

[2.] They thus painfully entreat the favour of God when they have lost it by sin; for then they are afflicted with a double evil—want of so great a comfort, and a sense of their own folly. A sense of God's favour may be withheld out of mere sovereignty, yet even then God's children will be earnest; but when it is withdrawn out of justice, as a correction for our folly and careless walking, there is greater cause of earnestness, that we may redeem and recover our loss again; then we are to be more earnest: 'Turn us again, Lord God of hosts, and cause thine anger towards us to cease,' Ps. 80:7. By their former experience they know the sweetness of God's favour, and by their present loss the bitterness of the want of it. Basil hath a notable comparison. He saith, if an object be too bright, it must be set at a distance from the eye that we may see better; so worldly things must be set at a distance from us: therefore God seems to be at a distance, hides his face, that his people might know by the loss and want of it how to value their blessings.

How far do they discover their earnestness?

(1.) In that they seek it above all other things—above corn, wine, and oil. This is not their painful desire to be made great, rich, high, honourable, happy in the world. All the world doth them no good without the favour of God. As all the stars, though they shine

together, do not dispel the darkness of the night, so no creatures can comfort us sufficiently when God hides his face from them: Ps. 30:1, 'Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled.' They cannot find God as they were wont. As at funeral feasts, dear friends have little comfort when they miss their old friend that was wont to bid them welcome at the house; so when God is gone, what comfort can they take in their portion? Many will say, Why are you pensive and sad? you have a great many friends, a great estate! Oh! you do not know the wound of a gracious heart, and how little these things are in comparison of the favour of God!

(2.) They manifest it in this, their contentedness with him, though they are kept low and bare in outward things: Ps. 17:15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.' It is enough for them to have the face of God, though they do not flourish in worldly plenty as others do, when in the exercise of grace they can find God propitious, 'behold his face in righteousness.' If they have not the candle they have the sun. If they go to God, they are welcome upon all occasions. If the world frown upon them, God doth not so: they are beloved of him, and in favour with him, and that satisfieth them.

What may be the reasons why the children of God so prize his favour?

(1st.) The worth of the thing itself: Ps. 63:3, 'Thy favour is better than life,' better than all comforts, better in itself, for this is that which we are never weary of. A man may be weary of all outward comforts: 'Days may come wherein there is no pleasure,' Eccles. 12:1; 'At that time the soul abhors dainty food,' Job 33:20. Pleasure, nay, life itself, may be a burden, but none ever was weary of the love of God, that cannot be a burden; this doth not satiate and cloy us. Again, the love

of God cannot be supplied and recompensed by other things: when a man loseth other things it may be made up in better. If a man be poor in this world, God hath chosen him to be rich in faith; if afflicted and destitute of outward provisions, yet they have inward comforts and graces, and they will supply and make up this loss. But the loss of God's favour cannot be supplied; when that departs from you, and a man loseth the hope he seemeth to have, what a sorry comfort is it, having forfeited the love of God, to seek our amends in the creature! Then this is more durable than the present life. Other comforts fail, but the love of God never fails. This is the original of all other comforts: Ps. 30:7, 'By thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong;' and Ps. 44:3, 'Their own arm did not save them, but the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.' Sure it is better to drink of the fountain than of the stream: all is from the favour of God. In short, it is the vitality and the cause of life, and the cause of all comfort. This is better than life.

(2d.) They are affected with that which is their true misery, therefore they most importunately beg the favour of God. Every man prays according to the sense that he hath, according to that which he counts his misery. He that hath a sense of no other calamity but to be poor, scorned, or exposed to contempt, or the absence of the creature, prays accordingly. Sometimes he howls like a dog in pain, or beasts that want food, Hosea 7:14. But he that hath a deeper sense of his greatest necessities, he is affected with sin, which is the cause of all trouble; therefore he must have the favour of God and the grace of God. A godly and a carnal man differ as a child and a man in their apprehensions about pain and trouble. A child that is sick and would be eased of its present smart and pain, looks to nothing but that; but an understanding man knows the cause must be taken away. A child speaks according to the sense and apprehension it hath—take away his aching head or burning heat; but the understanding man looks

not only after present ease, but health, that the root of the distemper may be removed. So a worldly man would have affliction gone, and looks no further, but a godly man hath a deeper sense, he must have the favour of God; therefore his heart works painfully within him till this be obtained.

(3d.) They entreat the favour of God with all their hearts, because their business lies mainly with God. Their work is to walk closely with God, and keep up a strict communion with him. A carnal man's business lies with God sometimes in his trouble; but when he licks himself whole and is at ease, he can live without it. But a godly man's business is always with God, for God is always with him, in trouble and out of trouble. Therefore that is a notable speech, Ps. 91:9, 'Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation;' a refuge, that is a place of retreat in time of war; a habitation, there is our residence in time of peace, when every one sits under his own vine and fig-tree. Now, a godly man makes God not only his refuge but his habitation; therefore it concerns him to prize the favour of God, and keep in with him, for he is otherwise at an utter loss; therefore he must study to get all clear: if God be angry with him, his business is at a stand, and he cannot walk cheerfully with him from whom he expects all.

Use 1. To reprove those that are indifferent whether they enjoy God's favour, yea or nay; so they may enjoy the creature they are satisfied. Surely God is not these men's portion, for their only care is what they shall eat, how they may be clothed, how to live well in the world; but were never acquainted with this kind of trouble about God's favour: Ps. 10:4, it is said, 'The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.' He never troubles himself how to keep in with God; it never goes to his heart. He is such an one as can bring to pass whatever he projecteth and

desireth, without troubling himself with the fetters of religion and the care of a strict duty: he can live at large, and yet obtain his heart's desire, and thinketh them the only wise men, fit for his imitation, that can increase in worldly enjoyments without troubling themselves with such niceties as perplex others: he scorneth to trouble himself with prayer, and the observances which are necessary to waiting upon God. Again, it reproveth those that lie stupid and senseless under God's active displeasure. These are not as gross as the former, but make some profession of respect to God, but have not yet a tender sense of God's accesses and recesses, his comings and goings. When the Lord hides himself from their prayers, and doth not give out the wonted influences of his grace and comfort, they mind it not, do not with earnestness seek to recover it again. If you did make this your business without interruption, when you have not the smiles of God, the want of this would create pain.

Use 2. Of exhortation, to press us, if we would have God for our God, then to seek his favour above all things. Wait with an affectionate earnestness in every ordinance for some new discovery, some comfortable intimation of God's word: Ps. 130:6, 'My soul waiteth for thee.' What? for outward deliverances? No; but 'I wait for the Lord, and in his word do I hope.' Again, in every enjoyment it is not enough to have the creature with God's leave (so can all men have it, it is their portion), but you must have it with God's love, as a token from God, wrapt up in the bowels of Christ. God gives many gifts to wicked men, but doth not give them his love. This we should look after, that we may find our comforts to be sprinkled with love, that if God deliver you out of any strait, he may love you out of it, Isa. 38:17.

Secondly, For the manner, 'I have sought thy favour.' How? 'With my whole heart.' Note—

Doct. When we pray for the favour of God, it must be with our whole heart.

There is this intended in it—

1. The constant favour and presence of God, we must pray for it, for without prayer faith lies idle, Heb. 4:16.

2. They that pray for it, their hearts must be set upon what they pray. It is not enough that our tongues babble out a cold form, as many learn to pray as parrots speak, by rote. They say, not pray a prayer: James 5:17, 'Elias prayed earnestly;' in the margin, and so in the original, he 'prayed in prayer.' A man may take up words of course, and say things after others, which are not indeed the real desires of his heart; so they pray as if they prayed not, slightly, without any warmth and affection.

3. It is not enough that our hearts concur, but our whole hearts must go along with this work. Many times we pray but with half a heart:—

[1.] Partly when prayer is a fruit of memory and invention, but not the fruit of conscience. Common illumination will tell us how prayer is to be formed according to the tenor of the Christian faith; so men may repeat words such as the understanding judgeth fit, without any answerable touch upon the heart. This is their sin who are more careful about notions in prayer than the affections.

[2.] A man prays but with a piece of his heart when he prays rather with his conscience than with his affections. Will you distinguish this, a dictate of conscience must be distinguished from a purpose of heart. Conscience may tell us what is to be done, yet the heart have no liking to it. Austin saith when he was a carnal man he had some kind of conscience, and prayed against his sins; but, saith he, I was

afraid God would hear me. The favour of God is necessary, but the heart many times is not engaged in the pursuit of it. We oftener pray from our memories than our consciences, and oftener from our consciences than our affections; the heart is not put into the duty.

[3.] When our affections are divided to carnal things, and the comfortable part of spiritual things. No doubt there is no man but would have the favour of God, but it is with a condition that he may live as he does, and be as he is, and so the prevailing part of his soul bends him to his present course; he regards iniquity in his heart, and sin hath an interest and lies very near; he would have the favour of God abstractedly, but when he considers how his lusts must be parted with, there his heart is divided.

Use. Oh! then, look to it that you beg the Lord's favour with all your heart. God knows the heart. Rebekah dressed up Jacob so that his father mistook him. Ay! but God cannot mistake; his eye is not dim as Isaac's, he sees the heart; therefore let your heart, and whole heart, go out in the pursuit.

Quest. How shall we know when our hearts are thus thoroughly bent, if you seek him with all your hearts?

Ans. Then you will observe how you speed when you look after him; you will see what becomes of your requests. 'I will hearken what God will speak,' saith David, and 'will pray and look up;' as Elijah looked up to see the cloud a-coming. Again, if we pray with the whole heart there will be importunate arguings; desire will take no nay: Ps. 63:8, 'My soul followeth hard after thee.' Oh! it will be a painful, grievous thing to your souls if you do not speed in your prayers. Not a slight motion, or cold wish, but such as deeply affects the heart, and not easily put off and satisfied with other things. Wicked men would have the favour of God, but they are easily put out of the humour.

Again, then we pray with the whole heart when there is such a desire as not to be discouraged, but you venture again, when the Lord seems to put off and give a check to your requests: Isa. 26:8, 'The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee.' Still desires grow hotter and hotter, and when there is a kind of impudence not to be put off. Again, such as do excite endeavours for the obtaining of God's love and a sense of his favour. It will cost us pain and trouble when we are hard at work, and will be diligent in this thing. But when you rest in a few cold prayers, you are never hearty with God: Ps. 27:4, 'One thing have I desired.' What then? 'That will I seek after,' and use a great deal of diligence to come by it.

Thirdly, The fountain of all that we expect is mercy. All that seek God's favour must expect it upon terms of grace: 'Be merciful unto me.' We cannot say, Pay me what thou owest, or, Give me for my money. All whom God accepts to his grace and favour are unworthy: Isa. 55:1, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price.' Secondly, They who are received to favour still need mercy to pardon failings, Gal. 5. The best are but sanctified in part, and have the dregs of corruption always remaining, and frequently stirring in them.

Use. Let us thus deal with God: Hosea 14:2, 'Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.' The sum of all our requests is, that God would be merciful to us.

Fourthly, The rule and ground of confidence is 'according to thy word.' God's word is the rule of our confidence, for therein is God's stated course. If we would have favour from God and mercy, it must be upon his own terms. God will accept of us in Christ, if we repent,



believe, and obey, and seek his favour diligently: he will not deny those who seek, ask, knock. We would have mercy, but will not observe God's directions. We must ask according to God's will, not without a promise, nor against a command. God is made a voluntary debtor by his promise. These are notable props of faith, when we are encouraged to seek by the offer, to apply by the promise. We thrive no more in a comfortable sense of God's love, because we take not this course.

## **SERMON LXVI**

## **I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.—VER. 59.**

IN these words we have—

1. David's exercise, I thought on my ways.
2. The effect of it, I turned my feet unto thy testimonies.

In the former verse he beggeth mercy and the favour of God. Now those that beg mercy must be in a capacity to receive mercy. God is ready to show mercy, but to whom? To the penitent, that humbly seek it, and turn from the evil of their ways. We cannot expect God should be favourable to us while we continue in a course of sin. Therefore David showeth that he entreated God's mercy and favour upon God's terms, that he was one of those converted by grace: 'I thought on my ways,' &c. Some copies of the Septuagint have it τὰς ὁδοῦς σου διελογισάμην, 'I considered thy ways,' much to the same purpose; for a serious consideration of the excellency of God's ways is of use, as well as of the naughtiness of our own. But other copies read better, according to the original Hebrew, 'I thought on my ways,' our omissions, commissions, purposes, practices, the course of our thoughts, words, deeds.

In the other part, when we are said to turn our feet unto God's testimonies, it is meant of the conversion of the whole soul, evidenced by the course of our feet or practices. So Eccles. 5:1, 'Keep thy feet when thou goest into the house of God;' the meaning is, look to thy heart and affections. We are sometimes said to turn to God, and sometimes to the testimonies or commands of God. We turn to God as the object or last end; to his testimonies as the rule of our

conversation to lead us thither. So that by it is meant an effectual conversion of the whole man, to walk according to the rule of God's word.

The text issueth itself into this one point:—

Doct. That serious consideration of our own ways maketh way for sound conversion to God.

In the managing of this doctrine I shall discuss two things:—

1. The necessity of serious consideration in order to repentance.
2. How much it concerneth us after we have considered effectually to turn to the Lord.

First, The necessity of serious consideration in order to repentance. And there—

1. What is consideration.
2. The objects of it, or the things that must be considered.
3. I shall argue the necessity of this.

First, What is this consideration or thinking upon our ways? In the general, it is a returning upon our hearts, or a serious and anxious debating with ourselves concerning our eternal condition. For the understanding whereof, consider that a carnal man is mindless and altogether careless of his eternal interests, like a fool or madman, or one out of his wits. We were 'sometimes foolish,' ἀνόητοι. Titus 3:3, like men asleep or distracted; they do not know what they are doing, nor what will be the issue of things, till God awaken their hearts to think of their condition, and then they begin to act like men again,

and to be sensible of their case. Thus it is said of the prodigal, Luke 15:17, εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἦλθεν, that 'he came to himself;' as a man when he is drunk, we say he is not himself, he doth not consider what he doth, nor consider the danger of his actions. And the Psalmist, speaking of the conversion of the Gentiles, saith, Ps. 22:27, 'The ends of the earth shall remember, and turn unto the Lord;' that is, shall recollect themselves, and consider of the end of their lives, whence they are, whither they are going, and what shall become of them to all eternity, as if all this while they had forgotten the purpose for which they were sent into the world, who was their master, what was their business. Alas! before this serious consideration, men in seeing see not, and in hearing hear not, as a man that is musing of another matter is not affected with what you tell him; he heareth and doth not hear. It is the awakening of the heart which is God's first work, before he giveth other grace: Eph. 5:14, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' First awake, and then arise from the dead, before which men have but such languid notions of God and Christ and salvation by him as men have in a dream; but when we come to weigh and scan things with affection and application, then the soul is awakened.

Now God bringeth us to this—

1. Partly by his word, which showeth our natural face, James 1:23, 24, or natural estate and condition before God. It is appointed for this purpose, to be the instrument to awaken men, to discover them to themselves. Now, because this may make but a weak impression, such as may soon be blotted out, ἀνδρὶ παρακύψαντι, they forget and fall asleep again; therefore to this God joineth his rod. Therefore—
2. Partly by afflictions; as the prodigal, when he was reduced to husks and rags, then he came to himself and was brought to his right

mind. Again, 1 Kings 8:47, 'If in the land of their affliction they shall bethink themselves and repent;' the Hebrew is, 'bring it back to their hearts.' Affliction is sanctified to this end, to open the eyes; it bringeth us to ourselves. So Haggai, 1:5, 7, 'Now consider your ways,' now θέσθε τὰς καρδίας ἐπὶ τὰς ὁδοὺς ὑμῶν, 'lay your hearts upon your ways;' when they sowed much and brought in little, and what they earned was put into a bag with holes; that is, when the hand of God was upon them, and the visible curse of his providence. When the word of God doth not effectually discover men to themselves, then he sends afflictions to put them upon a search, and by his rod whippeth them out of their sleepy dreams and carnal security.

3. By his Spirit; and the first effect of his operations is compunction: Acts 2:37, 'When they heard this they were pricked in heart, and cried out, Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?' It makes them anxious and solicitous. I ascribe this work to the Spirit, because it was a time when the Spirit was newly poured forth. Well then, in the general, it is God's awakening the heart to a serious and anxious debate with itself concerning its eternal condition, before which we go on sleepily in a course of sin; but then the soul crieth out. What have I done, and what shall I do? how carelessly have I lived! and what shall become of me to all eternity?

More particularly, this thinking upon our ways involveth in its full latitude three grand duties:—

1. As it relateth to our past estate, or the ways wherein we have walked, self-examining, or a serious searching and inquiring in what condition we are before God. This is necessary to conversion and turning to the Lord: Lam. 3:40, 'Let us search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord.' There needeth a serious calling ourselves to an account, or a strict view and survey of our former courses, if we

would amend what is amiss in them; and still, as we renew our repentance, this course must we take.

2. As it relateth to present actions, or the ways wherein we are to walk, so it implieth prudent consideration before we do anything; let us see our warrant, that we may do nothing but what is agreeable to God's word: Prov. 4:26, 27, 'Ponder the paths of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established: turn not to the right hand or to the left; remove thy foot from evil.' We have a narrow line to walk by, but a foot of ground to go upon; and therefore we should not walk at haphazard, but with much exactness: Eph. 5:15, 'See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise;' therefore we need to weigh all our actions in the balance of the sanctuary, that if anything displease God we may avoid it. The conscience of our weakness, and the strictness of our rule, should make us take the better heed to ourselves.

3. With respect to the tendency and issues of things; and so it noteth fore-consideration or deliberation in order to choice. God biddeth his people 'stand upon the ways and see, and inquire after the old paths, which is the good way, and walk therein,' Jer. 6:16; as travellers, when they are at a loss or in doubt of their way, seeing divers paths before them, are careful to inform themselves aright that they may take the next, readiest, and best way for their journey's end. An awakened conscience is like Hercules, in bivio; there are two ways present themselves—the way of sin and flesh-pleasing, and the way of God's commandments; or, as it is Mat. 7:13, 14, 'the broad way,' and 'the narrow way.' The broad way of sin seemeth pleasant and enticing, but it leadeth to death; the narrow way is rough and craggy, troublesome to flesh and blood, but the end is life and peace. Now the soul debateth upon the choice which of these is better, by weighing the loss and gain on either side, and the final issue and

tendency of both these ways; or rather, the awakened soul is in the case of a man that is yet to choose; or like a man that is out of the way, and wants his usual marks. He bethinketh himself, If I go on in this broad beaten road of corruption, I am sure to go down to the chambers of death, and perish evermore. Oh! but let me make a stop; it is better to take God's direction than the way of mine own heart; it is a way that will undo me for ever. Hitherto I have gone awry; how shall I do to get into the right way? I would be happy, and this course will never make me so; surely it is better to take God's counsel than to please the flesh. No course will satisfy conscience, no course will make you happy, but a life led according to the word of God. Thus you see it implieth—

1. An examination of our past course, or a looking into our own estate.
2. A careful watch over future actions.
3. A consideration of the issue and event of things. I have viewed my life past. I have been wrong, and I see it will be bitterness in the issue; therefore I purpose to give up myself to a course of obedience, and therefore to consider well of my actions for the future. Now this is a work that is not once to be done, but always. As often as we look to ourselves, we shall find something that needeth amendment; and therefore we need to press the heart with new and pregnant thoughts to mind our duty, and to use constant caution, and taking heed to our ways that we may not go wrong. Ps. 39:1, thus did David, to keep his heart right, 'I thought on my ways.'

Secondly, The objects of this consideration, or the things that must be considered; that may be gathered out of the former discourse. But

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1. Who made thee? Eccles. 12:1, 'Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth.' It is a great advantage to call to mind whose creatures we are; for this will shame us, that we have done no more than we have done for him, from whom we have all that we have; and this in youth, when the effects of this creating bounty are most fresh upon our senses. In good earnest consider, who was it that made thee a reasonable creature; not a stone, and without life; nor a plant, and without sense; nor a beast, and without reason; but a man, with reason, and understanding, and will, and affections; that thou mayest know him, and love him, and enjoy him. And hast thou never thought of the God that made thee? Art thou of those hare-brained fools that go on rashly in a course of sin, and 'God is not in all their thoughts'? Ps. 10:4. How canst thou look upon the body without thoughts of him whose workmanship it is? or think of thy soul without thinking of God whose image and superscription it bears, and without whom thou canst not so much as think? Shall it be troublesome to thee to have frequent thoughts of God, when thou canst go musing of vanity all the day long? Shall every trifle find a room in thy heart, when God findeth no room there? 'He is not far from every one of us,' Acts 17:27, but we are far from him. He is before thee, behind thee, round about thee, yea, within thee, or else thou couldst not keep thy breath in thy body for a moment, and wilt thou not then take some time to season thy heart with thoughts of God? The first miscarriage of men came from this: Rom. 1:28, 'They liked not to retain God in their knowledge.' Thoughts of God and right opinions of God were a burden to them, and therefore they gave up themselves to an ungodly course and evil state of mind. And wilt thou put such a scorn and contempt upon thy Creator as never seriously to think of him? yea, when thoughts of God rush in upon thy mind, to turn them out as unwelcome guests? This is to degenerate into the state of devils, a part of whose torment it is to think of God: they 'believe and tremble;' the more explicit thoughts



they have of the name of God, the more is their horror increased. Oh! then let thy meditations of God be sweet and serious, Ps. 104:34. Everything that passeth before thine eyes proclaims an invisible God, an infinite and eternal power, that made thee and all things else. Shall the heavens above, the earth beneath thee say, Remember God; and every creature, every pile of grass thou treadest upon, call to thee, Remember God; and wilt thou be so stupid and scornful as not to cast a look upon him? Then we begin to be serious when thoughts of God are more fastened upon our hearts.

2. Why did he make thee? Not in vain; for no wise agent will make a thing to no purpose, especially with such advice, 'Let us make man.' Certainly not for a life of sin, to break his laws, and follow your lusts, and satisfy your fleshly desires. Was this God's end, that the creature might rebel against himself? This is not consistent with his goodness, to make us for such an end; or if so, why did he make the rules of justice and equity natural to us, so that man is a law to himself? Rom. 2:14. Nor for sport and recreation, to eat, drink, and be merry, or to melt away your days in ease and idleness. He spake rather like a beast than a man, 'Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry; thou hast goods laid up for many years,' Luke 12:19. If merely for pleasures, why did he give us a conscience? The brute beasts are fitter for such a use, who have no conscience, and therefore no remorse to embitter their pleasures. What was the end for which God made us? Was it to gather wealth, and that the soul might cater for the body, and that we might live well here in the world? No; for then God's work would terminate in itself. And why were such noble faculties given us, such a high-flying reason, that hath a sense of another world, if this were all God's end, that we might grovel here upon earth, and scrape and heap up this world's riches? We see they are the basest of men who are given to this kind of pursuits. Surely this was not God's end. But why was it? Prov. 16:4, 'God hath made

all things for himself,' for his glory; and so man to glorify him and enjoy him. The beasts were made to glorify him in their kind, but man to enjoy him. This is my end, to seek after God, to please him, to serve him: Ps. 14:2, 'The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God.' God, that hath fixed his end, observeth what man doth in compliance with it, what affection and care they have to find him, please him, glorify him. Reason will tell us as well as scripture that the first cause must be the last end, and we must end there where we began at first: 1 Cor. 10:31, 'Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' Well, then, I was not made for nothing, not to sin away my life, nor to sport it away, nor to talk it away, nor to drudge it away in the servile and basest offices of this life; my end is to enjoy God, and my work and business is to serve and glorify him.

3. How little you have answered this end! God complaineth of our backwardness to this work: Jer. 8:6, 'No man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?' God, upon a review, found every day's work good, very good in themselves, and their correspondence and frame, Gen. 1:31; but when we consider our ways, we shall find that all is evil, very evil. We have too long gone on in a course of sin, and the more we go on, the more we shall go astray, and wander from the great end for which we were created, which was God's service and honour. Oh! consider your ways, especially when conscience is set a work by the word, or when we smart under the folly of our own wanderings, and God maketh us sensible of our mistake by some smart scourge. If we never seriously thought on our ways before, then is a time to think of them, and to count it a mercy that we are not left to go on in a course of sin without checks and disappointments. Oh! look upon the drift and course of your lives and actions, pry into every corner of them. What

have I been doing hitherto? spending my days in vanity and sin? Have I remembered my Creator, made it my work to serve him, my scope to glorify him? Have I looked after this as the unum necessarium, the great law and business of my life, that I might enjoy communion with God? Oh! for how long a time hath God been kept out of his right, and I have been sowing to the flesh, and never minded the great errand for which I was sent into the world! None can excuse himself.

4. The unkindness and baseness of such a course, that you may make it odious to the soul. God hath not only made me, but kept me, and provided for me day after day. 'The God which fed me all my lifetime,' saith Jacob, Gen. 48:15. I have been fed at his table, clothed at his cost, defended, kept, when long ago God might have struck me dead in my sins; and yet all this while I have not thought of God, to pay the return of my thanks and obedience to my great benefactor. The very beasts are more dutiful in their kind to man, who, as God's instrument, provideth for them: Isa. 1:3, 'The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but my people will not know, Israel will not consider.' How senseless have I been of the great obligations wherein I stand bound to God! There is the fault; we do not know, and will not consider what hath been done to God for this.

5. What it will come to, or what will become of you, if you should still so continue, or if I should go on in this course, what will be my portion for ever? Nothing but an eternal separation from God, and endless torments with the devil and his angels: Ps. 50:22, 'Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.' Oh! this is the means to awaken the conscience, and to affect the heart with high and right thoughts of God. What will be the end of those that go far away from God, if they do not make haste to come home to him? Eternal and merciless vengeance; for

God will not always bear with forgetful sinners; they shall be torn in pieces, the soul sent to hell, and the body to the grave. Oh! it concerned the poor impenitent wretch that now goeth on fearless in a course of sin, immediately to stop in his march, lest he be hurried away to the place of torment, and there be no escaping. Now, urge this upon the heart, and exercise your thoughts in the remembrance of it; and if you have overcome and overwrestled some former qualms of conscience, now lay it to heart, and do so no more. It may be the hour is at hand when God will take away your souls from you, and all your sins shall be set in order before you, and the stupid conscience, that is now senseless, shall have a lively feeling of all your rebellions and unkindnesses done to God, as the paper which was but now white, when stamped with the printing-irons hath a story written upon it in legible characters.

6. How much it concerneth you to come out of this condition speedily, for God is not a God to be neglected or dallied with. When he calls in the seasons of grace he will be observed, otherwise you may call and he will have no regard: 'They shall call, and I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but not find me,' Prov. 1:28. When you receive many checks of conscience, entreaties of grace, motions of the Spirit in vain, God will be gone. God doth commonly give men a day, and no man or angel knoweth how long this day shall last. God gave Cain a day: 'If thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted? if thou dost ill, sin lieth at the door.' Oh! then, when you begin to have thoughts of turning unto God, let them not be quelled. God reckoneth every hour, 'These three years,' 'this second epistle,' 'this second miracle;' and when his patience will expire you cannot tell.

7. How happy it will be for you when once you change your course! The prodigal remembered the plenty in his father's house; you will find a manifest difference: Rom. 6:21, 22, 'What fruit had you then in

those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death: but now, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.' In the way, no such gripes of conscience, no shame, sorrow, fears; in the end, everlasting life. It was your mistaking that called the days of sin good days. Oh! but when fruitful in holiness you will have present comfort and serenity of mind, a taste of the clusters of Canaan in the wilderness, hope of a glorious state, and the best will be at last. Compare pain with pain, pleasure with pleasure. We do not compare aright the pains of godliness with pleasures of sin; and yet there you may see the discharging of our duty will yield more true comfort and peace than all the pleasures of sin can bring us.

8. What hopes by Christ: Heb. 3:1, 'Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our profession, Jesus Christ;' what provision God hath made.

Thirdly, Let me argue the necessity of this consideration.

1. Otherwise men are rash, careless, and precipitant, and act as they are carried on by their own lusts; whereas, if they did consider, it would stop them in the course of sin. They rush like a horse into the battle, because 'no man saith, What have I done?' Jer. 8:6. Men run on like a headstrong horse after their lusts and fancies; whereas, if they do seriously bethink themselves, and cast in a few grave thoughts about things to come, it would be like the putting in of cold water into a boiling pot, abate the fervour of their lusts. Men are wicked because they are inconsiderate; there are arguments enough against sin if they would but pause and weigh them seriously; but we do not think of heaven and hell, and therefore they do not work upon

us: Eccles. 11:9, 'Remember that for all these things God will bring thee to judgment.'

2. This serious consideration is a good means to awaken us from the sleep of security. When we consider the end why we were made, the rule we are to walk by, and poise ourselves about conformity or inconformity to this rule, and do withal revolve the issues of things in our minds, it cannot but rouse us up out of our sloth and stupidity, and make us act more vigorously and regularly as to the ends of our creation. Oh! what shall I do? The first grace is awakening; that maketh way for other graces; Eph. 5:14, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' Whereas otherwise, when we consider not, we are stupid and sottish: Isa. 44:19, 'None considereth in his heart, Is there not a lie in my right hand? I have burnt part in the fire,' Eccles. 5:1, they 'offer the sacrifice of fools,' for 'they consider not that they have done evil;' they do not weigh their actions. The reason why they go wrong and continue wrong is, they do not seriously ponder and debate with themselves what it will come to.

3. By consideration we come to find where the work of God sticketh with us, and so conviction being the more particular, worketh the more kindly. A blunt iron that toucheth many points doth not so soon go to the quick as a needle that toucheth but one point: Mal. 3:7, 'Return, and they said, Wherein shall we return?' We do not see the need of repentance so much as by prying narrowly into our own ways. In short, without this, life is not so regular, the heart is not over-powered with such strong and full reason to comply with God's counsel.

Secondly, How much it concerneth us, after we have considered our ways, to turn to the Lord, and diligently to pursue the course which

he hath prescribed: 'I turned my feet unto thy testimonies.' A sound conversion is here described.

1. I turned, in the thorough purpose of his heart, that is the act on our part. It is by God's grace that we are turned, but we turn ourselves when the purpose of our souls is fixed: 'Turn me, and I shall be turned.' God inclineth the heart, and we manifest it by binding ourselves by a thorough purpose. A wish, an offer, when it endeth only in that, we have not considered enough; but when the heart is bent, I am turned. The prodigal, when he took up, came to himself, and had reasoned the case, says, 'I will go to my father,' Luke 15:18. It must be such a purpose as is diligently pursued.

2. The object or rule, my feet unto thy testimonies. By his feet is meant the course of his life. Our will and natural inclination should be no rule to us, but God's testimonies. We must entirely give up ourselves to the direction of his word: 'As many as walk according to this rule,' Gal. 6:16. We are not to walk as we list. There is a fixed determinate rule, which must be kept with all accurateness and attention; a godly man is very tender of breaking this rule; he makes conscience of keeping to this rule.

Now it concerneth us to make sure work of it.

[1.] Because convictions lost occasion the greater hardness of heart. No iron so hard as that which has been often heated and often quenched; and no heart so bad as theirs that seemed to have some serious and anxious thoughts about their eternal condition. The devil is the more busy and watchful about them because of their offer to escape; and God is the more provoked because they started aside when they were at the point of yielding; as better a match were never proposed, than to break off just as it is ready to be concluded. Always according to the closeness of the application, if it succeed not, so

doth our hardness of heart increase. They that were ministerially stirred, when they pull away the shoulder, their hearts grow like an adamant stone: Zech. 7:11, 12, 'But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear; yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his Spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts.' When the Spirit is in a way of striving, Gen 6:3, when you are any way affected, if resistance be continued, he withdraws. When men blunt the edge of conscience, deaden their affections, they lose all feeling: 2 Peter 2:20, 21, 'For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.' They sin against former knowledge, experience, and sense of the truth. As their light is, so their resisting causeth hardness, and all the sensible work cometh to nothing. But that is not all, it turneth to loss; it maketh it more difficult than it was before in regard of us; it maketh us more careless. When we had some stirring in our consciences before, we healed it slightly, and we think to do so again.

[2.] You will provoke God to use a rougher dispensation when the persuasions of the word and the strivings of the Spirit cannot bring you to repentance. They will not be won by arguments; God teacheth them by blows, as Gideon did the men of Succoth by briers and thorns. Therefore they shall shortly find themselves so involved in the fruit of their sins, as they shall not look off from it; their guilt shall lay hold of them at every hand: Hosea 7:2, 'They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their sins; now their doings have



beset them round about.' We should be much with our hearts, considering our case, how it is with us. God useth not the rod till forced to it: 'He doth not willingly grieve nor afflict the children of men,' Lam. 3:33. When milder means work but half a cure, the rest is supplied by some pressing judgments; his work is stopped, and therefore he promotes it this way.

[3.] It is a sign your consideration is not serious when you are off and on, and it produceth no good effect in the soul. A plaster may be sovereign, but when you are still pulling it off and putting it on, it does no good. Light thoughts work not; when they are deep and ponderous, then they leave a durable impression. Still it is, 'Remember and turn:' Ps. 22:27, 'All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord.' Bethink and repent: 1 Kings 8:47, 'If they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captives, and repent'; 'Search and try, and turn unto the Lord.' Some are semper victuri, always considering, about to live: but you must resolve: kindly convictions will not die, nor let the convinced sinner alone till they appear in the fruits of obedience.

[4.] The devil hath his purposes: Mat. 13:19, 'The wicked one catcheth away that which was sown in his heart;' he watcheth troubled sinners, that the work may die away.

Use 1. To reprove us—

1. For not considering our ways. When did you ever go aside, and seriously debate with yourselves about your turning to God? Did you ever lay it to your hearts how matters stand between you and God? There are certain seasons when God calleth you to it, and that is—

[1.] When the doctrine of life and the way of salvation hath been represented unto you with evidence and power, and you have felt

some stirring and trouble in your consciences. Did you go home and say, Rom. 8:31, 'What shall we then say to these things?' God hath spoken to me this day; now shall all this be lost and come to nothing? Heb. 2:3, 'How shall I escape if I neglect so great salvation?' Now I am called to mind Christ and salvation more. If I should give no heed to these things, or only give them the hearing for the present, oh! what will become of me? There is a special providence in every message, warning, offer, or instruction by the word. Acts 13:26, 'To you is this word of salvation sent;' he doth not say, We brought it, but, God sent it; as some message of God for your trial. Do we think of these things which we have heard and learned?

[2.] When God appeareth against you in a course of judgments, cutting off one comfort after another, now taking away a child, then blasting the estate: 'Now consider your ways;' Eccles. 7:14, 'In the day of adversity consider;' then is the duty in season. Affliction doth not rise out of the dust; God hath some end in these providences; and what is his end but to make me mindful of my duty to him? See for what end these things come, and to what issue they tend, that we may hear the rod, and know the meaning of the providence. If you do not consider, God will make you consider before he hath done with you. Jer. 23:20, 'The anger of the Lord shall not return till he hath performed all the thoughts of his heart, and then you shall consider it perfectly.' God will follow blow after blow till we do consider his mind and purpose. Jer. 30:24, 'The fierce anger of the Lord shall not return until he hath done it, and until he hath performed the intents of his heart.'

2. To reprove us for not taking this advantage. When we are set a-thinking of our ways, we have many thoughts and sensible stirrings, but they come to nothing, because we do not follow it close. You think, and have some workings of conscience, but do they end in a

fixed purpose? Some break through all, as Saul forces himself, 1 Sam. 13:12. Break through all restraints of conscience. Felix had his qualm, but he puts it off to another season. Oh! consider these things will one day be a witness against you, the sensible workings upon your hearts by the word and rod.

Use 2. To stir us up to this work, serious consideration in order to sound conversion.

1. Be frequent in it. If daily you called yourselves to an account, all acts of grace would thrive the better. Seneca of Sextius, *Quid hodie malum sanasti? cui vitio obstitisti?* You have God's example in reviewing every day's work, and in dealing with Adam before he slept. The man that was unclean was to wash his clothes at eventide.

2. Seriously set yourself to it: Deut. 32:46, 'Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day.' It is a weighty matter of life and death: Ps. 4:4, 'Commune with your hearts and be still.' This is the way to check sin, and to come on most hopefully in a course of obedience.

3. Drive your thoughts to a resolution, to rectify whatever is amiss; never leave thinking of your ways till you grow anxious about eternal life, nor let your anxiousness cease till you bring it to somewhat; grow to some resolution about the ways of God. Pray God to make your consideration effectual: 2 Tim. 2:7, 'Consider what I have said, and the Lord give you understanding in all things;' this is but the means, God giveth the grace.

## **SERMON LXVII**

## **I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.—VER. 60.**

IN the verse immediately preceding the man of God speaks of repentance as the fruit of consideration and self-examining: 'I considered my ways, and then turned my feet to thy testimonies.' But when did he turn? For though we see the evil of our ways, we are naturally slow to get it redressed. Therefore David did not only turn to God, but he did it speedily. We have an account of that in this verse, 'I made haste,' &c. This readiness in the work of obedience is doubly expressed—affirmatively and negatively. Affirmatively, 'I made haste;' negatively, 'I delayed not.' This double expression increaseth the sense, according to the manner of the Hebrews; as Ps. 118:17, 'I shall not die, but live,' that is, surely live; so here, 'I made haste, and delayed not,' that is, I verily delayed not a moment; as soon as he had thought of his ways, and taken up resolutions of walking closely with God, he did put it into practice. The Septuagint reads the words thus: I was ready, and was not troubled or diverted by fear of danger. Indeed, besides our natural slowness to good, this is one usual ground of delays, we distract ourselves with fears, and when God hath made known his will to us in many duties, we think of tarrying till the times are more quiet and favour our practice, and our affairs are in a better posture. A good improvement may be made of that translation; but the words run better, as they run more generally, with us, 'I made haste, and delayed not,' &c.; and from thence observe—

Doct. That the call of God, whether to amendment and newness of life, or to any particular duty, must be without delay obeyed.

To illustrate the point by these reasons:—

Reas. 1. Ready obedience is a good evidence of a sound impression of grace left upon our hearts. There is a slighter conviction which breedeth a sense of duty, but doth not urge us thoroughly to the performance of it; and so men stand reasoning instead of running, debating the case with God: and there is a more sound conviction which is accompanied with a prevailing efficacy, and when we have this upon our spirits, then all excuses and delays are laid aside, and we come off readily and kindly in the way of compliance with God's call. This is doctrinally spoken of, Cant. 1:4, 'Draw me, and we will run after thee.' Running is an earnest and speedy motion. From whence comes it? From drawing; it is a fruit of drawing, or the sweet and powerful attraction which the Spirit of God useth in the hearts of the elect. Instances I might give you in several calls and conversions spoken of in scripture. When Christ called Andrew and Peter, 'They left their father and followed after him,' Mark 1:20. So when Christ called Zaccheus, 'he made haste, and came down from the tree, and received him joyfully,' Luke 19:6. So Christ to Matthew, 'Follow me, and straightway he followed him,' Mat. 9:9. Julian the apostate scoffs at these passages, as if it were irrational to conceive such a thing could be, that men should so soon leave their course of gain and calling; or else that Christ's followers were a kind of sots and fools, weak, and poor-spirited creatures, that upon a word speaking they would come off presently all of a sudden: but impulsions of the Spirit carry their own reason with them, and draw the heart without any more ado. But such as he were not acquainted with the workings of the Holy Ghost in conversion, therefore scoff at these things. So Gal. 1:16, 'Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.' When our call is clear, there needs no debate. When men stand reasoning instead of running, there is not a thorough work upon them.

Reas. 2. The sooner we turn to the ways of God the better we speed. How so?

1. Partly in this, that the work goes on the more kindly, as being carried forth in the strength of the present influence and impulsions of grace; whereas, if the heart grow cold again, it will be the more difficult. A blow while the iron is hot doth more than ten at another time when it grows cold again. So when thy heart grows cold, thou wilt not have that advantage as when thou art under a warm conviction. And indeed that is the devil's cheat, to speak of hereafter, to elude the importunity of the present conviction that is upon you. John 5:4, You know when the waters were stirred, then was the time to put in, he that stepped in first had experience of the sanative virtue of the waters; so when the heart is stirred, we should not lose this advantage, but come on upon that call. There are several metaphors in scripture that do express this; sometimes, we must open when God knocks, Cant. 5; we must enter when God opens, lest the door be shut against us, Mat. 25; we must come forth when he bids us, as Lot out of Sodom, lest we perish: when a thing is done speedily and in season it is a great advantage.

2. The more welcome to God the sooner we turn to him. We value a gift not only by its own worth, but by the readiness of him that gives; if we have it at first asking, we count it a greater kindness, and give the more thanks; so the less we stand hucking with God, and demurring upon his call, the more acceptable is our obedience. Pharaoh did at length let Israel go, but was forced to it, and with much ado, no thanks to him. It is true indeed, if we turn at length seriously, heartily, we are accepted with God, but not so accepted as when we come in at first. Surely the fewer calls we withstand, the less we provoke God, and the more ready entertainment do we find. The spouse, that would not open at the first knock, but only at length, when her bowels were troubled, when she thought of her unkindness, then she went out to open to her beloved, but then her beloved was gone. You will not find God at your beck when you dally

with him. Your comforts will cost you longer waiting for, when you make God wait for entrance, and would not give way to the work of his grace.

3. You speed better, because your personal benefit is the greater, the sooner you turn to the Lord. You have more knowledge, more experience, you get more comfort, you would be more profitable to others, more useful to God. If ever God touch your hearts, and once you come to experiment what an excellent thing it is to live in communion with God, you will be sorry you began no sooner. Paul complains that he was as a man 'born out of due time,' 1 Cor. 15:8, and so had not the advantage of seeing Christ in the flesh, until he showed himself to him from heaven in the vision upon his conversion. You lose many a comfortable sight of Christ because you were so late acquainted with him. And it is said of Andronicus and Junius, Rom. 16:7, 'they were in Christ before me.' Certainly he that is first in Christ, and sooner called to grace, hath the advantage of us. An early acquaintance with God gives us advantages both in point of enjoyment and service. In point of enjoyment; peace, comfort, joy in the Holy Ghost. A man would not want these things, they are so valuable in themselves; the want of them is an incomparable loss to us. Certainly they would have been much better than all those flesh-pleasing vanities that you dote upon, and keep you from Christ. A man that hath for a long while wasted his time and strength in driving on a peddling trade, when he is acquainted with a more gainful course, Oh, saith he, that I had known this sooner! so, none have any taste of the ways of God, but they will wish so; Oh, that I had sooner renounced my carnal delights, and betaken myself to the service of God!

Then advantages in point of service. What honour might we have brought to God, what good done to others, if we had begun sooner!

Oh, saith one, had I but the time to spend again which I trifled away in the devil's service! What use might I have made of the vigour and freshness of my youth, and quickness of my parts for God, and the large tract of time which I spent in sin and vanity! Every day in a carnal state was a loss of opportunity of service, the glorifying of God, the great end for which you were made.

Reas. 3. There is danger and hazard in delay and putting off a business of such concernment, as conversion to God and his ways is, upon such uncertainties. For the understanding of the force of this reason—

1. Let us determine that this is a business of the greatest concernment, and that will show us the folly of our delays, for certainly the greatest work should first be thought of. Now if you will believe the word of God, that will tell you the salvation of your souls should be your main care: Mat. 6:33, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,' &c.; Ps. 27:4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after,' &c. Whatever is neglected, this is a business that must be looked after. And Luke 10:42, 'One thing is needful.' Let us argue from these places. Certainly that which is necessary should be preferred before that which is superfluous. A man would take care to get meat rather than sauce, and would prefer his business before his recreation, that which is eternal before that which is temporal. It is not necessary we should be great and rich in the world. Within a little while it will not be a pin to choose what part we have acted here. But it is necessary we should be gracious, holy, and acquainted with God in Christ; that is our business. Again, that which is eternal should be preferred before that which is temporal. You count him a fool that is very exact and careful to get his room in an inn furnished, when he neglects his house where his constant abode is. In the other world there is our long home; and if all our



care should be here for the present estate, where we tarry but for a night, but a little while, and neglect eternity, our everlasting happiness, that were a very great folly. That which is spiritual, which concerns our soul, should be preferred before that which is carnal and corporal, and only concerns the body, for the better part should have the most care. As for instance, a man that is wounded and cut through his clothes and skin and all, will sooner look to have the wound closed up in his body than the rent made up in his garment. So the distempers of the inward man should be first cured before we look after the outward man, which is as it were the garment and clothing, for these outward things shall be added. Here is your work, to please God, not satisfy the flesh. This is that which concerns us not only for a while but for ever, and concerns the inward man. This is the grand business of concernment; therefore we should delay other things rather than delay the work of our salvation; yet usually all other things have a quick despatch, and this only is neglected and lies by the wall.

2. That this business of concernment is left upon great hazard and uncertainty.

[1.] Life is uncertain. He that does seriously consider the uncertain shortness of the present life, how can he delay a moment, lest he be called home to God before his great errand for which he was sent into the world be done? Many of you, when you seriously think of it, would not for a thousand worlds die the next day so unprovided, unfurnished with promises, evidences, experiences; and yet it may be so that that may be the time when they shall be called home to God. This life is but 'a vapour,' James 4:4, a little warm breath turned in and out by the nostrils, that is soon choked and stopped; and 'thou knowest not what will be on the morrow,' Prov. 27:1. As that devout person said when he was invited to a meal the next day, to come to-

morrow to a feast, I have not had a morrow for these many years. We have no security for the next day but our own word, and he that hath nothing but his own word to secure him is very weakly secured. Life is short, and we make it shorter by continuing in sin. It is uncertain: if there were a fixed time and period wherein we knew our continuance should be in the world, then we should be tempted to wallow freely in our carnal lusts, and entertain sin a little longer, and put off repentance till hereafter. But God hath left life upon great uncertainties; the band of providence may soon crop you off, long before you come to your flower. None are nearer to destruction than those that promise themselves a longer time in sin: Luke 12:19, 'Thou hast goods laid up for many years,' but 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.' God loves to disappoint secure careless souls that promise themselves a longer life without his leave; he will break in upon a sudden. A poor careless sinner would fain keep his soul a little longer. No, it is demanded now: he doth not give it up, but it is taken away from him. Reason with thyself as Isaac, Gen. 27:2 (I allude to it), 'Behold now I am old, I know not the day of my death; make me savoury meats that my soul may bless thee before I die.' So reason, I have spent so much time in the world, and I know not the day of my dissolution, when God will call me home; oh, let me go to God that he may bless me before I die!

[2.] You know not whether the means of grace shall be continued to you or no, and such affectionate offers and melting entreaties: Acts 13:46, 'Since you put away the word of God from you, you judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life.' God will not always wait upon a lingering sinner, but will take the denial and be gone. They judge themselves unworthy of that grace, they pass sentence upon themselves: 2 Cor. 6:1, 2, 'Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation: we beseech you receive not the grace of God in vain.' God hath his seasons, and when these are past, will not treat with us in

such a mild affectionate manner. The means of grace are removed from a people by strange providences, when they have slighted the offers of grace: Luke 13:7, 'These three years I came seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?' In that text there is—(1.) God's righteous expectation, 'These three years I came seeking fruit.' He was the dresser of the vineyard; they were the three years of his ministry, as by a serious harmonising the evangelists will appear that he was just now entering upon his last half year they had his ministry among them. (2.) Their unthankful frustration, 'I find none,' nothing answerable to what means they enjoyed. (3.) God's terrible denunciation, 'Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?' God will root up a people, or remove the means; and therefore will ye leave it upon such uncertainties?

[3.] There is an uncertainty of grace: 2 Tim. 2:25, 'If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.' It is a mere hazard, it may be he will, it may be not. It is uncertain whether the Spirit of God will ever put in your heart a thought of turning to God again: Gen. 6:3, 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man.' The Spirit of God strives for a long while, follows a sinner, casts in many an anxious thought, troubles and shakes him out of his carnal quiet and security, but this will not always last. Ah, Christians! there are certain seasons, if we had the skill to take hold of them; there is an appointed fixed time when God is nearer to us than at another time, and we shall never have our hearts at such an advantage: Isa. 55:6, 'Call upon him while he is near, and while he may be found.' There are certain seasons which are times of finding. Some are of opinion that there are certain seasons when a man may be rich if he will, when God offereth him an opportunity for an estate in the world, if he knew the time and how to take hold of it. Certainly to those that live under the means of grace there is a time of finding,

when God is nearer to them than at another time, and therefore will you slip that, and leave it upon such great uncertainties?

[4.] There is an uncertainty in this; we are not certain of having the use of our natural faculties; we may lose our understandings by a stupid disease, and God may bring a judgment upon those that dally with him in the work of repentance. It is a usual judgment upon them that while they were alive did forget God, when they come to die, to forget themselves, and have not the free use of their reason, but, invaded with some stupid disease, die in their sins, and so pass into another world.

Reas. 4. The fourth reason is the great mischief of delay.

1. The longer we delay the greater indisposition is there upon us to embrace the ways of God. O Christians! when we press you to holy things, to turn yourselves to the Lord, you begin to make some essay, and then are discouraged, and find it is hard and tedious to flesh and blood, and so you give over. Now mark, if it be hard to-day, it will be harder the next, so the third onward, for it is hardness of heart that makes the work of God hard. Now the more we provoke God, the more we resist his call, the more hard the heart is; the impulses of his grace are not so strong as before, and the heart every day is more hardened. As a path weareth the harder by frequent treading, so the heart is more hard, the mind more blind, the will more obstinate, the affections more engaged and rooted in a course of sin: Jer. 13:23, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.' Oh, to break off an inveterate custom is hard! A plant newly set is more easily taken up than a plant that hath taken root. When we grow old and rotten in the way of sin, it will be much harder for us than now it is: the longer we lie soaking here in sin, the farther off from God.

2. We provide the more discomfort for ourselves. Always the proportion of our sorrow is according to the measure of our sins. Whether it be godly sorrow, the sorrow of repentance, or despairing sorrow, those horrors which are impressed upon us as a punishment of our rebellion and impenitency, in both senses you still increase your sorrow the more you sin. For the sorrow of repentance, it is clear that sorrow must carry proportion with our offences. She that had much forgiven wept much. Certainly it will cost you the more tears, a greater humbling before God, the longer you continue in a course of sin against him. And for the sorrow of punishment, you are 'treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath,' Rom. 2:5. Your burden will be greater and more increased upon you. It is too heavy for your shoulders already to bear; why should we add to the weight of it? Either our sorrow of repentance will be greater, or the anxious sense of our punishment; for in both God observes, and God requires a proportion.

3. Consider how unfit we shall be for God's service if we delay a little longer, when our strength is spent, and vigour of youth exhausted; when our ears grow deaf, eyes dim, understanding dull, affections spent, memory lost. Is this a time to begin with God, and to look after the business of our souls? Certainly he that made all, that was our Creator, deserves the flower of our strength, Eccles. 12:1. When the tackling is spoiled and ship rotten, is that a time to put to sea? or rather when the ship is new built? Shall the devil feast upon the flower and freshness of your youth, and God only have the scraps and fragments of the devil's table? When we are good for nothing else, then to think we are good enough for God and the business of religion, which requires all our might and all our strength, when we are spent, is it a time to begin our warfare, or in our youth?

4. There is this, the just suspicion which is upon a late repentance; it is seldom sound; it is no true repentance which ariseth merely from horror and fear of hell. It may be but the beginnings of everlasting despair, and their desires may be but offers of self-love after their own ease. All men seek the Lord at length, but wise men seek him betimes. The difference is made on some in time, on others out of time, upon their death-beds. The most profane would have God for their portion when they can sin no more, and enjoy the world no longer. How can we tell this is a sound work? It seems to be a very questionable thing, merely proceeding from self-love and natural desires of happiness in all men. When we begin with God, we begin out of self-love, we come for our ease and interest, that we may be safe and happy; afterwards we come to a delight of spirit in his service, and having opportunity, show in our works the power of our affection to God, and manifest the soundness of our conversion. It is possible a death-bed repentance may be true, but it is very doubtful. There is but one instance, which is that of the thief upon the cross. The scriptures are a history of five thousand years; yet all that while we have but one instance of a man that repented when he came to die; and in that one instance there is an extraordinary conjunction of circumstances, such as will never fall out again. Christ was at the thief's right hand, in the height of his love, drawing sinners to salvation; and probably this man had never any such call till then. Some may at the eleventh hour be converted, because they were not called till then. Every one came when they were called. Therefore, there being so great and just a suspicion that lies against a late repentance, certainly we should not delay.

Reas. 5. The reasons for delay are very inconsiderable. Solomon saith, Prov. 26:16, that 'the sluggard thinks himself wiser than seven men that can render a reason.' Mark, as Solomon's fool is not to be taken literally, but spiritually, so Solomon's sluggard is not to be

taken morally, but spiritually. They that are sluggish and slow of heart in the things of God, they think they have a great deal of reason on their side, and will not be persuaded on the contrary but they shall do well enough for all that; and they can argue against the calls and injunctions of God. Yet how little can they say for themselves! See what reasons may be said for delay; I mean not that they plead and argue, but it is that which sways them, that which lies next the heart is this; why they keep off from God, and are satisfied with their present estate.

1. The pleasures of sin are sweet, and they are loath to forego them, and to engage their souls in the severities of a strict obedience. Here is the bottom reason, this is, that which sways them. I will not speak to this plea as it lies against conversion itself, but only as it makes men to delay. If I were to plead for conversion itself, I would tell these carnalists of higher pleasure; that their delights shall not be abrogated, but preserved; their delight shall be transplanted from Egypt to Canaan, that it may thrive and prosper in a happier soil; that they may have purer contentments, and those chaste and happy satisfactions of enjoying communion with God. But I shall only deal with them as it relates to the delay of conversion. Therefore I thus argue: These pleasures of sin must one day be renounced, or you are for ever miserable; and if you must one day, why not now? For mark, sin will be as sweet hereafter as it now is, and salvation is always dispensed upon the same terms; you cannot be saved hereafter with less ado, or bring down Christ and heaven to a lower rate; and, therefore, if this be a reason now, it will ever lie as a reason against Christ and religion, then you will never tend to look after the ways of life; if you are loath to part with sin now, you will never part with it. The laws of Christianity are always the same. God will not bate you anything of repentance, and your heart is not like to be better, but worse, that is the sum of it; and therefore this reason signifies

nothing when it comes to be tried in the balance of the sanctuary, and yet this is the main reason.

2. They can plead other things; hope God will be merciful to them hereafter; though they indulge themselves a little longer in sin, he will at length save them. I answer—You cannot bend his mercy and make it save; it is a mere uncertainty, peradventure he will, peradventure not. Would you take poison, out of hope that afterward you may meet with an antidote? And this is the very case between God and us. I answer further—There are shrewd suspicions that God will not be merciful to those that run such a desperate adventure; for whoever delays his repentance doth in effect pawn his soul with the devil, and leaves it in his hands, and says, Here, Satan, keep my soul; if I fetch it not again by such a day, it is thine for ever: and can you think mercy will bring it out? Again, there are great causes of fear, because there is such a thing as judicial hardness of heart, by a sentence of obduration. There are some that God gives up to their own ways and counsels, and God inflicts this sentence upon those that continue in sin, notwithstanding conviction of their hearts to the contrary: Prov. 1:25, 26, 'Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I will also laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh.' There are thousands in hell merely upon this account, that have forfeited the benefit of God's mercy, and tenders of his grace, and have been shut up by hardness of heart, by God's sentence of obduration; the most dreadful punishment that can light upon a creature on this side hell.

3. Ay! but we are willing, and would turn to the Lord now, but we have no leisure, and have not those conveniencies that we shall have hereafter, for then we shall get things into a better frame and posture. Oh, no; it is mere hypocrisy to think you are willing when you delay, for there is nothing hinders but a want of will, and a



loathness to comply with the commands of God. When we dare not flatly deny, then we delay. *Non vacat*, that is the sinner's plea, I am not at leisure; but *non placet*, there is the reality. Mat. 22:7, they which were invited to the wedding varnished their denial over with an excuse. Delay is a denial, for if they were willing there would be no excuse. To be rid of importunate and troublesome creditors, we promise them payment another time, and we know our estate will be more wasted by that time; it is but to put them off: so this delay and putting off God is but a shift. Here is the misery, God always comes unseasonably to a carnal heart. It was the devils that said, Mat. 8:29, 'Art thou come to torment us before our time?' Good things are a torment to a carnal heart, and they always come out of time. Certainly that is the best time when the word is pressed upon the heart with evidence, light, and power, and when God treats with thee about thine eternal peace.

Reas. 6. There are very urgent reasons to quicken us to make haste.

1. The state wherein we are at present is so bad and dangerous that we can never soon enough come out of it. The state of a man in his carnal condition is compared in scripture to a prison: Rom. 11:32, 'God hath concluded or shut them all up in unbelief.' And mark, it is a prison that is all on fire. Oh, when poor captives are bolted and shut up in a flaming prison, how will they run hither and thither to get out! So should we run and strive to get out of this flaming prison. You cannot be too soon out of the power of the devil, or from under the curse of the law, the danger of hell-fire, and the dominion of sin: Mat. 3:7, 'Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' He doth not say, to go, nor to run, but to flee. Fleeing from wrath to come, that is the truest motion. And so Heb. 6:18; they which had the avenger of blood at their heels fled for refuge to take hold of the hope set before them. If there be poison in our bowels we think we can

never soon enough cast it out. If fire hath taken hold of a building, we do not say we will quench it hereafter, the next week, or next month, but think we can never soon enough quench it. Or if there be a wound in the body, we do not let it alone till it fester and rankle. Christians, you may apply all this to the present case; here the danger is greater. There is no poison so deadly as sin, which hath infected all mankind: no wound so dangerous, for that will be the death of body and soul: no fire so dreadful as the wrath of God; therefore we cannot soon enough come out of this condition.

2. We cannot be happy soon enough, for the state we make after is the arms of God, the bosom of Jesus, the hope of eternal life; we cannot soon enough get within the compass of such privileges. Oh! shall Christ lie by as a dead commodity or breaded ware? It shows we know not the gift of God, John 4. If we had a due sense and value of his excellency, we would take the morning market, and let not Christ Jesus, with all his benefits, lie by as a commodity that may be had at the last, at any time of the day; we would look upon him as the quickest ware in the market, and flock to him 'as doves to the windows,' Isa. 60:8. You would force your way that you might get into his heart; you would count all things but dross and dung that you might gain him. It will be sweet to be encircled in the embraces of Jesus Christ, to have 'his left hand under your head, and his right hand to embrace you,' Cant. 2:6; and will you delay when he stands offering himself, and stretching out his hand all the day long to receive you?

## **SERMON LXVIII**

**I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy  
commandments.—VER. 60.**

I COME now to the application.

Use 1. To reprove the dallying with God which we are conscious to in the work of conversion, which is so common and natural to us. We are apt to put off God from time to time, from childhood to youth, from youth to man's age, from man's age to old age, and from old age to death-bed; and so the devil steals away one hour after another till all time be past.

I shall—(1.) Speak of the causes of this delay; (2.) Represent the heinousness of it, that you may not stroke this sin with a gentle censure, and think lightly of the matter.

First, Of the causes of this delay.

1. Unbelief, or want of a due sense or sight of things to come. If men were persuaded of eternal life and eternal death, they would not stand hovering so long between heaven and hell, but presently engage their hearts to draw nigh to God. But we 'cannot see afar off,' 2 Peter 1:9. Nature is purblind: to carnal hearts there is a mist upon eternity, they have no prospective whereby to look into another world, therefore it hath no influence upon them to quicken them to more speed and earnestness. If we had a due sense of eternal death, surely we would be fleeing from wrath to come; no motion should be earnest and swift enough to get from such a danger. If we had a due sense of eternal life, we would be 'running to take hold of the hope that is before us,' Heb. 6:18.

2. Security. If men have a cold belief of heaven and hell, if they take up the current opinions of the country, yet do not take it into their serious thoughts, they 'put far away the evil day,' Amos 6:3. Things at a distance do not startle us, as a clap of thunder afar off doth not fright us so much as when it is just over our heads in our own zenith.

We look upon these things as to come, so put off the thought of them. Next to a want of sound belief, the want of a serious consideration is the cause why men dally with God. If we had the same thoughts living and dying, our motions would be more earnest and ready. When death and eternity is near, we are otherwise affected than when we look upon it as afar off. One said of a zealous preacher, He preacheth as if death were at my back. Oh, could we look upon death as at our back or heels! If men did but consider that within a few days they must go to heaven or hell, that there is but the slender thread of a frail life upon which they depend, that is soon fretted asunder, they would not venture any longer to be out of a state of grace, nor dally with God. But we think we may live long, and time enough to repent by leisure; we put far off the day of our change, and so are undone by our own security.

3. Averseness of heart from God. That which makes us desirous to stay longer in a way of sin, doth indeed make us loath to turn at all; and what is that? Obstinacy and unsubjected heart to God: 'The carnal mind is enmity to the law of God,' Rom. 8:7. We manifest our enmity to the law of God by delays as well as by a downright opposition. Neh. 4:6, it is said the work went on speedily. Why? 'For the people had a mind to the work.' Where there is an earnest bent of heart, there we cannot linger and dally any longer. But men have no love nor affection to God, therefore do they delay and keep off from him.

4. The love of the world rooted in us, the love of present delights and present contentments. This is so deeply rooted in our nature that here we stick, and are loath to come off kindly to the work of God. In Mat. 22, when they were invited to the marriage-feast of the king's son, that is, to the privileges of the gospel, what did they plead? The farm, oxen, merchandise, and one had married a wife; they were

loath to be divorced from their dearest lusts, and to renounce the satisfaction which they had in carnal things, that so they might walk with God in a way of strict obedience.

Secondly, Let me represent the heinousness of it. Because we are apt to stroke it with a gentle censure, and to speak of this with soft words, let us see what this delay and putting off God is, when he comes with a great deal of importunity and affectionate earnestness, inviting us to partake of his grace.

1. It is flat disobedience to God. You think it is but putting it off for a while; no, it is flat disobedience. Why? God is as peremptory for the time and season as he is for the duty itself. God doth not only say, Turn to me, but, To-day, 'even while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts,' Heb. 3:7, 8. The Lord deals with us as the Roman ambassador dealt with Antiochus, when he was shifting and putting off the matter, that he might not give a direct answer to the Romans. The ambassador draws a circle round about him, saith he, *Intra hunc*, Let me have an answer before thou passest from hence. So God will not only have an answer, but a present answer. If he saith, To-day, it is flat disobedience for you to say, To-morrow. He saith, Now is the time of salvation. We are charged in his name and by his authority to do it now, in this instant.

2. It is ingratitude and unthankfulness for God's eternal love: Ps. 103:17, 'From everlasting to everlasting thy loving-kindness is great to them that fear thee.' From all eternity God was mindful of us, and before the world was. With reverence we may speak it: ever since he was God he was our God: from eternity to eternity his loving-kindness is great; and shall we adjourn and put him off to an odd corner of our lives, when he thought he could never soon enough think of us? Shall the whole duration of God be taken up by his love

to us, and shall we be content to grieve the Spirit of God, and trample his laws under our feet for all this? Can you have hearts to abuse such a God, and to deal so unkindly with him?

3. It is base disingenuity: we do not deal with God as we would have God to deal with us. If we have any business or errand at the throne of grace, we would be heard presently, and are ready to complain if we have not a quick despatch: Ps. 102:2, 'Lord, hear me speedily.' Here is our language when praying for any relief we stand in need of. To-day is a season for mercy, but to-morrow we make always to be the season for duty. We would have God to tarry our sinful leisure, till the heat of our lusts be spent, and fervours of youth be abated; yet we will not tarry his holy leisure. We are bound, but the Lord is free whether he will answer us or no; yet we murmur if God come not in at our beck. We are always in haste if in any danger and want any relief; we cry, How long? And shall God stand waiting till we turn from our evil ways? If any cry, How long? God may, as he doth Jer. 13:27, 'When shall it once be?'

4. It is base self-love when we can be content to dishonour God longer, provided that at length we may be saved. Shall I say that this is to prefer our salvation before God? No, but it is to prefer our sins before God. And it shows that we are not willing to part with sin upon reasons of duty, or any real inclination of heart towards God, but only upon reasons of interest, that we may be saved; yea, never to part with it at all if you might have your wills. Not but that a man may and ought to eye rewards and punishments. It is part of the exercise of our faith to eye the reward, and also to eye the punishment; but this manifests an inordinate respect to the reward when we would enjoy our personal happiness, and so that be obtained at length, we care not how God be disobeyed and dishonoured. You do but in effect say to God thus, Let me despise thy

commands, and abuse thy mercies a little longer; then I will look after my salvation, when my lusts are satisfied. This is base self-love. Christ did not redeem us only that we might die well, but that we might live well; not only that we might be safe at last, but glorify God here upon earth; not only that we might enter into heaven, but do him service, and that all our days: Luke 1:74, 'Being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life.'

5. It is great injustice and injury to God, who hath been too long kept out of his right already. Oh, look back! How ungratefully have you spent all your former time! Too much time hath been spent already, and you would delay longer: 1 Peter 4:3, 'The time past may more than suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles,' &c. It is enough, and should be more than enough, and now you should not stay a moment. As those that have delayed their journey, when they begin and set out, mend their pace that they may redeem their time and accomplish their journey; so should we, for the time past is more than enough to be spent in worldly vanity and carnal excess: Rom. 13:11–14, 'It is high time to awake out of sin.' God hath been encroached upon for a long time, and that should and will be a grief of heart to you, that you have not all this while acknowledged or paid your debt to your lord. The thought of this should prevail with us the more, because the payment of a debt to a man should not be delayed, to put off a poor man till to-morrow 'when thou hast it by thee,' Prov. 3:28; and the wages of a servant should not abide with us, Lev. 19:13. We are not to defraud a poor servant, nor to delay him, but to make him quick payment; and shall we defraud our great Creator of the debt we owe to him, and put him off from day to day?

Use 2. To exhort us with speed to turn to the Lord, and to comply with his motions. Let us not put off God from day to day. I shall urge

it—(1.) As to the general case; (2.) As to particular duties which are pressed upon you.

First, As to the general case. Oh! go and bethink yourselves, how do matters stand between God and thy soul? Debate it seriously, that if you have neglected God and his salvation already, you may now turn to him without delay. Let me press you further.

1. You can never part with sin soon enough; it is a cursed inmate, that will surely bring mischief upon the soul that harbours it. It will set its own dwelling on fire. If there be a mote in the eye, a thorn in the foot, we take them out without delay; and is not sin a greater mischief, and sooner to be looked into and parted with? Certainly the evil of sin is greater than all evil, and hereafter the trouble will be greater; therefore we can never soon enough part with it.

2. Let this move you: sin must have a quick despatch, and shall not God? It would defeat temptations if we would but delay them, it would stop the furies of anger, and suppress the motions of lust. Augustus the emperor advised those who were angry to repeat the Greek alphabet, meaning that they might take time to consider. So for uncleanness and other sins; if the practice and execution of many lusts were but delayed, we would not be so frequent in them as we are, to the dishonour of God and scandal of religion. Prov. 7:22, it is said of the young man enticed by the harlot, that 'forthwith he went after her.' When our lusts are agog, all the checks of conscience and persuasions of the word will not prevail for a little respite. Now, shall sin have a more ready entertainment than God? Will you rush upon the practice of sin like a horse into the battle, and come on in the service of God like a snail? Will you be so eager and passionate upon the impulsion of every lust, and so hardly be entreated by the Spirit of God and by the word of God?



3. If you be not ready, God is ready. How ready is he, on the one hand, to receive you, and, on the other hand, to punish you! The one quickens us by hope, and the other by fear. For the consideration which works upon hope, God is ready: Mat. 22:4, 5, 'Come to the wedding, all things are ready.' He hath a Christ ready to receive you, a Spirit ready to sanctify and cure all your soul distempers; he hath pardoning mercy to forgive all your sins, he hath power of grace to remedy all your distempers; and will not you be ready? Luke 15:20, the prodigal said, 'I will go to my father.' Mark his language, 'I will go;' the father ran. When we do but relent, and with brokenness of heart come and lie at the feet of God, love's pace is very swift, and runs to snatch us out of the fire; therefore will you not be ready to cast yourselves into the arms of his compassion? Cant. 2:8, Christ is represented as 'leaping upon the mountains, and skipping upon the hills.' Christ thinks he can never be soon and early enough with a returning sinner, to revive a poor broken-hearted sinner; therefore, if God be so ready, so should you. On the other side, to work upon your fear, if you delay, God is ready to punish you. The wrath of God hangs over your heads like a sharp sword by a slender thread, and will you sit still and keep your place? 'The judge is at the door;' he is ready to judge, James 5:9. Are you ready to be judged? God is ready to condemn, to execute, and are not you ready to implore mercy, to seek the Lord's favour? ready to fall flat, and beg terms of grace in and through Christ Jesus? Rahab, when the Lord had by his messengers threatened destruction to Jericho, only Rahab's house was to be safe. She hanged out a scarlet thread ere the spies were departed, Josh. 2; she did not delay till the army came and the city was surprised. When the Lord is marching against sinners with vengeance and fury, you cannot come soon enough to God to prevent it, Luke 14:32. That king that had twenty thousand marching against him, doth not stay till they were in his quarters, but while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassy, and desireth

conditions of peace. God is ready to execute all his vengeance and curses of the law; therefore, while you may, seek conditions of peace. You have been spared long; it may be for the next sin you may pay for all. A thief that hath long escaped, when he is taken at length, all his villany is recompensed into his bosom; if he had not stolen the last time, he had escaped. God hath spared you hitherto; it may be upon the next sin he will strike you, and hold his hands no longer. If God now strike, in what a woful case would you be?

4. There was never any that came to God too soon; many have come too late, the foolish virgins are an instance. When they brought little children to Christ, Christ received them. There are none so little but the great God can form and fashion them into a temple for himself. Usually God chooseth his people from among the youth. There may be some converted in old age, but few; usually it is in our youth, or as soon as we come to our maturity. Reason thus: I may be too late, I cannot be too early; let me no longer dally with God.

Secondly, As to the particular duties which are pressed upon you, let me caution you and direct you.

1. By way of caution.

[1.] When you have any stirrings of heart, any anxious thoughts about your eternal condition, beware you do not believe the devil, that hereafter will be a more convenient season. I shall give directions suitable to the grand enemies of our salvation, the devil, the world, and the flesh, Now, do not believe the devil. This was Felix's case. Paul was reasoning of justice and temperance, graces that he was little acquainted withal, and Paul quickens all by a remembrance of judgment to come, and then Felix trembled. But how doth he put off this heart-work? Hereafter we shall have 'a more convenient season,' Acts 24:25. Oh! never will it be better with you

than now when the waters are stirred. Still there is something in the sinner's way when God hath any business for him. When young, we want wisdom; when old, we want strength; in the middle of business, we want leisure; in the midst of leisure, we are corrupted and want a heart. We are lazy, and then every molehill seems a mountain. Remember, if the devil can but get us to delay, he hath us fast enough. If he can but get us to put it off to-day, then to-morrow, then the next day, shall be as that. Austin, when he had conviction upon him, he prays from his conscience, Lord, mortify my lusts, but not yet. Satan's morrow will never come. There is no end of delays. He tells you of to-morrow and another season, but that season will never come.

[2.] Let not the world choke the word. It is notable the choking the good seed which was scattered among thorns. Christ expounds it of the world. Now what of the world choketh it? Mat. 13:22, he instanceth in 'the cares of the world;' and Luke instanceth in 'the pleasures of this life;' he adds 'voluptuous living,' Luke 8:14; and Mark hath it more generally, 'the cares of this life,' Mark 4:19; 'and the lusts of other things choke the word.' The meaning of all those places is this: Many a man hath some beams of light darted into his bosom, and he begins to have serious and anxious thoughts of his eternal condition. Ay! but then the pleasures and cares of the world interpose, and they must be first served, and so the conviction is lost. Sometimes a man is full of business, and cannot attend to carrying on this work; at other times he is loath to forego his voluptuous course; there is some sport he must attend upon, and so the word is lost. When you have conviction upon you, you are under God's arrest; when you go and get out of the chains of conscience without God's leave, you break prison. All business must give way to your great business, and follow that close till you come to some issue: Mat. 8:21, 'Follow me,' saith Christ. 'Suffer me first to go bury my father.'

'Nay,' saith Christ, 'let the dead bury the dead, but do thou follow me.' How specious soever the work be, we must call off our souls. Let not these beams of conviction which are darted into your bosom be quenched.

[3.] Consult not with the flesh, as a friend in the case, when your heart begins to work towards God: Gal. 1:16, 'Immediately I consulted not with flesh and blood.' It is notable the word signifies to lay down a burden, to lay down our cares and difficulties in a friend's bosom. When a man hath any trouble upon him he communicates it to his friend. Now, you have a burden upon you, you begin to be sensible you are in a wrong course, and must turn to God. Do not lay down your burdens in the flesh's bosom; they will tell you this is but a pang and melancholy qualm, and would furnish you with a great many seeming reasons to put it off, frivolous excuses, slothful pretences, carnal fears, and idle allegations; therefore consult not with the flesh as with a friend in the case.

[4.] Be not discouraged with tediousness and difficulty, which, upon a trial, you will find in the ways of God. Many that carry on their convictions to a resolution, and their good resolutions to some performance, when they find it to be a difficult and tedious business, a thing that is irksome to the flesh, they throw up all, and there is an end of the conviction that was upon them. A bullock at first yoking is most unruly until he be accustomed to it; so afterwards duty will be more sweet and easy: if you will but take Christ's yoke upon trial, you shall find it is a sweet yoke, Mat. 11:29. And remember, difficulties in the service of God should rather excite than discourage. Will you serve God with that which cost you nothing? Will you think to go to heaven, and not enter in at the strait gate? Remember, this is one of our waymarks. Counterbalance difficulty with reward, and punishment and pains of duty with the pains of hell, the pleasure of

sin with the reward of eternal life: urge your souls with the equity in Christ's ways, and the filthiness and turpitude in those sinful courses.

[5.] If you have discouragements from God, and he seems to withdraw or withhold his grace, remember he is not at your beck: if he gives nothing he oweth nothing. If he should not give present comfort, strength, and help, usually it may be so for your trial. We are never brought to a thorough obedience until we come to this resolution: Let God do what he will, I will do what he hath commanded; till we yield to God's sovereignty, and venture through his denials and the suspensions of his grace. As the woman of Canaan, he first answereth her not a word; when he answers, his speech is more discouraging than his silence, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and give it to dogs.' She ventures through all these discouragements. Christ yields at length: 'O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee as thou wilt.' God will bring his creatures to such a thorough obedience. You may have no visits of his love, no beam of his grace; though you meet with a dumb oracle, and he seems to cast you off, and you have many fears, yet venture through with a holy obstinacy that you will not give over; as Job 13:15, 'Though he kill me, yet will I put my trust in him.' When you follow God with such an obstinacy of obedience, though he should appear never so contrary, yet we will encourage ourselves in waiting upon him. Thus be severe to your purpose.

2. For positive directions.

[1.] Observe the call of God. There are certain seasons when God more especially doth approach the heart of a sinner, when Christ knocks: Rev. 3:20, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.' How doth Christ knock? By the motions of his grace, when the word sets

conscience awork. One time or other God meets with the heart of every man that lives under the gospel, so that his conscience tells him, I must be another man, or I am an undone man for ever. Then Christ knocks when conscience is thus set awork; when the waters are stirred, then is the time to put in for cure. Now observe this, that you may welcome the authority of his truth. To resist Christ in this work is a dangerous thing. For a woman to destroy the child in the womb is murder; so to resist Christ in this work that is going on towards the new birth is spiritual murder.

[2.] Be sure this work come to some effect. To stifle convictions, that is very dangerous. There is no iron so hard as that which hath been often heated and often quenched; so no hearts so hard as those that have had many convictions and have quenched them: 1 Thes. 5:19, 'Quench not the Spirit.' You have great qualms of conscience. Felix he trembles; ay! but it came to nothing. Many men's hearts are roused, but it does no good. A man that sleeps upon a bridge may dream that he is falling into the water, and so dream that he may shake every limb of him, and so shake and tremble that he may cry out in his sleep. Ay! but the man doth not awake, and rouse up that he may avoid the danger. So the word of God may work so far that they begin to fear they are even dropping into the pit; they have anxious thoughts about their eternal condition, but still they sleep till their security overcome their fear, and so this work comes to nothing. And therefore, be not contented to have some motions upon thy soul now and then, some involuntary impressions, but see what they come to: Eph. 5:14, 'Awake, thou that sleepest,' &c. When Christ hath awakened thee, and thou beginnest to be startled in the sleep of thy security, rouse up thyself and be serious.

[3.] Actuate thy thoughts by a sound belief and application of eternity, that you may not lose your convictions. First by a belief, and

then by an application. This is that which doth actuate and enliven all those truths that set on the work of God. First, by a belief of eternity. Surely there is good and evil, there is hope and fear, therefore there is heaven and hell. Say, there are two states, a state of nature and a state of grace; and these two states have respect to two covenants—a covenant of works, that worketh bondage, and binds me over to punishment, and a covenant of grace; and both these do issue themselves at length into heaven and hell. This is the great sum of our religion. And conscience and reason will tell me there is a world to come; there must be a time when God will deal more severely with sinners than he doth in the present life. Enliven your thoughts by strengthening your belief of eternity, for this is that which doth set home all the exhortations of his word, and which makes our thoughts serious. And then, secondly, by a serious application of these things to yourselves. If you would have these hopes, apply the offer of heaven to work upon your hope, and the commination of hell to work upon your fear. The offer of heaven: If I would be blessed in Christ, surely I must mend my course. Now, Acts 3:26, 'He hath sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.' When there is an offer that comes in with power upon the heart, then Christ is sent to turn me from my sins, that I may be the inheritor of an everlasting blessing; and shall I not let go my sins? I have often flattered myself with this, Sure I am willing to be saved; but I cannot be saved if I live in my sins, otherwise I am no more willing to be saved than the devils, for they are willing to be saved from the wrath of God for ever. A creature is willing to be eased of his torment, and every one would have eternal life: Evermore give me this life. Now, let Christ do his work to turn you from your sins. So by working upon your fear: Here God hath threatened me with eternal damnation if I do not hearken. Now scourge thy soul with that smart question, Heb. 2:3, 'How shall I escape if I neglect so great salvation?' How shall I escape the

damnation of hell if I turn back upon his offer, if I deal slightly with God in a business which so nearly concerns my soul?

[4.] Issue forth a practical decree for God in the soul. When the heart is backward, we have no remedy left but to decree for God. David makes a decree in the court of conscience: Ps. 32:5, 'I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord.' I said, I determined, I would go and lie at God's foot, and humble myself; so I said—set down a resolution which shall be like the laws of the Medes and Persians, never to be reversed—that thou wilt for this present and ever hereafter wait upon the means, and give way to the work of God upon thy soul; resolve that you will go and lie at God's feet, and say, 'Lord, turn me: I am as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke,' Jer. 31:18. thou hast forbidden me to despair, and commanded thy creature to come to thee for grace—here I cast myself at the footstool of thy mercy; and resolve you will keep up your endeavours in all the means of grace in hearing the word, prayer, &c. Though no sensible comfort comes, yet in obedience perform holy duties: 'At thy command,' says Peter, 'I will cast out the net,' Luke 5:5. Be diligent and frequent in waiting upon God, and look with more seriousness and earnestness of soul after the business of eternal life.

## SERMON LXIX

**The bands of the wicked have robbed me:  
but I have not forgotten thy law.—VER.**

**61.**

IN the words observe—

1. David's trial.



2. His constancy under that trial.

1. His trial is set forth by two things:—

[1.] The persons from whom it came, the bands of the wicked.

[2.] The evil done him, have robbed me.

[1.] The persons, 'The bands 'לְבַנְיֹתָי of the wicked.' 'לְבַנְיֹתָי signifieth a cord, and also a troop or company, not of soldiers only, but others: 1 Sam. 10:5, 'Thou shalt meet a company or troop of prophets;' it is the same word. Those that interpret it cords or ropes, understand it some one way, some another. Aben Ezra, the griefs and sorrows prepared for the wicked have taken hold of me, and parallels it with Ps. 116:3, 'The sorrows of death compassed me, the pains of hell gat hold of me.' Others understand it of the snares the wicked laid for him. But the word is better translated by the Chaldee paraphrase, catervœ, the bands; in our old translation, 'The congregations of the wicked:' he meaneth the multitude of his enemies leaguering together against him.

[2.] The evil done him, they 'have robbed me.' A man may suffer in his name by slander, in his dwelling by his exile, in his liberty by imprisonment, in limbs or life by torture and execution, in his estate by fine and confiscation. Many are the troubles of the righteous; this last is here intended. There are the depredations of thieves and robbers, but they do not spoil for religion's sake, but the supply of their lusts; the plunderings of soldiers by the license of war, when laws cease, so men are robbed or have their goods taken from them by violence; or else it may be by pretence of law, by fine and confiscation, as it is said: Acts 8:3, 'Saul made havoc of the churches, and entering into every house, haling men, committed them to prison;' Acts 9:1, 'Saul, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples, desires letters of the high priest, that if he

found any of this way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.' At that time the favourers of the gospel suffered much rapine and spoil of goods. Applying it to David's case, some think it fulfilled when the Amalekites spoiled Ziklag, 1 Sam. 30, and took the women captives, and the spoil of the city. Some understand it of the time when Absalom and his party rifled his house and defiled his concubines, 2 Sam. 15.

2. His constancy. No calamity had wrought upon him so far as to forsake God's truth, or go against his conscience in anything.

Doct. That no temporal loss which can accrue to us by the violence of evil men should make us forsake our duty to God.

1. That this temptation may be greater or less as it is circumstantiated. It is here represented by David by this word, the bands or the troops of the wicked, which implieth—

[1.] Their multitudes. One froward wicked man may do much harm in his neighbourhood, as there are some whom God reserveth as scourges to his people and goads and thorns to their sides; but when many rise up against us, the temptation is the greater: Ps. 3:1, 'Lord, how are they increased which trouble me? many are they which rise up against me.' The sincere are but few themselves, and they have many enemies: 1 John 5:19, 'We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.' There was a whole world against a handful of Christians, but we must not 'follow a multitude to do evil.'

[2.] Their confederacy, 'The bands of the wicked:' Ps. 83:5–7, 'They have consulted together with one consent, they are confederate against thee, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek.' Though the wicked be at enmity one with another, yet they will all agree to destroy the people of God.

[3.] These were set on mischief; for the bands of the wicked are spoken of here as a society opposite to that which is spoken of afterwards, ver. 63, 'I am a companion of them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy commandments.' There are two seeds which have enmity one against another, 'the seed of the woman,' and 'the seed of the serpent,' Gen. 3:15. The far greatest part of the world live an ungodly sensual life, and therefore cannot endure those that give an example of a holy self-denying life, John 15:19; therefore the life of godliness is usually made matter of common hatred, scorn, and opposition, for the sensual and ungodly cannot endure the godly and the heavenly. The more exactly any man setteth himself to obey God, the more he crosseth the lusts and carnal interests of the wicked, and so the more he commonly suffereth in the world. The world is full of malice and prejudice against them; they slander them, oppress them, represent them under an odious character; and they often meet with disturbances from the assaults and injuries of wicked men.

[4.] The hurt they did him was spoiling and taking away the conveniences of the temporal life, they 'robbed me.' Though it go no further, yet to be deprived of those necessary and convenient comforts is matter of sorrow in itself. It goeth near to the hearts of worldlings to part with them, and therefore by this means they think to discourage the people of God; and many times God permitteth it that their lives, liberties, and estates shall be much in their power: Ps. 44:10, 'They that hate us spoil for themselves.' God leaveth them in their hands to dispose of them at their pleasure, which is a great and sharp temptation to his people. The Amalekites 'left no sustenance in Israel,' Judges 6:4.

2. When a man is said to forsake his duty to God by such trials.

[1.] When he loseth his patience and meek submission to his will. Thus the Lord tried Job by the Sabæans and Chaldæans, Job 1:15, 17, who 'took away his oxen, and camels, and all his stock;' yet Job meekly submitteth to the Lord's will: ver. 21, 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' Not ὁ Χαλδαῖος ἀφήλατο, but Job eyeth God both in giving and taking: if he take, he gave before, or else we had it not to lose. When we look to instruments we are full of wrath: a bucket of water cast upon us enrageth us more than a soaking shower that cometh from heaven. Let us see God, without whom nothing cometh to pass.

[2.] When he loseth his comfort and confidence in God, for that is a sign we live upon the creature, and cannot trust God without the creature. Man knoweth how to put a cheat upon his own heart. When he hath all things at full, then he talketh of living by faith; as those women who 'would eat their own bread, and wear their apparel, only call us by thy name,' Isa. 4:1. So they, though all their happiness be bound up with the creatures, yet have the wit to give God the name. Now God will take away the creature to see how we can live upon himself alone: 1 Sam. 30:6, 'David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.' He still maintained his hope in the Lord when all was gone, when the emptiers had emptied him.

[3.] When we desert the truth, or go against conscience in anything. David telleth us here, when 'the bands of the wicked,' &c.; that is, 'the congregations,' says the old translation, as decreeing an unjust sentence against him; or 'bands,' says the new, as appointed to attack him; or troops, when the wicked combined against him by troops. So the primitive Christians 'suffered the spoiling of their goods,' Heb. 10:34; the Jews endeavoured to make them poor and miserable, that they might forsake their Christianity. But we must, with Joseph, leave our coat to keep our conscience; and these trials, in short,

should be but the exercise of our patience and hope, and we should be provoked to do nothing but what best becometh God's servants.

3. That we should not forsake our duty to God for temporal losses.

[1.] We entered upon the profession of Christianity on these terms: Mat. 16:24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.' Life, wealth, and honours must be forsaken: Luke 14:26, 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.' Only relations and life are there mentioned, goods are not; but afterwards, ver. 33, 'He that forsaketh not all he hath,' *voto et præparatione animi*. Yet Christ may permit some to break through at a cheaper rate, but all must resolve on it, prepare for such a temptation. God hath not excepted it out of his covenant and dispensations; he may when he pleases suffer a righteous man to be stripped to the skin, therefore we must not except it out of our resignation. The wise merchant 'sold all,' Mat. 13:45, 46. When a man cometh to accept of Christ, there is a competition. Without this—

(1.) No true faith. True faith includes in it an election and choice or esteem and valuation of Christ, not only as good, but as more excellent, more necessary for us, more beneficial to us than all other things. It is *prælatio unius rei præ altera*, a preference of Christ above other things: Phil. 3:7–9, 'I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,' &c. Christ is apprehended as more necessary for the soul; it cometh to him under an apprehension of a deep want, and with a broken-hearted sense of misery; we are undone without him. We are not so though we want or lose the world; God can repair us here, will at last save us without these things: Luke 10:42, 'But one thing is needful.' Christ is esteemed

more excellent; the rarest comforts of the world are but base things to his grace, but dung and dross in comparison; not only uncertain, but vain and empty as to any real good: Job 27:8, 'For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he has gained, when God taketh away his soul?' Christ is more beneficial to a poor sinner; in him alone true happiness is to be found; therefore we must suffer anything rather than offend our Saviour: Rom. 8:39, 'No creature is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

(2.) No true love. Religion without self-denial in one kind or another is Christianity of our own making, not of Christ's. We cull out the easy safe part of religion, and then we call this love to God and love to Christ. No; the true Christian love is to love God above all. Now, one branch of loving God above all is to part with things near and dear to us when God calleth us so to do. We must be contented to be crucified to the world with our Lord and Master: Mat. 10:37, 'He that loveth father, or mother, or son, or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me.' An underling love Christ will not like or accept.

[2.] On this condition we possess and enjoy the good things of this world, namely, to part with them when God calleth us thereunto. We are not absolute owners, but tenants at will: Haggai 2:8, 'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.' The absolute disposal of the riches and wealth of the world belongeth unto God, who hath all these things, with the power to dispose of them as he pleaseth. Therefore he is to be eyed, acknowledged, and submitted unto in the ordering of our lot and portion: Hosea 2:9, 'I will return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness.' God still retaineth the dominion of the creatures in his own hand, and we have but the stewardship and dispensation of them: he will give and he will take away at his own pleasure. They are

deposited in our hands as a trust, for which we are accountable; therefore, if God demand, there should be an act of voluntary submission and subjection on our part. If we enjoy them as our own, by an original right exclusive of God, we are usurpers but not just possessors. We have indeed a subordinate right to prevent the encroachment of our fellow-creatures, but that is but such a right as a man hath in a trust, or a servant to his working tools. Surely God may dispose of his own as he will. If we give it for God's glory, or lay out our wealth in his service, God's right must be owned: 1 Chron. 29:14, 'For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.' If God take it away by immediate providence, it was his own: Job 1:21, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.' If by men, if we lose anything for God, it is his own that we lose.

[3.] Our gain in Christ is more than our loss in the world, both here and hereafter. So his promise: Mark 10:29, 30, 'Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive a hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life.' Our religion promiseth us spiritual recompense in this world, and eternal in the other, but exempteth us not from persecutions. He that hath a heart to quit anything for Christ, shall have it abundantly recompensed in the world, with a reward much greater in value and worth than that which he hath forsaken, sometimes more and better in the same kind; as Job's estate was doubled, and Valentinian, that left the place of a tribune or captain of soldiers for his conscience, and got that of an emperor. If not this, he giveth them a greater portion of his Spirit and the graces thereof, more peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and this is a hundred-fold better than all that we lose. Now this we have with persecution: John 16:33, 'These things have I

spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace; in the world you shall have tribulation.' But then, for the world to come, then all shall be abundantly made up to us in eternal life, when we shall reign with Christ in his heavenly kingdom. This is all in all to a Christian; that which is lost for God is not lost. Surely in heaven we shall have far better things than we lose here.

[4.] Because the wicked never overcome but when they foil us of our innocency, zeal, and courage. The victory of a Christian doth not consist in not suffering, or not fighting, but in keeping that which we fight for: a Christian is 'more than a conqueror,' Rom. 8:37. *Scias hominem Christo deditum mori posse, vinci non posse.* He may lose goods, lose life, yet still he overcomes whilst he is faithful to his duty. Those that were 'as sheep appointed to the slaughter,' and 'killed all the day long,' they were oppressed and kept under, yet were 'more than conquerors.' The way to conquer is by patience and zeal, though we be trodden down and ruined; not by getting the best of opposite factions, but by keeping a good conscience, and patience, and contentedness in sufferings. If God be honoured, if the kingdom of Christ be advanced by our sufferings, we are victorious: Rev. 12:11, 'They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death.' That is an overcoming indeed, to die in the quarrel, and be the more glorious conquerors. As long as a Christian keepeth the faith, whatever he loses in the contest he has the best of it: 2 Tim. 4:7, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith,' &c. Our victory is not to be measured by our prosperity and adversity, but our faithful adherence to God. Though the devil and his instruments get their will over our bodies and bodily interests, yet if he get not his will over our souls, we conquer, and not Satan. Christians have not only to do with men who strike at their worldly interests, but with Satan, who hath a spite at their souls: Eph. 6:12, 'For we wrestle not



against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.' God may give men a power over the bodily lives of his people, and all the interests thereof; the devil aimeth at the destruction of souls. He will let you enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, that deprive you of your delight in God and celestial pleasures. He can be content you shall have dignities and honours if they prove a snare to you; if he seeketh to bring you to trouble and poverty, it is to draw you from God.

[5.] Fainting argueth weakness, if not nullity of grace: Prov. 24:10, 'If thou faintest in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.' A zealous, constant mind will overcome all discouragements: 2 Tim. 1:7, 'For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind.' Trees, well rooted, will abide the blasts of strong winds. It is hard to those that are guided by flesh and blood to overcome such temptations, but to the heavenly mind it is more easy.

Use 1. Of information.

1. That loss of goods for adhering to God's word by the violence and rapine of evil-minded men is one temptation we should prepare for: such trials may come. Such as mind to be constant must prepare themselves to quit their goods. We all study to shift off the cross, but none studieth to prepare for the cross. Profession goeth at too low a rate when people leap into it upon the impulsion of carnal motives, or some light conviction or approbation. God taketh his fan in his hand, and the chaff is distinguished from the solid grain. All love ἀδάπανον εὐαγγέλιον, a cheap gospel: the gospel will have many summer friends, gaudy butterflies, that fly abroad in the sunshine; but what cost are we content to be at for the gospel's sake?

2. That where men make conscience of their ways, they are not apt to be reduced by penalties, for they are guided by a higher principle than the interests of the flesh. Conscience looks to the obligation of duty, what we must do or not do; not to the course of our interests—not what is safe, but what is duty. Oh! but their sufferings may make them serious and wise, and so reflect upon their error, and change their mind. Ans. It rather puzzleth the case when a man is divided between his conscience and his interests. The unsound are blinded by their interests; but a gracious heart in a clear case is more resolute, in a doubtful is more afraid and full of hesitancy, lest he gratify the flesh, and so the case is more perplexed. Men sooner come to themselves and relinquish errors if interest be not in the case.

Use 2. To exhort us to keep a good conscience, and to be faithful with God, though our temporal interests should be endangered thereby. The conscience of our duty should more comfort us than the loss of temporal things should trouble our minds. But because this is not a by-point that I am now upon, nor a small thing that I press you to, but necessary for every candidate of eternity or true disciple of Jesus Christ, I must direct to get this constancy of mind.

1. I will show you what is necessary to it by way of disposition or qualification.

2. What is necessary to it by way of consideration.

1. By way of disposition.

[1.] There is required a lively faith concerning the world to come, with some assurance of our interest therein. That faith is necessary to draw off the heart from the conveniences and comforts of this life appeareth by that, Heb. 10:34, 'Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing of yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and a

more enduring substance.' There is both faith implied, and also some assurance of our interest; they knew there was substance to be had in the other world. They that live by sense count present things only substance, but the world to come only fancy and shadows; but the gracious heart, on the contrary, looketh upon this world as 'a vain show.' Ps. 39:6, the world to come to be only the enduring substance, or that true solid good which will make us everlastingly happy. And there is some assurance of our interest; they had this substance; that is, by virtue of God's promise they had a title and right to it, and some security for the full possession of it in due time, by the first fruits and earnest of the Spirit. This they knew in themselves; they discerned their own qualifications, and fulfilling the conditions of the promises; and the Spirit did in some measure testify to them that they were the sons of God; and from all this flowed their suffering of the loss of worldly goods, and their suffering of it joyfully.

[2.] A sincere love to Christ is necessary, for then they will not quit his interest for what is most near and dear to them in the world: Rom. 8:35, 'What shall separate us from the love of Christ?' Love there is not only taken passively, for the love wherewith Christ loveth us, but actively, for the love wherewith we love Christ. For the things mentioned there, 'tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword,' belong not to the latter; for tribulation is not wont to withdraw God from loving us, but us from loving God. It is we that are assaulted by tribulation, and not God nor Christ: it is our love which the temptation striketh at. A man that loveth Christ sincerely will be at some loss for him. Christ is rather held by the heart than by the head only. They that make a religion of their opinions will find no such effect, if they have a faith that never went deeper than their brains and their fancies, that reacheth not their heart, and doth not stir up their love to Christ, that will not enable them to hold out against temptations. Though men may

sacrifice some of their weaker lusts and petty interests, yet they will not forsake all for his sake: he that loveth Christ will not leave him. Why doth a sinner deny himself for his lusts? he loveth them, and sacrifices his time, strength, estate, conscience. So a Christian that knoweth Christ hath loved him, and therefore loveth Christ again; he will not easily quit him and his truth. A bare belief is only in the head, which is but the entrance into the inwards of the soul; it is the heart which is Christ's castle and citadel. A superficial assent may let him go, but a faith which worketh by love produceth this close adherence. Well, if we would endure spoiling of our goods, it is our wisdom to consider what we love most, and can least part withal. Christ is infinitely to be valued, as more precious than all the wealth in the world.

[3.] A well-grounded resolution in the truth: 1 Thes. 5:21, 'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.' When we take up the ways of God upon fashion, or half conviction, or probable reasons, and do not resolve upon sound evidence, we are in danger to be shaken when it is a costly thing to be a sincere Christian; but when conscience is soundly informed, then all things give way to conscience. If the wicked spoil us of our goods, they should not spoil us of our best treasure, which is a good conscience. Whatever power they have by God's permission over our outward estates, they have no power over our consciences; that is the best friend or the worst enemy. No bird singeth so sweetly as the bird in our bosoms; here heaven or hell is begun, and the solaces of the outward life are nothing to this.

[4.] A contempt of the world. Our earthly affections must be mortified, and that upon a twofold account:—

(1.) That we may freely part with them; for if they be overvalued, our affliction will be according to the degree of our affection: Mark 10:22, 'He was sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions.' We cannot so freely resign them to God, and leave all for treasure in heaven.

(2.) That we may more entirely depend upon God: Heb. 13:5, 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.' Till the heart be purged from carnal affections, the promises of God have little force and respect with us. A little satisfieth a contented and a weaned mind, and he can the better cast himself upon God's providence.

[5.] A sound belief of God's providence; this hath a great influence upon a free parting with our estates for our conscience' sake: Heb. 11:8, by faith Abraham left his country, kindred, possessions, and trusted himself blindfold with God's providence. This principle was made use of when the king was troubled about the hundred talents: 2 Chron. 25:9, saith the man of God, 'The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.' God's providence is enough for a gracious heart. Indeed it is hard to maintain such a faith in providence when exposed to great injuries. We are apt to doubt of it; goodness seemeth to be neglected by him: Ps. 73:14, 'Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.' Doth God know? But a Christian must believe in hope against hope.

## 2. Remedies by way of consideration.

[1.] They cannot rob us of spiritual and eternal riches, of the fear of God, love of God; treasures in heaven are out of their reach: Mat. 6:19, 20, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and

steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through or steal.' Your joy shall no man take from you,' John 16:22. Heavenly things can never be taken from their owners.

[2.] If they cannot take away our God and Christ, we shall be certainly happy. All things in the world depend on God and Christ: 'The favour of the Lord maketh rich,' Prov. 10:22; without his blessing nothing prospereth. All judgment is in the hands of Christ, John 5:22. He hath the government of the world, or dominion over all things which may conduce to help or hinder his people's happiness. Things are not left to their arbitrament or uncertain contingency, but are under the government of a supreme providence, in the hand of him that loves us.

[3.] Tried friendship is most valuable: James 1:12, 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.'

[4.] If we suffer with Christ, we shall also be glorified with him: Rom. 8:17, 'If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.'

## **SERMON LXX**

**At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee, because of thy righteous judgments.**

**—VER. 62.**

IN these words observe three things:—

1. David's holy employment, or the duty promised, giving thanks to God.

2. His earnestness and fervency, implied in the time mentioned, at midnight I will rise; rather interrupt his sleep and rest than God should want his praise.

3. The cause or matter of his thanksgiving, because of thy righteous judgments, whereby he meaneth the dispensations of his providence in delivering the godly and punishing the wicked according to his word. Where observe—

1. The term by which these dispensations are expressed, judgments.

2. The adjunct, righteous judgments.

1. For the term, 'judgments,' they are so called partly because they are God's judicial acts belonging to his government of the world; partly because they are dispensed according to his word, the sentences of which are also called judgments. There are the judgments of his mouth and of his hand: Ps. 119:13, 'With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.'

2. The adjunct, 'righteous,' or the judgments of thy righteousness; so called because they are holy, just, and full of equity.

Doct. 1. One special duty wherein the people of God should be much exercised is thanksgiving.

Doct. 2. That, God's providence rightly considered, we shall in the worst times find much more cause to give thanks than to complain.

Doct. 3. That a heart deeply affected with God's providence will take all occasions to praise God and give thanks to his name, both in

season and out of season.

Doct. 1. One special duty wherein the people of God should be much exercised is thanksgiving. This duty is often pressed upon us: Heb. 13:15, 'Let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually, which is the fruit of our lips;' giving thanks unto his name. There are two words there used, praise and thanksgiving: generally taken, they are the same; strictly taken, thanksgiving differeth from praise. They agree that we use our voice in thanksgiving, as we do also in praise, for they are both said to be the fruit of our lips. What is in the prophet Hosea, chap. 14:2, 'calves of our lips,' is in the Septuagint, 'the fruit of our lips;' and they both agree that they are a sacrifice offered to our supreme benefactor, or that they belong to the thank-offerings of the gospel. But they differ in that thanksgiving belongeth to benefits bestowed on ourselves or others; but in relation to us, praise to any excellency whatsoever. Thanksgiving may be in word or deed; praise in words only. Well, then, thanksgiving is a sensible acknowledgment of favours received, or an expression of our sense of them, by word and work, to the praise of the bestower. The object of it is the works of God as beneficial unto us, or to those who are related to us, or in whose good or ill we are concerned. As public persons, as magistrates: 1 Tim. 2:1, 2, 'I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplication, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority.' Pastors of the church: 2 Cor. 1:11, 'You also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf.' Or our kindred according to the flesh, or some bond of Christian duty: Rom. 12:15, 'Rejoice with them that do rejoice.' Another place where this duty is enforced is Eph. 5:20, where we are bidden to 'give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;' where you see it is a duty of a universal and perpetual use, and one



wherein the honour of God and Christ is much concerned. A third place is 1 Thes. 5:18, 'In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.' See what reason he urgeth; the express will of God requiring this worship at our hands. We are to obey *intuitu voluntatis*. God's will is the fundamental reason of our obedience in every commandment; but here is a direct charge, now God hath made known the wonders of his love in Christ.

I shall prove to you that this is a necessary duty, a profitable duty, a pleasant and delightful duty.

1. The necessity of being much and often in thanksgiving will appear by these two considerations:—

[1.] Because God is continually beneficial to us, blessing and delivering his people every day, and by new mercies giveth us new matter of praise and thanksgiving: Ps. 68:19, 'Blessed be the God of our salvation, who loadeth us daily with his benefits, Selah.' He hath continually favoured us and preserved us, and poured his benefits upon us. The mercies of every day make way for songs which may sweeten our rest in the night; and his giving us rest by night, and preserving us in our sleep, when we could not help ourselves, giveth us songs in the morning. And all the day long we find new matter of praise: our whole work is divided between receiving and acknowledging.

[2.] Some mercies are so general and beneficial that they should never be forgotten, but remembered before God every day. Such as redemption by Christ: Ps. 111:4, 'He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered.' We must daily be blessing God for Jesus Christ: 2 Cor. 9:15, 'Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.' I understand it of his grace by Christ. We should ever be thus blessing

and praising him; for the keeping of his great works in memory is the foundation of all love and service to God.

2. It is a profitable duty. The usefulness of thanksgiving appeareth with respect to faith, love, and obedience.

[1.] With respect to faith. Faith and praise live and die together; if there be faith, there will be praise; and if there be praise, there will be faith. If faith, there will be praise, for faith is a bird that can sing in winter: Ps. 56:4, 'In God will I praise his word, in God have I put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me;' and ver. 10, 'In God I will praise his word, in the Lord I will praise his word.' His word is satisfaction enough to a gracious heart; if they have his word, they can praise him beforehand, for the grounds of hope before they have enjoyment. As Abraham, when he had not a foot in the land of Canaan, yet built an altar and offered sacrifices of thanksgiving, because of God's grant and the future possession in his posterity, Gen. 13:18. Then, whether he punisheth or pitieth, we will praise him and glory in him. Faith entertaineth the promise before performance cometh, not only with confidence, but with delight and praise. The other part is, if praise, there will be faith; that is, supposing the praise real, for it raiseth our faith to expect the like again, having received so much grace already. All God's praises are the believer's advantage, the mercy is many times given as a pledge of more mercy. In many cases Deus donando debet. If life, he will give food and bodily raiment. It holdeth good in spiritual things. If Christ, other things with Christ. One concession draweth another; if he spares me, he will feed me, clothe me. The attributes from whence the mercy cometh is the pillar of the believer's confidence and hope. If such a good, then a fit object of trust. If I have found him a God hearing prayer, 'I will call upon him as long as I live,' Ps. 116:2. Praise

doth but provide matter of trust, and represent God to us as a storehouse of all good things, and a sure foundation for dependence.

[2.] The great respect it hath to love. Praise and thanksgiving is an act of love, and then it cherisheth and feedeth love. It is an act of love to God, for if we love God we will praise him. Prayer is a work of necessity, but praise a mere work of duty and respect to God. We would exalt him more in our own hearts and in the hearts of others: Ps. 71:14, 'I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.' We pray because we need God, and we praise him because we love him. Self-love will put us upon prayer, but the love of God upon praise and thanksgiving; then we return to give him the glory. Those that seek themselves will cry to him in their distress; but those that love God cannot endure that he should be without his due honour. In heaven, when other graces and duties cease, which belong to this imperfect state, as faith and repentance cease, yet love remaineth; and because love remaineth, praise remaineth, which is our great employment in the other world. So it feedeth and cherisheth love, for every benefit acknowledged is a new fuel to keep in the fire: Ps. 18:1, 'I will love thee, O Lord, my strength;' Ps. 116:1, 'I will love the Lord, who hath heard the voice of my supplications;' Deut. 30:20, 'That thou mayest love the Lord, who is thy life, and the length of thy days.' The soul by praise is filled with a sense of the mercy and goodness of God, so that hereby he is made more amiable to us.

[3.] With respect to submission and obedience to his laws and providence.

(1.) His laws. The greatest bond of duty upon the fallen creature is gratitude. Now grateful we cannot be without a sensible and explicit acknowledgment of his goodness to us: the more frequent and serious in that, the more doth our love constrain us to devote

ourselves to God: Rom. 12:1, 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.' To live to him: 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 'For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.' And therefore praise and thanksgiving is a greater help to the spiritual life than we are usually aware of; for, working in us a sense of God's love, and an actual remembrance of his benefits (as it will do if rightly performed), it doth make us shy of sin, more careful and solicitous to do his will. Shall we offend so good a God? God's love to us is a love of bounty; our love to God is a love of duty, when we grudge not to live in subjection to him: 1 John 5:3, 'His commandments are not grievous.'

(2.) Submission to his providence. There is a querulous and sour spirit which is natural to us, always repining and murmuring at God's dealing, and wasting and vexing our spirits in heartless complaints. Now, this fretting, quarrelling, impatient humour, which often showeth itself against God even in our prayers and supplications, is quelled by nothing so much as by being frequent in praises and thanksgivings: Job 1:21, 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' It is an act of holy prudence in the saints, when they are under any trouble, to strain themselves to the quite contrary duty of what temptations and corruptions would drive them unto. When the temptation is laid to make us murmur and swell at God's dealings, we should on the contrary bless and give thanks. And therefore the Psalmist doth so frequently sing praises in the saddest condition. There is no perfect defeating the temptation but by studying matter of praise, and to set seriously about the duty. So Job 2:10, 'Shall we receive good at the

hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' Shall we receive so many proofs of the love of God, and quarrel at a few afflictions that come from the same hand, and rebel against his providence when he bringeth on some needful trouble for our trial and exercise? and having tasted so much of his bounty and love, repine and fret at every change of dealing, though it be useful to purge out our corruptions, and promote our communion with God? Surely nothing can be extremely evil that cometh from this good hand. As we receive good things cheerfully and contentedly, so must we receive evil things submissively and patiently.

3. It is a most delightful work to remember the many thousand mercies God hath bestowed on the church, ourselves, and friends. To remember his gracious word and all the passages of his providence; is this burdensome to us? Ps. 147:1, 'Praise ye the Lord, for it is pleasant;' and Ps. 135:3, 'Sing praises unto his name, for it is pleasant.' Next to necessity, profit; next to profit, pleasure. No necessity so great as spiritual necessity, because our eternal well-being or ill-being dependeth on it; and beggary is nothing to being found naked in the great day. No profit so great as spiritual; that is not to be measured by the good things of this world, or a little pelf, or the great mammon, which so many worship; but some spiritual and divine benefit, which tendeth to make us spiritually better, more like God, more capable of communion with him: that is true profit, it is an increase of faith, love, and obedience. So for pleasure and delight; that which truly exhilarateth the soul, begets upon us a solid impression of God's love, that is the true pleasure. Carnal pleasures are unwholesome for you, like luscious fruits, which make you sick. Nothing is so hard of digestion as carnal pleasures. This feedeth the flesh, warreth against the soul; but this holy delight that resulteth from the serious remembrance of God, and setting forth his

excellences and benefits, is safe and healthful, and doth cheer us but not hurt us.

Use. Oh, then, let us be oftener in praising and giving thanks to God! Can you receive so much, and beg so much, and never think of a return or any expression of gratitude? Is there such a being as God, have you all your supplies from him, and will you not take some time to acknowledge what he hath done for your souls? Either you must deny his being, and then you are atheists; or you must deny his providence, and then you are epicureans, next door to atheism; or you must deny such a duty as praise and thanksgiving, and then you are anti-scripturists, for the scripture everywhere calleth for it at our hands; or else, if you neglect this duty, you live in flat contradiction to what you profess to believe, and then you are practical atheists, and practical epicureans, and practical anti-scripturists; and so your condemnation will be the greater, because you own the truth but deny the practice. I beseech you, therefore, to be often alone with God, and that in a way of thanksgiving, to increase your love, faith, and obedience, and delight in God. Shall I use arguments to you?

1. Have you received nothing from God? I put this question to you, because great is our unthankfulness, not only for common benefits, but also for special deliverances—the one not noted and observed, the other not improved. Humble persons will find matter of praise in very common benefits, but we forget even signal mercies. Therefore, I say, have you received nothing? Now, consider, is there no return due? You know the story, Luke 17:15–19, Christ healed ten lepers, and but one of them 'returned and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down at his feet giving thanks, and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way; thy faith hath

made thee whole.' All had received a like benefit, but one only returned, and he a Gentile and no Jew, to acknowledge the mercy. They were made whole by a miraculous providence, he was made whole by a more gracious dispensation: 'Thy faith hath made thee whole;' he was dismissed with a special blessing. God scattereth his benefits upon all mankind, but how few own the supreme benefactor! Surely a sensible heart seeth always new occasions of praising God, and some old occasions that must always be remembered, always for life, and peace, and safety, and daily provision; and always for Christ, and the hopes of eternal life. Surely if we have the comfort, God should have the glory: Ps. 96:8, 'Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name, bring an offering, and come into his courts.' He that hath scattered his seed expecteth a crop from you.

2. How disingenuous is it to be always craving, and never giving thanks! It is contrary to his directions in the word; for he showeth us there that all our prayers should be mingled with a thankful sense and acknowledgment of his mercies: Phil. 4:6, 'In everything let your requests and supplications be made known with thanksgiving.' Do not come only in a complaining way: Col. 4:2, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.' They are not holy requests unless we acknowledge what he hath done for us, as well as desire him to do more. Nothing more usual than to come in our necessities to seek help; but we do not return, when we have received help and relief, to give thanks. When our turn is served, we neglect God. Wants urge us more than blessings, our interest swayeth us more than duty. As a dog swalloweth every bit that is cast to him, and still looketh for more, we swallow whatever the bounty of God casteth out to us without thanks, and when we need again, we would have more, and though warm in petitions, yet cold, rare, infrequent in gratulations. It is not only against scripture, but against nature.

Ethnics abhor the ungrateful, that were still receiving, but forgetting to give thanks. It is against justice to seek help of God, and when we have it to make no more mention of God than if we had it from ourselves. It is against truth; we make many promises in our affliction, but forget all when well at ease.

3. God either takes away or blasts the mercies which we are not thankful for. Sometimes he taketh them from us: Hosea 2:8, 9, 'I will take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and I will recover my wool and flax.' Why? 'She doth not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and gave her silver and gold.' Where his kindness is not taken notice of, nor his hand seen and acknowledged, he will take his benefits to himself again. We know not the value of mercies so much by their worth as by their want; ὡσπερ ὀφθαλμοὶ τὸ ἄγαν λαμπρὸν οὐκ ὀρῶσι—a thing too near the eye cannot be seen. God must set things at a distance to make us value them. If he take them not away, yet many times he blasts them as to their natural use: Mal. 2:2, 'And if you will not hear, and if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings; yea, I have cursed them already, because you do not lay it to heart.' The creature is a deaf-nut; when we come to crack it, we have not the natural blessing as to health, strength, and cheerfulness, Acts 14:17; or if food, yet not gladness of heart with it; or we have not the sanctified use, it is not a mercy that leadeth us to God. A thing is sanctified when it is a bono in bonum, if it cometh from God and leadeth us to God: 1 Cor. 3:21–23, 'All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, for you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' You have a covenant right, a holy use.



4. Bless him for favours received, and you shall have more. Thanksgiving is the kindly way of petitioning, and the more thankful for mercies, the more they are increased upon us. Vapours drawn up from the earth return in showers to the earth again. The sea poureth out its fulness into the rivers, and all rivers return to the sea from whence they came: Ps. 67:5, 6, 'Let the people praise thee, O God; yea, let all the people praise thee: then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us.' When springs lie low, we pour a little water into the pump, not to enrich the fountain, but to bring up more for ourselves. It is not only true of outward increase, but of spiritual also: Col. 2:7, 'Be ye rooted in the faith, and abound therein with thanksgiving.' If we give thanks for so much grace as we have already received, it is the way to increase our store. We thrive no more, get no more victory over our corruptions, because we do no more give thanks.

5. When God's common mercies are well observed or well improved, it fits us for acts of more special kindness. In the story of the lepers— Luke 17:19, 'Thy faith hath made thee whole,'—he met not only with a bodily cure, but a soul cure: Luke 16:11, 'If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?' When we suspect a vessel leaketh, we try it with water before we fill it with wine. You are upon your trial; be thankful for less, God will give you more. Means or directions:—

[1.] Heighten all the mercies you have by all the circumstances necessary to be considered. By the nature and kind of them: spiritual eternal blessings first; the greatest mercies deserve greatest acknowledgment: Eph. 1:3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ'—Christ's spirit, pardon of sins, heaven, the way of salvation known, accepted, and the things of the world as

subordinate helps. Luke 10:20, 'Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.' Then consider your sense in the want of mercies; what high thoughts had you then of them? The mercies are the same when you have them and when you want them, only your apprehensions are greater. If affectionately begged they must be affectionately acknowledged, else you are a hypocrite either in the supplication or gratulation. Consider the person giving, God, so high and glorious. A small remembrance from a great prince, no way obliged, no way needing me, to whom I can be no way profitable, a small kindness melts us, a gift of a few pounds, a little parcel of land. Do I court him and observe him? There is less reason why God should abase himself to look upon us or concern himself in us: Ps. 113:6, 'He humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth.' We have all things from him. Consider the person receiving; so unworthy: Gen. 32:10, 'I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant;' 2 Sam. 7:18, 'Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?' Consider the season; our greatest extremity is God's opportunity: Gen. 22:14, 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen,' when the knife was at the throat of his son; 2 Cor. 1:9, 10, 'We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust, that he will yet deliver us.' Consider the end and fruit of his mercy; it is to manifest his special love to us, and engage our hearts to himself: Isa. 38:17, 'Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption,' or 'thou hast loved me from the grave;' otherwise God may give things in anger. Consider the means by which he brought them about, when unlikely, unexpected in themselves, weak, insufficient. The greatest matters of providence hang many times upon small wires: a lie brought Joseph into prison,

and a dream fetched him out, and he was advanced, and Jacob's family fed. Consider the number of his mercies: Ps. 139:17, 'How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!' The many failings pardoned, comforts received, dangers prevented, deliverances vouchsafed. How he began with us before all time, conducted us in time, and hath been preparing for us a happiness which we shall enjoy when time shall be no more.

[2.] Satisfy yourselves with no praise and thanksgiving but what leaveth the impression of real effects upon the soul; for God is not flattered with empty praises and a little verbal commendation. There is a twofold praising of God—by expressive declaration or by objective impression. Now, neither expression nor impression must be excluded. Some platonical divines explode and scoff at the verbal praise more than becometh their reverence to the word of God: Ps. 50:23, 'He that offereth praise glorifieth me.' But then the impression must be looked after too, that we be like that God whom we commend and extol, that we depend on him more, love him more fervently, serve him more cheerfully.

Doct. 2. That God's providence rightly considered, we shall find in the worst times much more cause to give thanks than to complain. I observe this because David was now under affliction. He had in the former verse complained that 'the bands of the wicked had robbed him,' yet even then would he give thanks to God.

1. Observe here, the matter of his thanksgiving was God's providence according to his word, seen in executing threatenings on the wicked, and performing his promises to the godly. God's word is one of the chiefest benefits bestowed on man, and therefore should be a subject of our praises. Now, when this is verified in his providence, and we see a faithful performance of those things in mercy to his servants,

and in justice to his enemies, and the benefits and advantages of his law to them that are obedient, and the just punishment of the disobedient, and can discern not only a vein of righteousness but of truth in all God's dealings, this is a double benefit, which must be taken notice of, and acknowledged to God's praise. O Christians! how sweet is it to read his works by the light of the sanctuary, and to learn the interpretation of his providence from his Spirit by his word: Ps. 73:17, 'I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end;' by consulting the scriptures he see the end and close of them that walk not according to God's direction: his word and works do mutually explain one another. The sanctuary is the place where God's people meet, where his word is taught, where we may have satisfaction concerning all his dealings.

2. That when any divine dispensation goeth cross to our affections, yea, our prayers and expectations, yet even then can faith bring meat out of the eater, and find many occasions of praise and thanksgiving to God; for nothing falleth out so cross but we may see the hand of God in it working for good.

[1.] Though we have not the blessing we seek and pray for, yet we give thanks because God hath been sometimes entreated, he hath showed himself a God hearing prayer, and is only delaying now until a more fit time wherein he may give us that which is sought: Ps. 43:5, 'Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.' Now we are mourning, but he is our God, and we are not left without hope of a blessed issue. God, that hath been gracious, will be gracious again. He is our gracious father when we are under his sharpest corrections, a father when he striketh or frowneth; therefore we are not without hope that he will give us opportunities again of glorifying his name.

[2.] We bless God for continuing so long the mercies which he hath taken from us. Former experiences must not be forgotten: 'Ebenezer, hitherto the Lord hath helped us.' If he shall afflict us afterward, yet 'hitherto he hath helped us,' 1 Sam. 7:12. If he take away life, it is a mercy that he spared it so long for his own service and glory; if liberty, that we had such a time of rest and intermission.

[3.] God is yet worthy of praise and thanksgiving for choicer mercies yet continued, notwithstanding all the afflictions laid upon us. That we have his Spirit supporting us under our trials, and enabling us to bear them: 1 Peter 4:13, 14, 'Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. For if ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth on you.' And that we have any peace of conscience: Rom. 5:1, 'Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' That the hope of eternal life is not diminished but increased by our afflictions: Rom. 5:4, 5, 'We glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed: because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.' That many of our natural comforts are yet left, and God will supply us by ways best known to himself.

[4.] That evils and afflictions which light upon us for the gospel's sake, or righteousness' sake, and Christ's name's sake, are to be reckoned among our privileges, and deserve praise rather than complaint: Phil. 1:29, 'To you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.' If it be a gift, it is matter of praise.

[5.] Take these evils in the worst notion, they are less than we have deserved: Ezra 9:13, 'And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve.' Babylon is not hell, and still that should be acknowledged.

[6.] That no evil hath befallen us but such as God can bring good out of them: Rom. 8:28, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' All things that befall a Christian are either good, or shall turn to good; either to good natural: Gen. 50:20, 'Ye thought evil, but God meant it for good;' or good spiritual: Ps. 119:75, 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me;' or good eternal: 2 Cor. 4:17, 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'

Use 1. For information, that God's righteous judgments are matter of praise and thanksgiving. An angel is brought in speaking, Rev. 16:5, 'Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.' Indeed, the formal object of thanksgiving and praise is some benefit: Ps. 135:3, 'Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good.' We praise God for his judgments, because they are just and right; we praise God for his mercies, not only because they are just and equal, but comfortable and beneficial to us, and so a double ground of thanksgiving.

Use 2. For reproof, that we make more noise of a little trouble than we do of a thousand benefits that remain with us. We fret and complain and manifest the impatience of the flesh; like a great machine or carriage, if one pin be out of order, all stoppeth, or one member hurt, though all the rest of the body be sound; or as Haman, the favours of a great king, pleasures of a luxurious court, all this

availeth him nothing as long as Mordecai was in the gate, Esther 5:13; notwithstanding his riches, honours, multitude of children, great offices, this damped all his joy: Mal. 1:2, 'I have loved you, saith the Lord; yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?' Non quod habet numerat, &c. Oh! let us check this complaining spirit; let us consider what is left, not what God hath taken away; what we may or shall have, not what we now want; what God is, and will be to his people, though we see little or nothing in the creature.

Doct. 3. That a heart deeply affected with God's providence will take all occasions to praise and give thanks.

1. It is certain that our whole life should be a real expression of thankfulness to God. The life of a Christian is a life of love and praise, a hymn to God: 1 Peter 2:9, 'But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.' Christianity is a confession; the visible acting of godliness is a part of this confession; we are all saved as confessors or martyrs. Now the confession is made both in word and deed.

2. There are special occasions of thanksgiving and praise to God, as the apostle bids Timothy preach: 2 Tim. 4:2, εὐκαιρῶς ἀκαιρῶς, 'in season, out of season,' meaning thereby that he should not only take ordinary occasions, but extraordinary; he should make an opportunity where he found none. So we should press Christians to praise God not only in solemn duties, when the saints meet together to praise, but extraordinarily redeem time for this blessed work; yea, interrupt our lawful sleep and repose, to find frequent vacancies for so necessary a duty as the lauding and magnifying of God's mercy.

3. As for rising up at midnight, we can neither enforce it as a duty upon you, nor yet can we condemn it. It was an act of heroical zeal in

David, who employed his time waking to the honour of God, which others spent in sleeping; and we read that Paul and Silas 'sang praises at midnight,' Acts 16:25, though then in the stocks, and they had been scourged the day before. And it is said, Job 35:10, 'None saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?' that is, giveth matter of praise if we wake in the night. And David saith elsewhere, Ps. 42:8, 'The Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me;' day and night he would be filled with a sense of God's love, and with songs of praise. Therefore we cannot condemn this, but must highly commend it. Let men praise God at any time, and the more they deny themselves to do it, the more commendable is the action; yet we cannot enforce it upon you as a necessary duty, as the Papists build their nocturnal devotions upon it. That which we disapprove in them is, that those hours instituted by men they make necessary; that they direct their prayers to saints and angels which should only be to God, that they might mingle them with superstitious ceremonies and observances; that they pray and sing in an unknown tongue without devotion, appropriating it to a certain sort of men, to clerks for their gain, with an opinion of merit. The primitive Christians had their *hymnos antelucanos*, but in persecution, their *ἀλεκτροφωνίας*, saith Clem. Alexandrinus; but what is this to superstitious night-services?

4. Though we cannot enforce the particular observance upon you, yet there are many notable lessons to be drawn from David's practice.

[1.] The ardency of his devotion, or his earnest desire to praise God, 'at midnight;' then, when sleep doth most invade us, then he would rise up. His heart was so set upon the praising of God, and the sense of his righteous providence did so affect him, and urge him, or excite him to this duty, that he would not only employ himself in this work in the day-time, and so show his love to God, but he would rise out of



his bed to worship God and celebrate his praise. That which hindereth the sleep of ordinary men is either the cares of this world, the impatient resentment of injuries, or the sting of an evil conscience: these keep others waking, but David was awaked by a desire to praise God; no hour is unseasonable to a gracious heart; he is expressing his affection to God when others take their rest. Thus we read of our Lord Christ, that he spent whole nights in prayer, Luke 6:12. It is said of the glorified saints in heaven, that they praise God continually: Rev. 7:17, 'They are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.' Now, holy men, though much hindered by their bodily necessities, yet they will come as near as present frailty will permit; we oftentimes begin the day with some fervency of prayer and praise, but we faint ere even.

[2.] His sincerity, seen in his secrecy. David would profess his faith in God when he had no witness by him, at midnight, then no hazard of ostentation. It was a secret cheerfulness and delighting in God when alone; he could have no respect to the applause of men, but only to approve himself to God who seeth in secret. See Christ's direction, Mat. 6:6, 'But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly;' his own practice: Mark 1:35, 'Rising early in the morning, he went into a desert to pray.' Both time and place implied secrecy.

[3.] We learn hence the preciousness of time. It was so to David. See how he spendeth the time of his life. We read of David, when he lay down at night, he 'watered his couch with his tears,' after the examination of his heart; Ps. 119:62; at midnight he rose to give thanks; in the morning he prevented the morning-watches, seven times a-day praising God, morning, noon, night. These are all acts of

eminent piety. We should not content ourselves with so much grace as will merely serve to save us. Alas! we have much idle time hanging upon our hands; if we would give that to God it were well.

[4.] The value of godly exercises above our natural refreshings; the word is sweeter than appointed food: Job 23:12, 'I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.' David preferreth his praises of God before his sleep and rest in the night. Surely this should shame us for our sensuality. We can dispense with other things for our vain pleasures; we have done as much for sin, for vain sports, broken our rest for sin. Some monsters of mankind turn night into day, and day into night for their drunkenness, gaming, vain sports, &c., and shall we not deny ourselves for God?

[5.] The reverence to be used in secret adoration. David did not only raise up his spirits to praise God, but rise up out of his bed to bow the knee to him. Secret duties should be performed with some solemnity, not slubbered over. Praise, a special act of adoration, requireth the worship of body and soul.

Use. Let David's example condemn our backwardness and sluggishness, who will not take those occasions which offer themselves. Mark, he gave thanks when we fret; at midnight he rose to do it with the more secrecy and fervency; this not to pray only, but to give thanks.

## SERMON LXXI

**I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.**

**—VER. 63.**

IN this verse two things are observable:—

1. A description of the people of God; they are described by their principle, and by the course of their lives and actions, fear and obedience.
2. David's respect to them, I am a companion of all them.

More particularly:—

1. In the person speaking: the disparity of the persons is to be observed. David, who was a great prophet, yea, a king, yet saith, 'I am a companion of them that fear thee.' Christ himself called them this 'fellows:' Ps. 45:7, 'Thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows; and therefore David might well say, 'I am a companion.'
2. David saith of all them. The universal particle is to be observed; not only some, but all: when any lighted upon him, or he upon any of them, they were welcome to him. How well would it be for the world if the great potentates of the earth would thus think, speak, and do: 'I am a companion of all them that fear thee.' Self-love reigneth in most men. We love the rich and despise the poor, and so 'have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ in respect of persons,' James 2:1; therefore this universality is to be regarded. 'Hearing of your faith and love to all the saints,' Eph. 1:15, to the mean, as well as the greatest. Meanness doth not take away church relations, 1 Cor. 11:20. There are many differences in worldly respects between one child of God and another, yea, in spiritual gifts, some weaker, some stronger, but we must love all, for all are children of one Father, all owned by Christ, 'He is not ashamed to call them brethren,' Heb. 2:11. This, I say, is observable, the disparity of the persons—on the one side David, on the other all the people of God.

First, Let us take notice of the description of the people of God. They are such as fear him and keep his precepts, that is, obey him conscientiously, out of reverence to his majesty and goodness, and due regard to his will delivered in his word. The same description is used: Acts 10:35, 'In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.' Note hence—

Doct. 1. The fear of God is the grand principle of obedience: Deut. 5:29, 'Oh, that there were such an heart within them, that they would fear me and keep my commandments always.' Here consider—

1. What is the fear of God.
2. What influence it hath upon obedience.

1. What is the fear of God? There is a twofold fear of God—servile and filial.

[1.] Servile, by which a man feareth God and hateth him, as a slave feareth his cruel master, whom he could wish dead, and himself rid of his service, and obeyeth by mere compulsion and constraint. Thus the wicked fear God because they have drawn an ill picture of him in their minds: Mat. 25:24, 25, 'I knew thou wast a hard man, and I was afraid.' They perform only a little unwilling and displeasing service, and as little as they can, because of their ill conceit of God. So Adam feared God after his sin when he ran away from him, Gen. 3:10. Yea, so the devils fear God, and rebel against him: James 2:19, 'The devils also believe and tremble.' This fear hath torment in it to the creature, and hatred of God, because by the fear of his curse and the flames of hell he seeketh to drive them from sin.

[2.] Filial fear, as children fear to offend their dear parents; and thus the godly do so fear God, that they do also love him, and obey him,

and cleave to him, and this preserveth us in our duty: Jer. 32:40, 'I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me.' This is a necessary frame of heart for all those that would observe and obey God. This fear is twofold:—

(1.) The fear of reverence.

(2.) The fear of caution.

(1.) The fear of reverence, when the soul is deeply possessed with a sense of God's majesty and goodness, that it dareth not offend him. His greatness and majesty hath an influence upon this fear. 'Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it?' Jer. 5:22. His goodness and mercy: Hosea 3:5, 'They shall fear the Lord, and his goodness;' Jer. 10:6, 7, 'There is none like unto thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name is great in might: who would not fear thee, O king of nations?' Both together engage us to live always as in his eye and presence, and in the obedience of his holy will, studying to please him in all things.

(2.) The fear of caution is also called the fear of God, when we carry on the business of salvation with all possible solicitude and care. For it is no easy thing to please God and save our souls: Phil. 2:12, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.' In the time of our sojourning here we meet with many temptations; baits without are many, and the flesh within us is importunate to be pleased, and our account at the end of the journey is very exact: 1 Peter 1:17, 'And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.' A false heart is apt to betray us, and the entertainments of sense to entice and corrupt us, and we are assaulted on every side, and salvation and eternal happiness is the thing in chase and pursuit; if

we come short of it we are undone for ever: Heb. 4:1, 'Having a promise of rest left with us, let us fear lest we come short of it.' There is no mending errors in the other world; there we shall be convinced of our mistakes to our confusion, but not to our conversion and salvation.

## 2. The influence it hath upon keeping God's precepts.

[1.] In general, this is one demonstration of it, that the most eminent servants of God have been commended for their fear of God: Job, chap. 1:1, is said to be 'a man perfect and upright, one that feared God, and eschewed evil.' He had a true godliness, or a filial awe of God, which kept him from sin, and the temptations whereby it might insinuate itself into his soul. So Obadiah, Ahab's steward, is described to be a man 'that feared God greatly,' 1 Kings 18:3; and of one Hananiah it is said, Neh. 7:2, that 'he feared God greatly, above many others.' Men are more holy as the fear of God doth more prevail in their hearts, their tenderness both in avoiding and repenting of sin increaseth according as they entertain the awe and fear of God in their hearts, and here is the rise and fountain of all circumspect walking. As the stream is dried up that wanteth a fountain, so godliness ceaseth as the fear of God abateth.

[2.] More particularly.

(1.) It is the great pull-back and constant preservative of the soul against sin, as the beasts are contained in their subjection and obedience to man by the fear that is upon them: Gen. 7:2, 'The dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, that they shall not hurt you;' so the fear of God is upon us: Exod. 20:20, 'God is come to prove you, that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.' Joseph is an instance: Gen. 39:9, 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' Abraham could promise himself

little security in a place where no fear of God was: Gen. 20:11, 'I thought surely the fear of God is not in this place, and they will slay me for my wife's sake.' Therefore, Prov. 23:17, 'Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.'

(2.) It is the great excitement to obedience.

(1st.) Duties of religion will not reverently and seriously be performed unless there be a deep awe of God upon our souls: 'God will be sanctified in all that draw nigh unto him,' Lev. 10:3. Now, what is it to sanctify God in our hearts, but to fear his majesty and greatness and goodness? Isa. 8:13, 'Sanctify the Lord God of hosts in your hearts, and make him your fear.' Therefore David desireth God to call in his straggling thoughts and scattered affections: Ps. 86:11, 'Unite my heart to the fear of thy name;' so the serious worshippers are described to be those that 'desire to fear his name,' Neh. 1:11.

(2d.) Duties towards men will not be regarded in all times and places, unless the fear of God bear rule in our hearts; as servants, when their masters are absent, neglect their work: Col. 3:22, 'Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.' A Christian is alike everywhere, because God is alike everywhere. He that feareth God needeth no other theatre than his own conscience, nor other spectators than God and his holy angels. So to hinder us from contriving mischief in secret, when others are not aware of it: Lev. 19:14, 'Thou shalt not curse the deaf man, nor lay a stumbling-block before the blind, but shalt fear the Lord thy God.' The deaf hear not, the blind seeth not; but God seeth and heareth, and that is enough to a gracious heart to bridle us when it is in our power to hurt others; as Joseph assureth his brethren he would be just to them, 'for I fear God,' Gen. 42:18. Nehemiah did not

convert the public treasures to his private use: Neh. 5:15, 'So did not I, for I fear God.' This grace, when it is hazardous to be faithful to men, makes us to slight the danger: Exod. 1:17, 'The midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them;' that kept them from obeying that cruel edict, to their own hazard. Neither hope of gain nor fear of loss can prevail where men fear God.

(3d.) It breedeth zeal and diligence in the great and general business of our salvation, and maketh us more careful to approve ourselves unto God in our whole course, that we may be accepted of him: 2 Cor. 7:1, 'Perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' God is a great God, and will not be put off with anything, or served with a little religiousness by the by, but with more than ordinary care and zeal and diligence. Now, what inclineth us to this but the fear of God, or a reverence of his majesty and goodness? So Phil. 2:12, let us 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling.' Salvation is not to be looked after between sleeping and waking; no, it requireth our greatest attention, as having a sense of the weightiness of the work upon our hearts.

Use. The use is to press us to two things:—

1. To fear God.

2. To keep his precepts if we would come under the character of his people.

1. To fear God. Be not prejudiced against this grace; it is generally looked upon as a left-handed grace.

[1.] It is not contrary to our blessedness: Prov. 28:14, 'Blessed is he that feareth always.' It doth not infringe the happiness of our lives to be always in God's company, mindful of our duty to him. The angels



in heaven always behold the face of our heavenly Father, and in that vision their supreme happiness consists. There is a fear of angels and a fear of devils. The angels ever fear and reverence God, the devils believe and tremble: the angels' fear is reverence, the devils' fear is torment. God doth not require that we should always perplex ourselves with terrors and scruples—that were a torture, not a blessedness; but God hath required that we should always have a deep sense of his majesty and goodness impressed upon our hearts. In heaven this fear will not cease; it is an essential respect due from the creature to the Creator; and as we shall love him, so fear him always; and if a godly man were put to his choice, he would not be without this fear of God. To live always in an admiration of his excellent majesty, a thankful sense of his goodness, and a regard to his eye and presence, this is our happiness.

[2.] It is not contrary to our comfort and joy in the Lord. Fear to offend God, and joy in his favour may well stand together: Ps. 2:10, 'Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.' There is a sweet mixture in a gracious heart of holy awe and seriousness, with a delightful sense of God's goodness: these graces may easily be combined and brought to kiss one another: Ps. 112:1, 'Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, and delighteth greatly in his commandments.' When we do most carefully abstain from what displeaseth him, we have most sense of his love, and do most cheerfully practise what he requireth of us. All other pleasures and delights are but May-games and toys to that of a strict obedience, which giveth the soul a continual feast: Acts 9:31, 'They walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost.' None have such a comfortable life as they who are most careful to avoid sin. We need this mixture: we should grow slight and secure without fear, and slavish without comfort: there must be fear to weaken the security of the flesh, and joy of faith to revive the soul.

[3.] It is not contrary to courage and holy boldness, by which we should bear up under troubles and dangers. There is a spirit of fear opposite to a sound mind, 2 Tim. 1:7, when men are ashamed of the gospel, or afraid of the persecutions which accompany it: πνεῦμα δουλείας, a cowardly spirit, a worldly fear of adversities, and dangers, losses, reproaches. So we are commanded, 'Fear not their fear, but sanctify the Lord God of hosts in your hearts, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread,' Isa. 8:12, 13. No; this is the fear of the world; but I press to the fear of the Lord: Luke 12:4, 5, 'Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: fear him which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.' This is the best cure of the fear of the world, as one nail driveth out another. The fear to offend God inflameth our courage, and doth not abate it.

[4.] It is not contrary to the grace of the gospel. No; it is the fruit of it: Ps. 130:4, 'There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.' The heart is shy of a condemning God, but closeth with and adhereth to a pardoning God; and nothing breedeth this fear to offend so much as a tender sense of the Lord's goodness in Christ.

2. It presseth us to keep his precepts; that is the only evidence that the fear of God is rooted in our hearts. The heart must be prepared to keep all; they are all equally good, and they are all equally necessary; not one of them is in vain; and they are all joined together, like rings in a chain, and we are not sincere till we regard all: Ps. 119:6, 'Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.' The judgment must approve all: Ps. 119:128, 'Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way.' The will must be set and fixed in a serious purpose to keep all, making conscience of the least as well as the

greatest, the difficult as well as the easy: Heb. 13:18, 'I trust we have a good conscience in all things, willing to live honestly.' Earnest endeavours must be used to grow up to a more exact conformity to all: Phil. 3:14, 'I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' Some corruption may remain after all our endeavours, but none must be reserved or cherished in the heart: Ps. 66:18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart.' There will be a secret love to some sins more than others, but it must not be indulged, but checked and striven against, and prayed against: Ps. 119:133, 'Let not any iniquity have dominion over me.' And this praying and striving must produce some effect, that in some measure it may be said of us what was said of Zachary and Elizabeth: Luke 1:6, 'They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.' And we must increase and grow in this more and more: Col. 1:11, 'Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness;' and 1 Thes. 4:1, 'As ye have received of us how to walk, and to please God, so do you abound more and more.' The entertaining of some bosom sin, which we are loath to part withal, darkeneth our whole comfort.

Secondly, David's professed respect to these sort of men, 'I am a companion of them that fear thee,' of them, and of all them.

Doct. 2. That we should associate ourselves and keep communion with those who are truly gracious. Consider—

1. In what sense we are to be companions of them that fear the Lord.

2. Why it must be so, or the reasons.

1. In what sense may David or any other be said to be a companion of those that fear the Lord, or what it importeth.

[1.] We must join with them, or be engaged in the profession of the same faith and obedience unto God. The faith of all Christians is a 'common faith,' and their salvation a 'common salvation' to them all: Titus 1:4, 'Titus, my own son, after the common faith;' Jude 3, 'I gave diligence to write to you of the common salvation.' The communion with the saints which we believe in the Creed is in the first and chiefest place a communion in faith and charity, and this kind of communion all the members and parties of the catholic church have one with another. They are all quickened by the same Spirit, live by the same faith, wait for the hope of the same glory, and so they are companions in the same religion.

[2.] As many as cohabit and live in a convenient nearness must often meet together to join in the same worship; for God hath instituted the assemblies of the faithful that we may openly and with mutual consent worship God in Christ, in prayer, thanksgiving, praises, word, sacraments, &c.; and the assembling of ourselves for these ends must not be forsaken for negligence or fear: Heb. 10:25, 'Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhort one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.' Now in this sense we are companions of those that fear God, as we join in worship with them: Ps. 42:4, 'I had gone with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with the multitude of them that kept holy-day.' To make one in the public assemblies and societies of the godly, whereby God may be publicly honoured, and souls converted, comforted, and saved, is to be a companion of them that fear God and keep his precepts.

[3.] To love them, and prize them, and converse with them intimately upon all occasions, that by this society ye may excite one another to further proficiency in obedience. This is to be a companion with

them that fear God: so the prophet kept company with those good men that he had described, that he himself might be confirmed by them, and that he might aid and confirm them. David said, Ps. 16:2, 3, 'My goodness extendeth not to thee, but to the saints on the earth, and the excellent, in whom is all my delight,' that is, his love and kindness was towards the godly, esteeming them more excellent and precious, how mean soever in condition, above the ungodly world, how great soever their rank and quality be, and taking pleasure in their society; them he valued, and them he esteemed above all the greatest men in the world, and in them was all his joy and delight. So Ps. 15:4, 'In whose eyes a vile person is contemned, but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.' Mark these two opposite expressions, 'the excellent of the earth,' and 'a vile person.' Thus it is to look on things, not with the eye of sense, but faith and grace. So Paul longed to see the Romans, to be comforted by the mutual faith of him and them, Rom. 1:12. Well, then, to be a companion is to love tenderly, to prize and esteem one another for the grace of God which is in them, desiring one another's good, especially spiritual: 'Rejoicing with them that do rejoice, and mourning with them that mourn,' Rom. 12:15; praying for one another, giving thanks for one another, preventing the evil, endeavouring the good of one another, by counsel, help, and mutual assistance. So that, 'I am a companion,' is that I contract a friendship with them that fear God.

[4.] To be a companion with them is to own them in all conditions, and to take part and lot with them: Rev. 1:9, 'I, John, who am a brother and companion in tribulation, and the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.' We must have a fellowship with them not only in their privileges, but in their sufferings; not only companions in the kingdom, but companions in the tribulation and patience of Jesus Christ. So Heb. 10:33, 'Partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst ye became companions

of those that were so used;' in the one was their passion, in the other their compassion, in that they not only suffered themselves, but owned their brethren when they suffered, and did receive them, and comfort them, and stand by them; so near is the union, and so dear and tender is the affection, of Christian brethren among themselves. So it is said of Moses, Heb. 11:25, 'Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.' Alas! there are many summer friends to the gospel, painted butterflies, who are gone as soon as the sunshine of prosperity is gone. Brethren do almost forget that they are brethren, stand aloof, and are loath to own the afflicted.

## 2. Reasons why David was a companion of all the saints.

[1.] Our relation enforceth it: all that are in the church are of one kindred and lineage, descended from one common father, animated by one common spirit, and knit together in the profession of one common faith in Christ, and therefore must be companions one to another. As natural relation enforceth natural love, so Christian relation Christian love. To make this evident, let me tell you men may be considered in a twofold respect—as men, or as Christians and believers; and so there is a twofold love due to them, ἀγάπη, and φιλαδελφία—2 Peter 1:7, 'Brotherly kindness and charity.' Our common neighbour hath the same nature that we have, and is of the same stock, for all come of one blood; besides our particular relation to them, either natural by kindred, consanguinity, or affinity, or political as members of the same kingdom, or other various respects of benefit, vicinity, or familiarity. As Christians and believers; this is common to all of them that they have spiritual kindred, as they are partakers of the same divine nature, or image of God, 2 Peter 1:4, which they have from the same stock and original, Christ, the second Adam: 1 Cor. 15:45, 'The first Adam was made a living soul; the last

Adam was made a quickening spirit;' and as they make but one family, Eph. 3:15, 'Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named;' only this difference there is between Christ and Adam—we derive our original from Adam by the succession of many intervening generations; we are not his immediate children, as Cain and Abel were; but every believer doth immediately derive his life from Christ, hath it at the next hand; and besides this, there is an immediate communion by which every believer is joined to one another. There are several particular respects which do vary the degree of Christian love,—as men are public and private persons; some in remote churches, others in the same congregation; some excel in grace, others of a lower rank; some more, some less useful in advancing the kingdom of Christ. Thus you see the parallel between both these loves; Christian charity supposeth natural love as the foundation of it, for grace is built upon nature, but also it sublimateth it, and raiseth it to a higher degree of excellency than nature could reach; for the light of the gospel doth not abolish the light of nature, but perfecteth it, as the reasonable soul compriseth the vegetative and sensitive. We have other objects, see clearer arguments and reasons for love: Gal. 6:10, 'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially them who are of the household of faith;' 2 Peter 1:7, 'And add to godliness brotherly-kindness, to brotherly-kindness charity.'

[2.] The new nature inclineth us to it, and this love floweth from an inward propension and cordial inclination, needing no other outward allurements and provocation to procure it: 1 John 5:1, 'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.' The same love that inclineth us to love God inclineth us to love the brethren also: 1 John 4:9, 'As touching brotherly love, ye need not that I should write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of

God to love one another.' God's teaching is by effectual impression, or inclining the heart: it must needs be so, because all believers live in the communion of the same Spirit. As some philosophers say there is an anima mundi which holdeth all the parts of it together, so there is a spirit of communion which uniteth all the members of Christ's mystical body, and inclineth them one to another.

[3.] Gratitude to Christ maketh us to prize all that belong to him, and to own them, and to be companions with them in all conditions: 1 John 3:16–18, 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth;' 1 John 4:11, 'Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.' God loved us greatly, sent his own Son to die for us; now, how shall we express our thankfulness but by a dear and tender love to those who are Christ's? As David, when Jonathan was dead, inquired, 'Is there none of Jonathan's posterity to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake?' and at length he found lame Mephibosheth; so, is there none upon earth to whom we may show kindness for Christ's sake, who is now in heaven? Yes; there are the saints. Now these should be dear and precious to us, and we should be companions with them in all conditions.

[4.] Because of the profit and utility redounding. A true friend is valuable in secular matters, much more a spiritual friend: Prov. 27:17, 'As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth a man the countenance of his friend.' When a man is dull, his friend puts an edge upon him; he is a mighty support and stay to us: Prov. 17:17, 'A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity;' Prov. 27:9, 'The perfume



of an ointment rejoiceth the soul, so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel;' and in some cases he telleth us, 'A friend is better than a brother.' Now, if an ordinary true friend be so valuable, what is a Christian friend? A holy, heavenly, faithful friend is one of the greatest treasures upon earth; therefore we should seek out such and associate with them.

Use. Let us see, then, whom we make our companions; let us avoid evil company lest we be defiled by them, and frequent good company that we may be mutually comforted and quickened: 'I am a companion of them that fear thee.' Interpreters suppose it was spoken in opposition to the bands of the wicked mentioned ver. 61. If they unite, so should we. This, then, is our business, the rejecting of evil company, and the choice of good companions. To enforce this, take these considerations:—

1. Friendship is necessary, because man is ζῶον πολιτικόν, a sociable creature. Man was not made to live alone, but in company with others, and for mutual society and fellowship; and they that fly all company and live to and by themselves are counted inhuman: Eccles. 4:9–12, there the benefit of society is set forth, 'Two are better than one; for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; he hath not another to lift him up again: if two lie together they have heat; but how can one be warm alone? and if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him.' Thus far Solomon. The Egyptians in their hieroglyphics expressed the unprofitableness of a solitary man by a single millstone, which alone grindeth no meal, but with its fellow is very serviceable for that purpose. The Lord appointed mankind to live in society, that they might be mutually helpful to one another: he never made them to live in deserts, as wild beasts love to go alone, but as the tame, in flocks and herds. The Lord hath given variety of gifts to the sons of

men,—to all some, but to none all,—that one might stand in need of another, and make use of one another; and the subordination of one gift to another is the great instrument of upholding the world. Man is weak, and needeth society; for every man is insufficient to himself, and wants the help of others: and man is inclined by the bent of his nature; we have a certain desire to dwell together and live in society.

2. Though man affects society, yet in our company we may use choice, and the good must converse with the good, for these reasons:

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[1.] Because like will sort with like. Friendship is very much founded in suitableness, and maintained by it: *idem velle est nolle, est amicitia*. The godly will have special love to the godly, and they that fear God will be a companion of those that fear him; they are more dear and precious to them than others; as a wicked man easily smelleth out a fit companion: Ps. 50:18, 'When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers.' Like will to like, and therefore the godly should be dear and precious to one another. Every man's company wherein he delighteth showeth what manner of man he is himself. The fowls of heaven flock together according to their several kinds. Ye shall not see doves flocking with the ravens, nor divers kinds intermixed. Every man is known by his company. They that delight in drinking, love swilling and drunken companions; in gaming, love such as make no conscience of their time; in hunting, love such as are addicted to such exercise; in arms, love men of a soldierly and military spirit; they that delight in books love scholars and persons of a philosophical breeding. That which every man is taken withal he loveth to do it with his friend; so certainly they that love and fear God delight in those that love him and fear him, and their company is a refreshing to one another.

[2.] If they be not like, intimacy and converse will make them like: every man is wrought upon by his company. We imitate those whom we love, and with whom we often converse: Prov. 13:20, 'He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.' As a man that walketh in the sunshine is tanned insensibly, and as Moses' face shined by conversing with God, ere we are aware we adopt their manners and customs, and get a tincture from them. So Prov. 22:24, 25, 'Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go, lest thou learn his ways and get a snare to thy soul.' A man would think that of all sins, wrath and anger should not be propagated by company, the motions and furies of it are so uncomely to a beholder; yet secretly a liking of the person breedeth a liking of his ways, and a man getteth such a frame of spirit as those have whom he hath chosen for his companions. This should be the more regarded by us, because we are sooner made evil by evil company than good by good company: 1 Cor. 15:33, 'Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners;' evil words or ὀμιλῖαι κακαί, evil converses, corrupt good manners. We convey a disease to others, but not our health. Oh, how careful should we be of our friendship, that we may converse with such as may go before us as examples of piety, and provoke us by their strictness, heavenly-mindedness, mortification, and self-denial, to more love to God, zeal for his glory, and care of our salvation! Especially doth this concern the young, who, by their weakness of judgment, the vehemency of their affections, and want of experience, may be easily drawn into a snare.

[3.] Our love to God should put us upon loving his people and making them our intimates; for religion influenceth all things, our relations, common employments, friendships, and converses; it is a smart question that of the prophet, 2 Chron. 19:2, 'Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?' Surely a

gracious heart cannot take them into his bosom. He loveth all with a love of good-will, as seeking their good, but not with a love of complacency, as delighting in them. Our neighbour must be loved as ourselves; our natural neighbour as a natural self, with a love of benevolence; and our spiritual neighbour as our spiritual self, with a love of complacency. In opposition to complacency we may hate our sinful neighbour, as we must ourselves: 'The wicked is an abomination to the righteous,' Prov. 29:26. The hatred of abomination is opposite to the love of complacency, as odium inimicitiae to amor benevolentiae. So David saith, Ps. 139:21, 22, 'Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am I not grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies;' I cannot cry up a confederacy with them. They that have a kindness for God will be thus affected.

3. There is a threefold friendship—sinful, civil, and religious.

[1.] Sinful, when men agree in evil, as drunkards with drunkards, or robbers with robbers: Prov. 1:14, 'Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse.' When men conspire against the truth and interest of Christ in the world, or league themselves against his people, as Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek, Ps. 83:3, divided in interests, but united in hatred; as Herod and Pilate against Christ. This is *unitas contra unitatem*, as Austin, or *consortium factionis*, a bond of iniquity, or confederacy in evil. Again—

[2.] There is a civil friendship, built on natural pleasure and profit, when men converse together for trade or other civil ends. Thus men are at liberty to choose their company as their interests and course of their employments lead them. The apostle saith, a man must go out of the world if he should altogether abstain from the company of the wicked: 1 Cor. 5:9, 10, 'I wrote to you in an epistle not to company

with fornicators; yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, for then must ye needs go out of the world.' But—

[3.] There is religious friendship, which is built on virtue and grace, and is called 'the unity of the Spirit:' Eph. 6:3, 'Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' Now this is the firmest bond of all. Sinful societies are soon dissolved; drunkards and profane fellows, though they seem to unite and hold together, yet upon every cross word they fall out and break; and civil friendship, which is built on pleasure and profit, cannot be so firm as that which is built on honesty and godliness. This is among the good and holy, who are not so changeable as the bad and carnal, and the ground of it is more lasting. This is amicitia per se, the other per accidens, from constitution of soul and likeness of spirits. The good we seek may be possessed without envy; the friends do not straiten and intrench upon one another. Self-love and envy soon breaketh our friendship, but these seek the good of another as much as their own delight in the graces of one another.

[4.] In religious friendship we owe a love to all that fear God: Acts 4:32, 'The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul.' Love is called σύνδεσμος τῆς τελειότητος, 'the bond of perfectness,' Col. 3:14. All things are bound together by a holy society, and preserved by it.' There is in love a desire of union and fellowship with those whom we love: 1 Sam. 18:1, 'Jonathan's soul was knit to the soul of David, and he loved him as his own soul;' and the apostle biddeth all Christians to be 'knit together in brotherly love,' Col. 2:2; without this they are as a besom unbound, they fall all to pieces.

[5.] Though there must be a friendship to all, yet some are to be chosen for our intimacy. Our Lord Christ had Peter, James, and John, Mat. 17:1; Mat. 26:37, 'He took with him Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee.' When he raised Jairus' daughter, 'he suffered none to go in but Peter, James, and John,' Luke 8:51, ἐκλέκτων ἐκλεκτότεροι. This may be because of suitableness, or special inclination, or their excellency of grace, sicut se habet simpliciter ad simpliciter, ita magis ad magis.

[6.] Our converse with these must be improved to the use of edifying, to do one another good by reproof, advice, counsel: Lev. 19:17, 'Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; thou shalt in anywise reprove him, and not suffer sin to be upon him.' This is kindness to his soul: Rom. 1:11, 'I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end you may be established.'

## SERMON LXXII

### **The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes.—VER. 64.**

IN this verse I observe—

1. David's petition, teach me thy statutes.
2. The argument or consideration which encourageth him to ask it of God, the earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy. The sum and substance of this verse will be comprised in these five propositions:—
  1. That saving knowledge is a benefit that must be asked of God.
  2. That this benefit cannot be too often or sufficiently enough asked; it is his continual request.
  3. In asking we are encouraged by the bounty or mercy of God.
  4. That God is merciful all his creatures declare.
  5. That his goodness to all creatures should confirm us in hoping for saving grace or spiritual good things.

Prop. 1. That saving knowledge is a benefit that must be asked of God, for three reasons:—

1. God is the proper author of it.
2. It is a singular favour where he bestoweth it.

### 3. Prayer is the appointed means to obtain it.

1. God is the proper author of it. The fountain of wisdom is not in man himself, but God giveth it to whom he pleaseth. We were at first endowed by him with a reasonable soul and faculty of understanding: John 1:4, 'In him was life, and this life was the light of man.' All life is of God, especially that life which is light. The reasonable soul and the natural faculty of understanding cometh from him, and if it be disordered, as it is by sin, it must be by him restored and rectified; it is all God's gift. Now man is fallen from that light of life wherein he was created, his Maker must be his mender, he must go to 'the Father of lights' to have his light cleared, James 1:17, and his understanding freed from those mistakes and errors wherewith it was obscured. All knowledge is from God, much more saving grace or a sound knowledge of the mysteries of the gospel. Many scriptures speak to this: Job 32:8, 'There is a spirit in man, and the inspira-of the Almighty giveth understanding.' Though the dial be right set, yet it showeth not the time of the day except the sun shineth; so the spirit of man will grope and fumble in the clearest cases without a dvice irradiation. God enlighteneth the mind, directeth the judgment, giveth understanding what to do or say. So he challengeth it as his prerogative: Job 38:26, 'Who hath put wisdom into the inward parts, or given understanding unto the heart?' The exercise of the outward senses is from God, who gives the seeing eye, the hearing ear, much more the right exercise of the internal faculties; an understanding heart is much more from the Lord: Prov. 2:6, 'The Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding;' Dan. 2:21, 'He giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.' Certainly all true wisdom is from above: James 3:17, 'The wisdom that is from above is first pure,' &c. He distinguisheth there between the wisdom that is not from above and that which is from above. Man hath so



much wisdom yet left as to cater for the body and the concernments of the bodily life (called 'thine own wisdom,' Prov. 23:4); therefore he saith, ver. 15, 'This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.' But for wisdom that concerneth the other world and our everlasting concernments, that is of God, that is from above; the wisdom that is exercised in pure, peaceable, fruitful, self-denying obedience. All that have any of this wisdom should acknowledge God, and all that would have it should depend upon him, and run to the fountain where enough is to be had. Man's wit is but borrowed, and he holdeth it of God. *Vitia etiam sine magistro discuntur*—he needeth no teacher in what is evil and carnal, but in what is holy and spiritual he needeth it.

2. It is a singular favour to them on whom God bestoweth this heavenly wisdom, and so puts a difference between them and others. It is a greater sign of friendship and respect to them than if God had given them all the world: Mark 13:11, 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to others it is not given.' This is no common benefit, but a favour which God reserveth for his peculiar people; so John 15:15, 'I have called you friends, for all things which I have heard of my Father I have made known to you.' That is the highest argument of friendship, not to give you wealth, and honour, and greatness, but to give you an enlightened mind and a renewed heart. God may give honour and greatness and a worldly estate in judgment, as beasts fatted for destruction may be put into large pastures; but he doth not teach his statutes in judgment; it is a favour, though he useth a sharper discipline in teaching: Ps. 44:12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and teachest him out of thy law.' If God will teach his child not only by the word but by the rod, and useth a sharp discipline to instruct in the lesson of Christianity, it is a greater favour than if God did let him alone, and suffer him to perish with the wicked in his wrath. The prosperity of

wicked men is so far from being a felicity to them, that it is rather the greatest judgment; and to be punished and rebuked by God for all that we do amiss, and thereby to be reduced to the sense and practice of our duty, is indeed the greatest favour and mercy of God, and so the most valuable felicity and evidence of God's tender care over us. So Prov. 3:31, 32, 'Envy not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward is an abomination to the Lord, and his secret is with the righteous.' You are depressed and kept bare and low, but your adversaries flourish and grow insolent; you cannot therefore say, God hateth you, or loveth them, If the Lord hath given you the saving knowledge of himself and his Christ, and only given them worldly happiness, it is a great token of his love to you and hatred to them, that you need not envy them, for you are dignified with the higher privilege.

3. Prayer is the appointed means to obtain it. There are other means by which God conveyeth this heavenly wisdom, as by study and search. Dig for wisdom as for silver, and for understanding as hid treasures, Prov. 2:4. Dig in the mines of knowledge: attend upon the word which is able to make us wise unto salvation: Mark 4:24, 'Take heed what or how ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you; and unto you that hear shall more be given.' But all are sanctified by prayer: Prov. 2:3, 'Cry for knowledge, and lift up thy voice for understanding.' Bene orasse est bene studuisse, saith Luther; so to pray well is to hear aright. God giveth understanding by the ministry of the word, but he will be sought unto and acknowledged in the gift, otherwise we make an idol of our own understanding: Prov. 3:5, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' Let us not make a God of our own wisdom; do not seek it in the means without prayer to the Lord. Let us not study without prayer, nor you hear without prayer, nor go

about any business in your general and particular callings without prayer.

Prop. 2. This benefit cannot be too often nor too sufficiently asked of God.

1. Because of our want. We never know so much but we may know more of God's mind, and know it better and to better purpose. To know things as we ought to know them is the great gift: 1 Cor. 8:2, 'If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know;' that we may be more sanctified, more prudent, and orderly in governing our hearts and lives, that we may know things seasonably when they concern us in any special business and temptation: Prov. 28:26, 'He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool; but he that walketh wisely shall be delivered;' that is, he that followeth his own conceit soon falleth into a snare; he that maketh his bosom his oracle, and his own wit his counsel, thinks himself wise enough without daily seeking to God to order his own business, never succeedeth well, but plungeth himself into manifold inconveniences.

2. From God's manner of giving; he is not weary and tired with constant supplicants: James 1:5, 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.' The throne of grace lieth always open; the oftener we frequent it, the more welcome. We frown upon one that often troubleth us with his suits, but it is not so with God; we may beg and beg again.

3. The value of the benefit itself. Saving knowledge, or the light of the Spirit, keepeth alive the work of grace in our hearts. Habitual graces will soon wither and decay without a continual influence. The increase of sanctification cometh into the soul by the increase of

saving knowledge: 2 Peter 1:2, 'Grace be multiplied unto you, through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord.' The more we grow thriving in knowledge, the more we grow in grace, and the heart and life is more engaged. As we learn somewhat more of God in Christ, our awe and love to him is increased: Eph. 4:20, 21, 'Ye have not so learned Christ, if so be that you have heard him, and been taught of him as the truth is in Jesus;' that is, if ye are taught and instructed by Christ himself in the truth. It is not every sort of hearing Christ or knowledge which will do us good. Many learn him and know him who abuse that knowledge which they have of him; but if he effectually teach us by his Spirit, then our knowledge is practical and operative; we will practise what we know, be careful to please God in all things.

4. From the temper of a gracious heart: a taste of this knowledge will make us desire a further supply, that we may be taught more, and the soul may be more sanctified; therefore doth David deal with God for the increase of saving knowledge. We are contented with a little taste of heavenly doctrine, but holy men are not so. Show me thy mind, let me see thy glory: Hosea 6:3, 'Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.' They are for growth as well as truth; they experimentally know how good God is, and the more they know him the more they see their ignorance, and that there is more behind to be known of him. Before they had but a flying report of him, now they are acquainted with him, and have a nearer inspection into his ways, and this is but little in comparison of what they desire. We are bidden, 2 Peter 3:18, to 'grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' Present measures do not satisfy them; they must grow in knowledge, as grow in grace, more love to Christ, more delight in his ways.

Prop. 3. In asking any spiritual gift we are encouraged by the bounty and mercy of God. David signifieth both.

1. His bounty or benignity, or that free inclination which is in God to do good to his creatures.

2. His mercy respects the creature as affected with any misery. Mercy properly is a proneness to succour and relieve a man in misery notwithstanding sin. Now the larger thoughts of mercy, the more hope; partly because we have no plea of merit, and therefore mercy is the fountain of all the good which cometh to us from God. We cannot come to him as a debtor, and therefore we must come to him as a free benefactor. Wherewith can we oblige God? We have nothing to give to him but what is his own already, and was first received from him: 'All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee,' 1 Chron. 29:14; we pay the great governor of the world out of his own exchequer. The apostle maketh the challenge, Rom. 11:35, 'Who hath given him first, and it shall be recompensed to him?' The sun oweth nothing to the beam, but the beam all to the sun; the fountain oweth nothing to the stream, but the stream hath all from the fountain: so we have all from God, can bring nothing to him which was not his before, and came from him. Partly because there is a contrary merit, an ill-deserving upon us, for which he might deny us any further mercies: Ps. 25:8, 'Good and upright is the Lord; and therefore he will teach sinners in the way;' if the sinner be weary of his wandering, and would be directed of the Lord for the time to come, God is upright, he will not mislead us; and he is good, will readily lead us in a right path. Sin shall not obstruct our mercies, and therefore must not keep the penitent supplicant back from confidence to be heard in his prayer, when he would be directed in the ready way to happiness. If you would fain be reduced to a good life after all your straying, humbly lay yourselves at God's feet: 1 Kings 20:31, 'We have heard

that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; peradventure he will save thy life.' If God were most tenacious, we have cause to beat his ears continually with our suits and supplications, such is our want; but he is good, and ready to guide poor creatures; nay, he is merciful; and former sins shall be no obstruction to us, if at length we are willing to return to our duty.

Prop. 4. The universal experience of the world possesseth all men's minds with this apprehension, that God is a merciful God: 'The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy;' the world and everything therein sets forth his goodness to us. The same is said in other places: Ps. 33:5, 'The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.' If earth, what is heaven? Ps. 145:9, 'His tender mercy is over all his works.'

1. Let us see that every creature is a monument and witness of God's mercy and goodness. Things animate and inanimate, the heavens and earth, and all things contained therein, declare that there is a powerful, wise, and good God. There is no part of the world that we can set our eyes upon but it speaketh praise to God, and the thoughts of his bounty to the creatures, especially to man; for all things were either subjected to man's dominion, or created for his use and benefit. If we look to the heavens, all serveth for the use and benefit of mankind: Ps. 8:3, 4, 'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou are mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him?' The lowest heaven affordeth us breath, winds, rain; the middle or second heaven affordeth us heat, light, influence; and the third heaven an eternal habitation, if we serve God. In earth, all the things daily in our view speak to God's praise, if we had the leisure to hear them: these creatures and works of his that are daily in our view

represent him as a merciful God. This is the lesson which is most legible in them, whether we sit at home in our houses or go abroad, and consider land or water. Go to the animate creatures, the beasts of the field: Ps. 36:6, 'Thou preservest man and beast;' Job 12:7, 8, 'But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air shall declare unto thee: or speak to the earth and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?' His providence reacheth to an innumerable multitude of creatures, giving them life and motion, and sustaining them, and relieving their necessities, and doth largely bestow his blessing upon them according to their nature and condition. And this goodness of God shineth forth in all his creatures; not only in what he doth to them themselves, but in what he doth about them for man's sake. They were defiled with man's sin, and therefore he might in justice have abolished them, or made them useless to man, or instruments of his grief; but they are continued for our comfort, that we might live in a well-furnished world. Now, come to man himself, good, bad, wicked, godly: 'His sun shineth, his rain falleth on the evil and good, just and unjust,' Mat. 5:44. Great mercy is still continued to the fallen creature, even to the impenitent: Acts 14:17, 'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' What was God's witness? Ἀγαθοποιῶν, he doth good; much patience is used, men's lives continued while they sin, and means vouchsafed for their reclaiming; food, raiment, friends, habitations, health, ease, liberty afforded to them, and all to show that we have to do with a most merciful God, who is willing to be reconciled to the sinning creature. Go to the godly, and what is all their experience but a constant course of mercy? David's admiration declares it: Ps. 139:17, 18, 'How precious are thy thoughts to me, O Lord! how great is the sum of them! if I should count them, they are

more in number than the sand.' He was in a maze when he thought of the various dispensations of God's providence; there was no getting out. The Lord filleth up his servants' lives with great and various mercies, even in their warfare and pilgrimage here in this world; abundance of invaluable mercies, that if we do but consider what we do receive, we must needs be confirmed in this truth by our own senses. Everything is a mercy to a vessel of mercy.

2. Wherein God expresseth his mercy to them in creation and providence.

[1.] In creating them. It was great mercy that, being infinitely perfect in himself from all eternity, and so not needing anything, he took the creatures out of nothing, which therefore could merit nothing, and communicated his goodness to them: 'For thy pleasure they are and were created,' Rev. 4:11.

[2.] In preserving and continuing them so long as he seeth good. The heavens continue according to his ordinance; the beasts, and fowls, and fishes continue according to his pleasure: all the living creatures need many things for their daily sustentation which their Creator abundantly supplieth to them, and therefore the whole earth is full of his mercy. One creature the scripture taketh notice of: Luke 12:24, 'Consider the ravens, for God feedeth them;' and again, Job 38:41, 'He feedeth the young ravens when they cry and wander for lack of meat;' and Ps. 147:9, 'He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.' Why is the raven made such an instance of providence above other fowls, or other living creatures? Some say it is animal sibi rapacissimum; others, other things, τοὺς νεόττους ἐπιβάλλει, casts its young out of the nest as soon as they are able to fly, and put to hard shifts for themselves. All this showeth his mercy, how ready he is to supply the miserable.



Prop. 5. His goodness to all the creatures should confirm his people in hoping for saving grace or spiritual good things. Why, all the business will be to show you the force of this argument, and that it is a prop to faith.

1. We may reason from the less to the greater. Our Lord hath taught us so for food and clothing: Mat. 6:28–30, 'And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?' For fowls and lilies, they have no arts of tilling, spinning, are not of such account with God as mankind, as his people. So for protection: Mat. 10:29–31, 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows.' The reasoning is good; if he hath mercy for kites, he hath also for children, who are not only in a higher rank of creatures, but in a renewed state, and reconciled to him by Christ, become his friends and children, whom he tendeth as the apple of his eye; much more when they come for spiritual benefits pleasing to the Lord: 1 Kings 3:9, 10, 'Give, therefore, thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.' Now all these amount to a strong probability, if not a certainty. It is a mistake to think that faith only goeth upon certainties. No; sometimes it is mightily encouraged by probabilities. These must not be left out; for if I want any spiritual blessing, is it not a great encouragement to remember God's merciful nature shining forth in all his works? If kind to his creatures, will he not be

kind to me? If he causeth his sun to shine upon the wicked, will he not lift up the light of his countenance upon my soul? If his rain fall upon their fields, will he not let the dew of his grace fall upon my barren heart? Though the argument be not absolutely and infallibly conclusive, yet here is such a concurrence of probabilities that we should go and try what he will do for our souls.

2. They in their rank have their supplies, and we in our rank have our supplies; therefore his kindness to all creatures should encourage new creatures to expect their help from him; for God doth good to all his creatures according to their necessity and capacity; his giving them supplies convenient for them is a pawn of God's pleasure to bestow upon his servants greater gifts than these. All things that look to God have necessities provided for them according to the condition of their nature; and therefore, if you have another nature, and besides the good things of this life do need the good things which belong to the life to come, he will give us gifts and graces as he giveth them their food; for these are as necessary for this kind of life as food for that. As they in their rank find mercy, so we in ours; his general goodness confirmeth us in expecting these more special favours; for as there is a general benignity to all creatures, so there is a special to his children: Ps. 36:6, 7, 'Thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O Lord! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.' His common kindness and his special love are often compared together; they agree in this, that both come from a good God. Therefore the argument holdeth strong, if good to all creatures, then good to new creatures. Why should we think that he would not show his goodness to us also? Again, they agree in this, that in doing good God doth not consider the worthiness of the creature, but his own goodness and self-inclination to preserve what he hath made; as he did not disdain to give life to the meanest creatures, so he doth not disdain to

preserve them. As they had their life from him at first, so they have their life still in him, the poorest worm not excepted: not a worm, not a gnat, not a fly but tastes of God's bounty. God disdaineth not to look after the most abject things. So the plea of unworthiness lieth not in bar against the new creature, for necessary supplies God giveth out of his own goodness. Now, they differ in the kinds of the mercy,—one common, the other saving; and the special subjects of them,—one is to all creatures, the other is to God's peculiar people; and in the manner of conveyance,—the one floweth in the channel of common providence, the other is conveyed to us by the golden pipe of the Mediator. Well, then, the creatures have their mercies, and wicked men their mercies, that they prize and value; and the people of God have also what they prize and esteem.

3. God doth good to every one according to their necessity and capacity. He doth not give meat to the trees, nor stones to the beasts, but provideth food and nourishment convenient for them; so to his people, according to their condition of nature and special capacity. The general capacity is the condition of their natures, the special capacity is want or earnest desire. If we extremely need or earnestly desire these blessings, then we may reason from God's general goodness to all the creatures to that special act of goodness which we expect from him. Pray, mark how God's general goodness is expressed, Ps. 145:15, 16, 'The eyes of all things wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season: thou openest thy hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.' He keepeth a constant eye of providence, and if the desire be great, he doth not frustrate the natural expectation of hungry creatures, but giveth them that sort of food which is fit for them. Now God expecteth the same from new creatures: if necessity and vehement desire meet, he promises supply: 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it,' Ps. 81:10; and Ps. 145:19, 'The Lord will fulfil the desire of them that fear him, he also

will hear their cry, and will save them.' The beasts mourn and cry in their kind; we pray and cry in our kind: needy desires will be heard. He is in a capacity to receive spiritual blessings who is sensible of their necessity for the happiness of his immortal soul, and doth prize and value them, and earnestly desire them. The man of God was under a necessity, for he apprehended himself miserable, and at a loss without it; for he desired no other mercy. A gracious heart cannot be satisfied with low things. Be thus affected, and then this argument will be of use to you.

Use 1. For reproof. Since God is so merciful, how much are they to blame—

1. Who render themselves incapable of the benefit of mercy by impenitence persisted in against the means of grace! They slight his common mercy, and cut off themselves from his saving mercy. Abused goodness will be destructive: Rom. 2:4, 5, 'Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? but after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.'

2. The stupid and senseless, which do not take notice of the mercy of God which shineth forth in all the creatures! A man can turn his eye nowhere but in every place and quarter of the world he shall see plain testimonies of God's mercy. But alas! how much of this is lost and passed over for want of observation! Isa. 1:3, 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.' All this goodness was left in the earth to invite our minds and hearts to God; therefore, as the bee sucketh

honey out of every flower, so should we still dwell on the thoughts of God's goodness, represented to us in everything we see and feel.

3. That think of God's mercy with extenuating and diminishing thoughts, and do not raise their hopes and confidence by a serious reflection upon that ample discovery which he hath made of it in all his works! If God be good to all his creatures, why should we be left out of the number? Surely God will not be backward to those that earnestly desire his grace; therefore those that deject themselves, that say, God will not hear me, or regard my prayers, are to be condemned.

Use 2. Information, the lively light of the Spirit is a special mercy, Our misery lieth in the ignorance of God and the transgression of his law; our happiness in being enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. It is God's great gift: Jer. 24:7, 'I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; for they shall return unto me with all their heart.'

Use 3. To exhort you to cherish in your souls good thoughts of God, and the fulness and largeness of his bounty and mercy. The devil seeks to weaken our opinion of God's goodness; he thought to possess our first parents with this conceit, that God was envious, so as to draw them away from God. It will be of use to you:—

1. In all afflictive providences. Those who are poor and destitute, or in prison and banishment, or bereft of children, or oppressed with guilty fears, or assaulted with any other calamity: Job 13:15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;' still he is a good God. Here is the glory of faith, to believe him as a gracious father when we feel him as an enemy. Satan will be sure to put in upon these occasions—to tell you that God is an enemy, harsh, severe, implacable in his dealings,

one that regardeth you not in your misery, that giveth you no rest nor respite in your troubles; if he did not hate you, how could he deal thus with you? and so striketh a terror into the minds of men, that they are afraid of nothing so much as of God, and of coming to him by Christ. No; 'God is love,' a father when he frowneth as well as when he smileth: Heb. 12:10, 'He verily chastiseth us for our profit;' and 'we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.' And in reason should it not be so? Did your parents hate you because they were careful of your breeding, and sometimes corrected you for your faults? There is more of compassion than passion in his severest strokes. He hath the bowels of a mother, but yet the wisdom of a father. His love must not be exercised to the prejudice of his other attributes. He that pulleth you out of a deep gulf, though he breaketh your arm in pulling you out, doth not he love you? God is love, and the giver of all good things.

2. It is a great motive to repentance. As the prodigal thought of his father, so should we return: Jer. 3:12, 'Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever.' Come, lie at his feet, see what mine infinite love will do for you: 1 Kings 20:31, 'We have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings.' When you first begin with God, this is an argument and ground of comfort, much more when you renew your repentance. Hard thoughts of God keep us off from him, but his loving and merciful nature inviteth us to him.

3. It sweetens the duties of holiness: 1 John 5:3, 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.' This makes our resistance of sin more serious: Ezra

9:13, 'Seeing thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserved, should we again break thy commandments?'

4. To quicken and enliven your prayers for grace. You have to do with a merciful God: Ps. 145:19, 'He will fulfil the desires of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them.'

## SERMON LXXIII

### **Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word.—VER. 65.**

THE addresses that are made to God in this psalm are mostly prayers; while we are in the world we are compassed about with divers necessities and wants, but yet there is an intermixture of thanksgivings. We must not always be complaining, but sometimes giving of thanks. David was often exercised with various calamities; but as soon as he got rid of any danger, or obtained any deliverance, he is ready with his thanks and praises. Blessed will that time be when our mournings are altogether turned into triumphs, and our complaints into thanksgivings. But now here in the world gratulation should not wholly be shut out, but find a room in our addresses to God, as well as acknowledgments of sin and supplications for grace. None have to do with God but they find him bountiful, and there is no reason but present mercies should be acknowledged. In this verse you have the working of a thankful soul, sensible of the benefits already obtained in prayer, and making hearty acknowledgment of them to God: 'Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word.' Observe—

1. An acknowledgment of some benefit bestowed, thou hast dealt well with thy servant.
2. The way in which it was bestowed, according to thy word.

First, An acknowledgment of some benefit bestowed. In it observe:—

1. The party giving, thou, O Lord.
2. The act of bounty, generally expressed, thou hast dealt well.
3. The party receiving, with thy servant.

The fountain of all that we have is the goodness and fidelity of God; the promise is the channel and pipe by which it is conveyed to us, and the object is God's servant. When all these concur, how sweet is it! A good God is ready to show us mercy, and this mercy assured to us by promise, and God's servants capacitated to receive mercy. There is an excellent cause, which is the benignity of God; a sure conveyance, which is the promise of God; and a prepared object, who are the servants of God.

1. The party giving is God himself: all good is to be referred to God as the author of it.
2. The benefit received is generally expressed, 'Thou hast dealt well.' Some translations out of the Hebrew, *bonum fecisti*—thou hast done good with thy servant; the Septuagint, *χρηστοτητα ἐποίησας μετὰ τοῦ δούλου σοῦ*—thou hast made goodness to or with thy servant: out of them the vulgar, *bonitatem fecisti*. Some take this clause generally, whatever thou dost for thy servants is good; they count it so, though it be never so contrary to the interest of the flesh: sickness is good, loss of friends is good, and so is poverty and loss of goods to a humble and thankful mind. But surely David speaketh here of some



supply and deliverance wherein God had made good some promise to him. The Jewish rabbis understand it of his return to the kingdom, but most Christian writers understand it of some spiritual benefit, that good which God had done to him. If anything may be collected from the subsequent verses, it was certainly some spiritual good. The Septuagint repeats χρηστότητα twice, in this and the following verse, as if he acknowledged the benefit of that good judgment and knowledge of which there he beggeth an increase. It was in part given him already, and that learned by afflictions, in the third verse of this portion: 'Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have learned thy word.' Now then, go on to increase this work, this goodness which thou hast shown to thy servant.

3. The object, to 'thy servant.' It is an honourable comfortable style; David delighteth in it. God is a bountiful and a gracious master, ready to do good to his servants, rewarding them with grace here, and crowning that grace with glory hereafter: Heb. 11:6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.'

Secondly, The manner how this is assured and brought about, 'According to thy word.' That word, which is the encouragement of our prayer, is the rule of God's proceedings. Some things are given by a common providence, other things are given us as servants of God, or according to the promises that are made us in the word.

Doct. 1. That God doth good to his servants.

Doct. 2. That the good which God hath done for us should be thankfully acknowledged.

Doct. 3. That in our thankful acknowledgments we should take notice of God's truth, as well as his benignity and goodness.

Doct. 1. That God doth good to his servants. David giveth us here his own experience, and every one that is a faithful servant of God may come in with the like acknowledgments; for what proof God giveth of his goodness to any one of his servants, it is a pledge of that love, respect, and care that he beareth towards all the rest. Jacob acknowledgeth the same: Gen. 33:11, 'The Lord hath dealt graciously with me;' that was his account of providence.

1. From the inclination of his own nature: Ps. 119:68, 'Thou art good, and thou dost good.' The Psalmist concludeth this act from his nature. The sun doth not more naturally shine, nor fire more naturally burn, nor water more naturally flow, than acts of grace and goodness do naturally flow from God. If there be anything besides benefits in the world, the fault is not in God, but in us, who by sin provoke him to do otherwise.

2. The obligation of his promise; so this good cometh in as a reward, according to the law of his grace. He hath engaged himself by his promise to give us all good things: Ps. 84:11, 'The Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly;' Ps. 34:9, 10, 'Oh, fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.' Therefore it is said, Micah 2:7, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' The words 'saying good' is a doing good; when it is said, it may be accounted done, because of the certain performance of what is said.

3. The preparation of his people; his servants are capable. God is good, and doeth good, modo non ponatur obex, except we tie his hands and hinder our own mercies. There are certain laws of commerce between God and his creatures, so between God and man;

he meeteth us with his blessings in the way of our duty: Amos 6:12, 'Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plough there with oxen?' Some ground is incapable of being ploughed; some are morally incapable of having good done to or for them. But when the creature is in a capacity, God communicateth his goodness to them, dealeth with men as they deal with him: Ps. 18:25, 26, 'With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful, with an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright, with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure, with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward;' so Ps. 125:4, 'Do good to those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.' God is and will be gracious and bountiful to all those that continue faithful to him, and will never leave any degree of goodness unrewarded; the covenant shall not fail on his part.

Use 1. Let us be persuaded of this truth; it is one of the first things in religion, Heb. 11:6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' Next unto his being, his bounty, or else our religion will be cold or none at all. Many conceive amiss of God, and draw an ill picture of him in their minds, as if he were hard to be pleased, always frowning. Did we look upon him as one that is good and willing to do good, we would have less backwardness to duty and weariness in his service. Satan drew off the hearts of our first parents from God by vain surmises, as if he were severe and envious: Gen. 3:5, 'God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' This first battery was against the persuasion of God's goodness and kindness to man, which he endeavoureth to discredit. Yea, God's people may have the sense of his goodness strangely weakened. David is fain with violence to hold the conclusion which Satan would fain wrest out of his hands: Ps. 73:1, 'Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a pure heart.'

Therefore we had need to fortify our hearts and forearm ourselves with strong consolations and arguments.

1. He doth good to his enemies, and therefore certainly he will much more to his servants: 'He is good to all;' Ps. 145:9, 'The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.' The heathens had experience of it: Acts 14:17, 'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' And will he be unkind to his servants, to whom he is engaged by promise? It cannot be.

2. Consider Christ's reasoning: Mat. 7:11, 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?' God will not deal worse with his children than men do with theirs. We are natural and sinful parents: if we have any faith, or reason, or sense, we cannot gainsay this conclusion. A father will not be unnatural to his child; the most godless men will love their children, and seek their welfare, and do good unto them. Surely our heavenly Father will supply all our necessities, satisfy all our desires: he is more fatherly than all the fathers in the world can be; all the goodness in men is but as a drop to the ocean.

3. Consider, he never giveth his people any discouragement or just cause to complain of him: Micah 6:3, 'O my people, what have I done unto thee? or wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me;' Jer. 2:5, 'Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanities and become vain?' Why:—

[1.] His commands are not grievous: Mat. 11:30, 'My yoke is easy and my burthen is light;' 1 John 5:3, 'His commandments are not

grievous.' He prescribeth and commandeth nothing but for our good: Deut. 6:24, 'And the Lord commandeth us to do all the statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.' That he may with honour perform and make good all that he hath promised: Gen. 18:19, 'For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.' The obstructions removed, and grace flows out freely.

[2.] Trials sent by him are not above measure: 1 Cor. 10:13, 'There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to men; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it;' Isa. 27:8, 'In measure when it shooteth forth wilt thou debate with it: he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind.' He dealeth with much discretion and moderation, not according to the greatness of his power or the heinousness of their sin, but observeth our strength, what we are able to bear.

[3.] His punishments are not above deservings: Ezra 9:13, 'Seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve;' Job 11:6, 'Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.'

[4.] He is not hard to be pleased, nor inexorable upon every failing: Mal. 3:17, 'And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.' Many think God watcheth occasions to destroy them, or at least to molest and trouble them. No; he passeth by many weaknesses, or else what would become of the best of his children? pardoneth many sins, where the heart is sincere: 2 Chron.

30:18, 19, 'The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the preparation of the sanctuary.'

4. If he doth not give them the good things of this world, he giveth them better in lieu of them. While they are here in this world they have those things not only that are good, but make them good, which cannot be said of all the things of this world; they may easily make us worse, but they cannot make us better. He giveth them such things as tend to the enjoyment of the chiefest good, which is himself. As he is a good God, he pardoneth their sins: Ps. 25:7, 'Remember not the sins of my youth, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord;' that is one of the effects of his goodness to them. He directs them in the way of life: Ps. 25:8, 'Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he teach sinners in the way.' He beginneth, carrieth on, and completeth their salvation: 2 Thes. 1:11, 'Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of his calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.' Thus he giveth the best things, though he deny some common things, which are no arguments of his special favour; and it is dangerous to have our eyes fastened upon other wants when we have these things, and to repine against God, who hath dealt graciously with us in the higher expressions of his love.

5. The evil things of this world, which are not good in themselves, he turneth to good: Rom. 8:28, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' He is able to bring light out of darkness, or give light in darkness, or turn darkness into light; to give inward joy and comfort under all calamities, to support and sustain under all heavy pressures, and to deliver out of all distresses.

6. He doth give them so much of the good things of the world as is convenient for them: Ps. 34:9, 'Oh, fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him;' Ps. 84:11, 'The Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.' He giveth protection when it is necessary: Nahum 1:7, 'The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth those that trust in him;' Ezra 6:22, 'The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him.' He hath a great inclination to diffuse his benefits.

7. His doing good is chiefly in the world to come: John 12:26, 'If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.' Here he is with them in troubles, there they shall be with him in glory; here he can put marks of favour upon them, and distinguish between those that serve him and those that serve him not: Mal. 3:17, 'They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him;' there he will manifest his favour in the face of all the world.

Use 2. To persuade you to become the servants of God: you will have a good master if you be what you profess to be. Every Christian should say, as Paul did, Acts 27:23, 'The God whose I am, and whom I serve.' He is God's, and serveth God. (1.) He is God's by creation, for he made him out of nothing: Ps. 100:3, 'Know ye that the Lord he is God; it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture;' Col. 1:16, 'All things were created by him and for him.' By redemption; 1 Cor. 6:20, 'Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which is God's.' By covenant; Isa. 44:5, 'One shall say, I am the Lord's, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob, and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname

himself by the name of Israel;' Ezek. 16:8, 'I swear unto thee, and entered into covenant with thee, saith the Lord, and thou becamest mine;' and so voluntarily he is God's. Wicked men are God's in right, but against their wills; the godly are willingly God's. A man will never be hearty in his obedience and subjection till he look upon himself as God's. See an instance in the wicked, whose ungodliness and rebellion against God cometh from looking upon themselves as their own: Ps. 12:4, 'Who have said, With our tongues will we prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?' Their time their own, wealth their own, interest their own, bodies their own, souls their own, and therefore think they may employ all these things as they please. On the other side, take an instance of self-denial. Why so careful to serve and glorify God? Rom. 14:8, 'For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's;' they have given up themselves to be employed at his command. (2.) Him they serve. How do they serve him? (1st.) They must serve God with the spirit as well as the body: Rom. 1:9, 'God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son.' So Phil. 3:3, 'We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit;' Rom. 12:11, 'Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;' Rom. 7:6, 'That we should serve in newness of spirit.' When the heart is renewed, disposed, and fitted for his fear and service, there is an honest purpose and endeavour to serve him. (2d.) You must serve him faithfully, devoting yourselves to do his will, and to seek his glory. Your intention, trade, and study must be to honour God and please him, that if it be asked for whom are you at work? for whom speaking or spending your time? whose business are you doing? you may answer, All is for God. If the pleasing of the flesh be their work or scope, they are said to serve their own bellies: Rom. 16:18, 'They that are such serve not the Lord Jesus, but their own belly.' (3d.) Cheerfully; having so good a master, let us take pleasure in our work. Here is all good—good master, good work, good wages.



Certainly the more good any man findeth God to be, and the more good he himself hath received, the more good he ought to be: the goodness of God should melt us and awe us. There are two questions every one of you should put to yourselves, What hath God done for you? and, What have you done for God? When yon thus serve God, you may plead it to God, as David, Ps. 116:16, 'O Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant.' You may expect relief, and protection, and maintenance. Servants have their dole and portion from their masters' hands: Ps. 123:2, 'As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us.' He that doth God's will shall have his protection and blessing; you have a sanctified interest in all that falleth to your share: 1 Cor. 3:22, 23, 'Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' Lastly, God will now and then visibly put some marks of distinction on them: Mal. 3:18, 'Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.' For a while their glory may be clouded, they may be hardly dealt with in the world, but God hath his times of presenting all things in their own colours; but the chief time of manifestation is hereafter; when the servants of Christ come to receive their full reward, then they find him to be a good master indeed: John 12:26, 'If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.'

Doct. 2. That the good which God hath done for us should be thankfully acknowledged. We should not be always craving, always complaining; there should be a mixture of thanksgiving: Col. 4:6, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;' together with the expression of our wants and desires, there must be thanksgiving for favours already received.

1. There is a time for all things, for confessing sin, for begging mercy, for thankful acknowledgments; though in every address to God there should be somewhat of all these, yet at certain seasons one is predominant: in a time when God is offended, confession of sin; in a time of great wants and straits, prayer; in a time of great receivings, thanks. The times that pass over us bring upon us many changes; every change of dispensation must be sanctified by a suitable duty. As no condition is so bad but a good man can find an occasion of praising God and trusting in him, so no condition so good but matter of humbling and self-abasing will arise; yet there are special occasions that require the one or the other. *Opus diei in die suo.* James 5:13, 'Is any among you afflicted? let him pray: is any merry? let him sing psalms;' Ps. 50:15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.'

2. It is a disingenuous spirit to ask mercy for supplying our wants or delivering us from troubles, and not acknowledge mercy when that supply or deliverance is received. Prayer is a work of necessity, but praise of mere duty. Self-love will put us upon prayer, but the love of God upon praise and thanksgiving; we pray because we need God, we praise because we love God, and have a sense of his goodness to us: Luke 17:15, 'One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God.' Most turn back upon the mercy-seat, do not give glory to God when their turn is served.

3. It is for the glory and honour of God that his servants should speak good of his name. When they are always complaining, they bring an ill report upon the ways of God, like the spies that went to view the promised land; but it is a great invitation to others when we can tell them how good God hath been to us: Ps. 34:8, 'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth. in him.' This doth draw in others to come and take share with us.

4. It is for our profit; the more thankful for mercies, the more they are increased upon us; as vapours return in showers, the sea putteth out of her fulness into the rivers, and they again refund into the sea the water received thence: Ps. 67:5, 6, 'Let the people praise thee, O Lord; then shall the earth bring forth her increase.' When the springs are low, we pour in a little water into the pump, not to enrich the fountain, but to bring up more for ourselves. It is not only true of outward increase, but spiritual also: Col. 2:7, 'Be ye rooted in the faith, and abound therein with thanksgiving.' If we give thanks for so much grace as we have already received, it is the way to increase our store; we do no more thrive in victory over corruption, or the increase of divers graces, because we do no more give thanks.

5. It prevents many sins. I shall name two:—

[1.] Hardness of heart. When we are not thankful for blessings, they prove an occasion to the flesh, and so our table is made a snare, Ps. 69:22, and our welfare a trap. Men go on stupidly receiving blessings, but do not acknowledge the donor; but when we own God upon all occasions, the creature is sanctified, and the heart kept humble: 1 Tim. 4:4, 5, 'Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer;' an acknowledgment from whom it cometh.

[2.] It suppresseth murmuring, and that fretting, quarrelling, impatient, and distrustful humour which often showeth itself against God, even sometimes in our prayers and supplications. Nothing conduceth more to quiet our hearts in a dependence upon God for the future, and to allay our distrusts, discontents, and unquiet thoughts, than a holy exercise of thanksgiving: Phil. 4:6, 'Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with

thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.' Bless him for favours already received, and you will leave the burden of your care upon him for the future. God is where he was at first, and what he hath done he can do still.

Use. The use is, to press us to the serious and frequent discharge of this duty. It is a duty very necessary, very profitable, and very delightful; but usually we are backward, are not as careful to render thanks for the enjoyment of blessings as we are earnest and importunate in the want of them. It cometh to pass partly by the greediness of our desires, as a dog that swalloweth up every bit that is cast to him, and still looketh for more. Vidisti aliquando canem, saith Seneca, missa a domino frustra panis aut carnis aperto ore captantem, et quicquid excipit, protinus integrum devorat, et semper ad spem futuri hiat. This is an emblem of us; we swallow whatever the bounty of God throws forth without thanks, and still we look for more, as if all the former mercies were nothing; therefore are warm in petitions, but cold, raw, and infrequent in gratulations. Partly when we have mercies, we know not their value by the enjoyment as much as by the want. Ὀφθαλμοὶ τι ἄγαν λαμπρὸν οὐχ ὀρῶσι, saith Basil—a thing too near the eye cannot be seen, it darkeneth us with its splendour. God must set things at a distance to make us value them. Therefore we are more prone to complain than to give thanks. Partly from self-love; when our turn is served, we neglect God; as the raven returned to Noah no more, when there was floating carrion for it to feed upon, Gen. 8:7. Wants try us more than blessings: Hosea 5:15, 'In their affliction they will seek me early.' Our interest swayeth us more than our duty. Partly from a dark legal spirit, which will not own grace when it is near us, when Christians look altogether in the glass of the law, to exclude the comfort of the gospel, and to keep themselves under the rack of perplexing fears.

To remedy this—

1. Let us acknowledge God in all we do enjoy: Hosea 2:8, 'She did not consider that I gave her corn, and oil, and flax.' We are unthankful to God and man, but more to God. Comforts that come from an invisible hand, we look upon them as things that fall out of course, and so do not praise the giver; therefore let us awaken our hearts to the remembrance of God. Whosoever be the next hand, it is by his providence; and there is reason he should be praised and owned. It is not he that brings the present, but he that sendeth it, that deserveth our thanks. Beasts will own their benefactor: Isa. 1:3, 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib;' and if God be our benefactor, he must be owned and loved. If a man give us but a small sum, or a parcel of land, how do we court him or observe him! Less reason why God should look upon us, who is so high. A small remembrance from a great prince, no way obliged, who no way needeth me, to whom I can be no way profitable, is much valued; and will not I acknowledge God in his gifts? When you were in distress you acknowledged, he alone could send you help, and had high thoughts of the mercy; then what promises did you make? The mercy is the same now that it was then, therefore you should have the same apprehensions of it.

2. Let us not give thanks by the heap, but distinctly; acknowledge God's mercies in all cases. Particulars are most affective: let us come to an account for God, and recollect the passages of our lives, what he hath done for body and soul: Ps. 139:17, 'How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!' What he hath done for us before time, in time, and provided for us when time shall be no more; the beginning of this treaty with us, the progress of his work, the many failings we were guilty of, his patience in bearing with us, his goodness in hearing us, his giving, forgiving, keeping us

from dangers, in dangers, and deliverances out of dangers. What supplies and supports we have had, what visits of love, warnings, awakenings of heart!

3. Let us trace the benefits we enjoy to the fountain of them, the love of God; then we will say, Ps. 138:2, 'I will praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and truth.' This is not only to drink of the stream, but of the fountain; there the water is sweetest; when we see all this coming from the special love of God to our souls. Otherwise God may give in anger: Hosea 13:11, 'I gave them a king in mine anger;' as he gave the Israelites meat for their lusts: Isa. 38:17, 'Thou hast loved me from the grave;' this commendeth all experiences, maketh us love God again.

4. Compare yourselves with others your betters, who would be glad of your leavings,—their nature, disposition, endowments better than yours, yet receive less from God. He hath not dealt so with any nation. Whence is all this to me? John 14:22, 'Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world?' Many would be glad of our relics.

5. Consider your unworthiness: Gen. 32:10, 'I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant;' 2 Sam. 7:18, 'Who am I, O Lord, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?' Pride is the cause of discontent. Where all is received freely, there is no cause of discontent: much of giving thanks if we have anything. When we look to desert, we may wonder more at what we have than what we want: if afflicted, destitute, kept low and bare, it is a wonder we are not in hell. All this is spoken because men are not thankful, We are eager till we have blessings, but when we have them, then barren in

praises, unfruitful in obedience: like little children, forward to beg favours, but careless to acknowledge what they have received.

Doct. 3. That in our thankful acknowledgments we should take notice of God's truth, as well as his benignity and goodness. David owned the kindness as coming according to his word. So do the servants of God observe his accomplishing promises: Josh. 23:14, 'And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth; and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all hath come to pass unto you, not one thing hath failed thereof.' So Solomon: 1 Kings 8:56, 'Blessed be God that giveth rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised; there hath not failed one word of all his good promise which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant' Thus Joshua and Solomon observe how his word was made good to a tittle, and in the rigour of the letter; he hath not left undone anything, but accomplished all to the full. A great deal of benefit will come by it:—

1. For yourselves.

[1.] Your own faith will be confirmed by it, when you see that God is as good as his word, and bestoweth upon us the utmost that any promise of his giveth us to hope for: it is dictum factum with God; he is no more liberal in word than in deed. Look, as it confirmeth our faith in the truth of the threatenings, when we are punished as our congregation hath heard, Hosea 7:12,—they that would not believe their danger are made to feel it,—so our faith in the promise. God showeth what he will be to his servants, and after a little waiting they find it to be so. Wait but a little while, and you shall find the effect of the promises: Ps. 56:8, 'In God I will praise his word, in the Lord I will praise his word;' that is, I have great cause to take notice of the

promise; to a believer it is as good as performance: so Ps. 19:9, 'The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.' Former experience begets confidence for the time to come: the Lord doth not deceive us with vain words. There is an effect in them; I shall find it; what God saith he doth.

[2.] Your comfort is increased; receiving things in a way of promise sweeteneth a blessing. It is good to see whence things come to us, from the bounty of common providence, or from the promises of the covenant. There is a providential right and a covenant right. Devils hold their beings by a providential right, but the saints their blessings by covenant. The promise is made to God's servants, and the mercy conveyed by the promise is sanctified: 1 Cor. 3:23, 'All are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's;' 1 Tim. 4:3, they are to be 'received with thanksgiving of them that believe and know the truth.' Believers are called 'heirs of promise.' Some blessings the very nature of them showeth whence they come; but in others, as the deliverances and comforts of this life, the tenure of them is more comfortable than the mercies themselves; to have them not only from God's hand but heart. Wicked men have them as their portion, you as helps to your better portion: heirs of promise is an honourable title and relation. Such blessings are from love, and for our good.

2. As to others, you will invite, encourage, and strengthen them in believing. You are witnesses of his fidelity: Ps. 18:30, 'As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried.' I can assure you I have found more than letters and syllables in a promise, it is a tried word; I can tell you what God hath done for my soul.

Use. Let us look to the accomplishment of these promises, and trust God the more for the future. Make much of promises: Heb. 11:13, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having



seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.' They are sure declarations of the purposes of God. God's purposes are immutable, but promises declared lay an obligation upon him to keep them. Rejoice in them till performance cometh. Take heed of setting sense against them: Rom. 4:18–21, 'Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be: and being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform.' Naturally men are all for having before them. Take heed of haste: Ps. 116:11, 'I said in my haste, All men are liars;' Ps. 31:22, 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes.'

## SERMON LXXIV

**Teach me good judgment and knowledge:  
for I have believed thy commandments.—  
VER. 66.**

THE man of God had acknowledged that God had done good for him; now he beggeth the continuance of his goodness. God, that hath showed mercy, will show mercy. His treasure is not spent by giving,

nor hath he the less for communicating to the creature. Man will say, I have given you already, why do you trouble me any more? But God upbraideth no man; the more frequent our suits are for grace, the more welcome we are: 'Thou hast done good for thy servant;' and now again, 'Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.

In the words observe—

1. The blessing asked, Teach me good judgment and knowledge.
2. The reason urged, for I have believed thy commandments.

I begin with the prayer or blessing asked, 'Teach me good judgment and knowledge.' Let us consider a little the different translations of this clause. The Septuagint hath three words χρηστότητα, παιδείαν, καὶ γνῶσιν, goodness, discipline, and knowledge; others, bonitatem gustus et scientiæ doce me, teach me goodness of taste and knowledge; Ainsworth, Vatablus, bonitatem sensus, learn me goodness of reason and knowledge. In the original Hebrew טעם טוב, the Hebrew word signifieth taste or savour, so it is translated Ps. 34:8, 'Oh taste and see that the Lord is good.' The word also signifieth behaviour, as Ps. 34 title, 'A Psalm of David when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech.' For a man is tasted by his carriage, and some think it may mean goodness of inclination or manners. I think we fitly translate it judgment, it being coupled with a word that signifieth knowledge—taste, by a metaphor from the bodily sense, being applied to the mind; as meats are discerned by the taste, so things by the judgment; and so that which David beggeth here is a good or exact judgment, or the faculty of judging well.

Doct. That a judicious sound mind is a great blessing, and should earnestly be sought of God by all that would please him.

The man of God renewing this request so often, and his calling it here good judgment and knowledge, will warrant this observation, and sufficiently showeth how good it is to have the mind illuminated and endowed with the true knowledge of things. In handling this point, I shall show—

1. What is the use of a sound mind.
2. Why this should be so often and earnestly asked.

First, What is the use of a sound mind? There is a threefold act of judgment:—

1. To distinguish.
2. To determine.
3. To direct and order.

1. To distinguish and judge rightly of things that differ, that we may not mistake error for truth, and evil for good. So the apostle maketh it the great work of judgment to discern between good and evil: Heb. 5:14, 'But strong meat belongeth to those that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and bad.' The things that are to be judged are true and false, right and wrong, necessary or indifferent, expedient or inexpedient, fit or unfit; for many things are lawful that are not expedient: 1 Cor. 6:12, 'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient,' as to time, place, persons. Well, then, judgment is a spirit of discerning truth from falsehood, good from evil, that we may approve what is good, and disallow the contrary. So the spiritual man

judgeth all things, 1 Cor. 2:15; that is, though he hath not an authoritative judgment, he hath a judgment of discretion; and if he did stir up this gift of discerning, he might more easily understand his duty, and how far he is concerned in point of conscience and in order to salvation. So 1 Cor. 10:15, 'I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say.' The spiritually wise, if they would awaken the gifts of grace received in regeneration by diligence and prayer and heedfulness of soul, might sooner come to a resolution of their doubts than they usually do. As bodily taste doth discern things savoury from unsavoury, profitable from noxious, so is judgment given us that we may distinguish between the poisons which the world offereth in a golden cup to impure souls, and that wholesome spiritual milk which we suck out of the breasts of scripture, between savoury food and hurtful diet, how neatly soever cooked. The soul's taste is more necessary than the body's, as the soul is the better part, and as our danger is greater, and errors there cost us dearer.

2. To determine and resolve, *practicum dictamen*. The taste of the soul is for God, that bindeth our duty upon us, when there is a decree issued forth in the soul, that after we know our duty there may be a resolvedness of mind never to swerve from it. First the distinguishing work proceedeth; there is a clear and distinct approbation of God; then the determining followeth; this is the *πρόθεσις καρδίας*, Acts 11:23, 'The purpose of heart;' 2 Tim. 3:10, 'Thou hast known fully my doctrine, manner of life,' *πρόθεσιν*, purpose. The form of this decree and resolution you have in Ps. 73:28, 'But it is good for me to draw near to God.' This in the soul hath the authority of a principle. He that meaneth to be a thorough Christian must set the bent and bias and purpose of his heart strongly upon it: Ps. 39:1, 'I said, I will take heed to my ways.' So Ps. 32:5, 'I said, I will confess mine iniquities.' These purposes have a powerful command upon the whole soul, to set it a-working whatever they purpose with this strong decree, how

backward soever the heart be otherwise; they will excite and quicken us, and admit of no contradiction. It is our judgments lead us and guide and poise us. A man may have knowledge and learning, and play the fool if his judgment he not biassed: a man never taketh any course but his judgment telleth him it is best, and best for him all things considered. It is not men's knowledge leadeth them, but their judgments say to their wills, This is not for me; the other conduceth most to my profit, honour, or delight: but when the judgment is in some measure set towards God, then the man is for God.

3. To direct as well as to decree; so good judgment and knowledge serveth for the right guiding of ourselves and all our affairs. Many are wise in generals that err in particulars, and have a knowledge of principles, but their affairs are under no conduct. Particulars are nearer to practice, and very learned men are deceived in particulars: Rom. 2:20–22, 'An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law: thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?' Therefore, besides the general rule, the knowledge of God's will, it is necessary to have the gift of discretion, when particulars are clothed with circumstances. There is an infinite variety of circumstances which require a deal of prudence to determine them. A man may easily discourse on general truths concerning God, ourselves, the state of the church, the privileges of Christianity; but to direct them to particular cases, to govern our own hearts, and order our own ways, that is a harder thing: Hosea 14:9, 'Whoso is wise and prudent,' &c.; Prov. 8:12, 'I, wisdom, dwell with prudence' To direct is harder than to determine or distinguish. It is easier to distinguish of good and evil in the general, to lay down conclusions upon the evidence of

the goodness of the ways of God; but to reduce our knowledge to practice in all cases, that is the great work of judgment, that we may know what becometh the time, the place, the company where we are, and may have that ordering of our conversation aright, Ps. 50:23; to know how to carry ourselves in all relations, business, civil, sacred, light, serious; that we neither offend in excess nor defect; that we judge what is due to the Creator, and what is to be allowed to the creature; what is good, what is better, what is best of all; that we know how to pay reverence to superiors, how most profitably to converse with equals, what compassion to inferiors, how to do good to them; how to behave ourselves as husbands, wives, fathers, children. Wisdom maketh us profitable in our relations: 1 Peter 3:7, 'Let husbands dwell with wives according to knowledge.' There is much prudence and wisdom required to know how to converse profitably and Christianly with all that we have to do with. In short, how to love our friends in God, and our enemies for God; how to converse secretly with God, and to walk openly before men; how to cherish the flesh that it may not be unserviceable, yet how to mortify it that it may not wax wanton against the spirit; how to do all things in the fear of God, in meats, drinks, apparel, recreations; when and how to pray, what time for our callings, what for worship; when to speak, when to hold our peace; when to praise, and when to reprove; how to give, and how to take; when to scatter, when to keep back or withhold; and to order all things aright requireth a sound judgment, that we carry ourselves with that gravity and seriousness, that exactness and tenderness, that we may keep up the majesty of religion, and all the world may know that he is wise by whose counsel we are guided. But alas! where this sound judgment and discretion is wanting, we shall soon offend and transgress the laws of piety, charity, justice, sobriety. Piety and godliness will not be orderly; we shall either be guilty of a profane neglect of that course of duty that is necessary to keep in the life of grace, or turn religion into a sour

superstition and rigorous course of observances. Charity will not be orderly; we shall give to wastefulness, or withhold more than is meet, to the scandal or prejudice of the world towards religion. Not perform justice; we shall govern to God's dishonour, obey to his wrong, punish with too much severity, or forbear with too much lenity; our reproofs will be reproaches, our praises flattery. Sobriety will not be orderly; we shall deny ourselves our necessary comforts, or use them as an occasion to the flesh; either afflict the body and make ourselves unserviceable, or wrong the soul and burden and oppress it with vain delights. It short, even the higher acts of religion will degenerate; our fear will be turned into desperation, or our hope into presumption; our faith will be a light credulity, or our search after truth will turn into a flat scepticism or irresolution; our patience will be stupidity, or our constancy obstinacy; we shall either slight the hand of God, or faint under it; so that there is need of good judgment and knowledge to guide us in all our ways.

Secondly, Why this is so earnestly to be sought of God. The thing is evident from what is said already. But further—

1. Because this is a great defect in most Christians, who have many times good affections, but no prudence to guide and order them; they are indeed all affection, but no judgment; have a zeal, but without knowledge, Rom. 10:3. Zeal should be like fire, which is not only fervidus, but lucidus, hot, but bright. A blind horse may be full of mettle, but he is ever and anon stumbling. Oh! then, should we not earnestly seek of God good knowledge and judgment? The Spirit of God knoweth what is best for us. In the scriptures he hath indited prayers: Phil. 1:9, 'This I pray, that your love may abound more and more, in knowledge, and in all judgment;' that our love and zeal should have a proportionable measure of knowledge and judgment going along with it; and Col. 1:9, 'That ye may be filled with the

knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;' and again, Col. 3:16, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom.' These places show that it is not enough to have warm affections, but we must have a clear and a sound mind.

2. The mischief which ariseth from this defect is so great to themselves, to others, and the church of God.

[1.] To themselves.

(1.) Without the distinguishing or discerning act of judgment, how apt are we to be misled and deceived! They that cannot distinguish meats will soon eat what is unwholesome; so, if we have not a judgment to approve things that are excellent, and disapprove the contrary, our fancies will deceive us, for they are taken with every slight appearance; as Eve was deceived by the fruit because it was fair to see to, Gen. 3:6, with 2 Cor. 11:3, 'For I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.' Our affections will deceive us, for they judge by interest and profit, not duty and conscience. The affections are easily bribed by those bastard goods of pleasure, honour, and profit: 2 Cor. 4:4, 'In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.' The consent of the world will deceive us, for they may conspire in error and rebellion against God, and are usually the opposite party against God: Rom. 12:2, 'And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds.' Good men may deceive us; true and faithful ministers may err both in doctrine and manners, as the old prophet seduced the young one to his own destruction: 1 Kings 13:18, 'He said unto him, I am a prophet also, and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thy house, that he may eat bread and drink



water. But he lied unto him.' In what a woful plight, then, are Christians if they have not a judgment, and a test to taste doctrines and try things, as the mouth tasteth meats! How easily shall we take good for evil and evil for good, condemning that which God approveth, and approving that which God condemneth!

(2.) Without the determining act of judgment, how fickle and irresolute shall we be, either in the profession or in the practice of godliness. Many men's religion lasts but for a pang; it cometh upon them now and then, it is not their constant frame and constitution. For want of this purpose and resolute peremptory decree for the profession of godliness, there is an uncertainty, levity, and wavering in religion: men take up opinions lightly, and leave them as lightly again. Light chaff is carried about with every wind: Eph. 4:14, 'That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.' If we receive the truth upon the credit of men, we may be led off again, and we shall be ready to stagger when persecution cometh, especially if we see those men from whom we have learned the truth fall away; if we have not ἴδιον στήριγμα, a steadfastness of our own: 2 Peter 3:17, 'Beware lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.' Men should have a steadfastness proper to themselves, not stand by the steadfastness of another, the examples of others, the countenance or applause of the world, or the opinion of good men; but convincing reason, by which their minds may be enlightened, and their judgments set for God. So for practice; we are off and on, unstable in all our ways, Why? Because we content ourselves with some good motions before we have brought our hearts to this conclusion, to choose God for our portion, and to cleave to him. All in haste they will be religious, but sudden imperfect motions may be easily laid aside, and given over by contrary persuasions; but

when our hearts are fixed upon these holy purposes, then all contrary solicitations and oppositions will not break us or divert us. Satan hath small hopes to seduce or mislead a resolved Christian; loose and unengaged men lie open to him, and are ready to be entertained and employed by any new master.

(3.) Without the directing act of judgment, how easily shall we miscarry, and make religion a burden to ourselves, or else a scorn to the world! Want of judgment causeth different effects, not only in divers, but in the same person: sometimes a superstitious scrupulousness, at other times a profane negligence; sometimes making conscience of all things, then of nothing: as the one weareth off, the other succeedeth: as the devil cast the lunatic in the Gospel sometimes into the water, sometimes into the fire; either fearful of sin in everything they do, or bold to run into all sin without fear; whereas a truth judiciously understood would prevent either extreme. So again for want of judgment; sometimes men are transported by a fiery and indiscreet zeal, at other times settle into a cold indifferency, and all things come alike to them. The way to prevent both is to resolve upon evidence: 1 Thes. 5:21, 'Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.' Certainly the clearer our judgment is the more steadfast is our faith, the more vehement our love, the more sound our joy, the more constant our hope, the more calm our patience, the more earnest our pursuit of true happiness; otherwise we shall never carry it evenly between vain presumption and feigned reverence, between legal fear and rash hopes, uncomely dejections and a loose disregard of God. Wisdom is the faculty by which we apply that knowledge we have unto the end why we should have it.

[2.] It makes us troublesome to others, by preposterous carriage, rash censuring, needless intermeddling: Phil. 1:9, 10, 'And this I

pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;' our corruptions will otherwise break forth to the offence of others. An injudicious Christian increaseth the reproaches of the world, as if the servants of God were the troublers of Israel, by unseasonable reproofs, mistiming of duties, meddling with that which no ways appertained to him. All lawful things are not fit at all times, nor in all places, nor to be done by all persons. Much folly, indiscretion and rashness remaineth in the best, whereby they dishonour God, and bring religion into contempt.

[3.] They trouble the church of God; it hath suffered not only from the persecutions of enemies, but from! the folly, rashness, and indiscretion of its friends. There are different degrees of light, some babes, some young men, some grown persons in Christ Jesus: 1 John 2:13, 'I write unto you fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning; I write unto you young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one; I write unto you little children, because ye have known the Father.' Now, children have their fancies, and young men their passions, and old men their humours. When the one would prescribe to the other, they hurry all things into confusion: the injudicious generally seek to carry it, and would govern the world. In young ones, there are great affections but little knowledge and judgment; they have a great zeal, but little prudence to moderate it; and when this is joined with perverseness and contumacy, it is not easy to be said how much evil it bringeth to the church of God; as a fiery horse routeth the troop, and bringeth disorder into the army. The devil loveth to draw things into extremes, to set gift against gift, prudence against zeal, the youth of Christianity against age, and so to confound all things, and so to subvert the kingdom of Christ by that

comely vanity which is the beauty of it. In the general, all overdoing in religion is undoing.

Use. The use is, let all this press us to seek this benefit of good judgment and knowledge. To this end—

1. Consider the value and necessity of it. Without it we cannot regularly comfort ourselves in the promises, but it will breed a carelessness and neglect of our duty; nor fulfil the commandments of God, but it will breed in us a self-confidence and devaluing of the grace of God; nor reflect upon our sins, but we shall be swallowed up of immoderate sorrow; nor suffer for the truth, but we shall run into indiscreet reasoning and oppositions that will trouble all, and, it may be, subvert the interest of religion in the world; or else grow into a loose uncertainty, leaping from one opinion to another. This uncertainty cometh not so much, or not altogether, from vile affection, as want of information in religion, professing without light and evidence, having more of affection than principles. There is a twofold injudiciousness—total or partial. (1.) Total, when men are given up εἰς νοῦν ἀδόκιμον, into a reprobate sense, or an injudicious mind, Rom. 1:28: when utterly incapable of heavenly doctrine, or discerning the things of the Spirit. This is one of God's heaviest judgments. That is not the case of any of you, I hope. (2.) Partial, and that is in us all. Alas! we are ignorant of many things which we should know; at least, we have not that discretion and prudence which is necessary for directing our faith, tempering our zeal, ordering and regulating our practice, which is necessary to avoid evil, to do good, or to do good well. Or, if we have light, we have no sense or taste. Many never felt the bitterness of sin to purpose, of sweetness of righteousness; therefore we have need to cry to God, Lord, give me good taste and knowledge.

2. If you would have it, you must ask it of God. We can have no sound knowledge till God teach it us. By nature we are all blind, ignorant, vain; after grace received, though our ignorance be helped, it is not altogether cured; you must still fetch it from heaven by strong hand. Without his Spirit we cannot discern spiritual things: 1 Cor. 2:14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned;' that is, chiefly, the main things of the gospel, and universally all things, so far as conscience and obedience to God is concerned in them. It is the unction must teach us all things: 1 John 2:20, 'But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things;' the things of God must be seen in the light of his own Spirit. The Spirit of God first giveth us the desire of these things, and then satisfieth us with them. It is the Spirit of God purifieth this desire, that it may be holy, as having a holy end, that we may avoid whatever is displeasing to God, and do whatever is pleasing in his sight; and that is the ready way to come to knowledge and sound judgment: John 17:17, 'Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth;' John 3:21, 'He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.' Men that have a mind to maintain an opinion, or suffer an evil practice, are prejudiced and biassed by the idol that is in their hearts, and so do not see what may be seen, and what they seem to search after. Therefore David urgeth this as an argument in the latter end of the text, 'I have believed thy commandments;' that is to say, Lord, I know this word is thine, and I am willing to practise all that thou requirest. The great thing that is to be aimed at about knowledge is, not only that we may know, and be able to jangle about questions, or that we may be known and esteemed for our knowledge, but that we may practise and walk circumspectly, and in evil days and times know what the will of the Lord is concerning us; to desire knowledge as those that know the weight and consequence of these things, as I

shall show more fully hereafter. Those that would have good judgment and knowledge must be willing to understand their duty, and practise all that God requireth, that they may neither do things rashly, and without knowledge and deliberation, for then they are not good, how good soever they be in themselves: Prov. 19:2, 'Also, that the soul be without knowledge is not good;' or doubtingly, after deliberation; for he that doubteth is in part condemned in his own mind: Rom. 14:23, 'And he that doubteth is damned if he eat.' We must have a clear warrant from God, or else all is naught, and will tend to evil. Then it is the Spirit of God satisfieth these desires, when we earnestly desire of him to be informed in the true and perfect way: John 6:45, 'They shall be all taught of God.' He hath suited promises to the pure and earnest desire of knowledge. Then it is the Lord who sendeth means and blesseth means; as he sent Peter to Cornelius, Acts 10, and Philip to the eunuch, Acts 8. All is at his disposal, and he will not fail the waiting soul; he hath made Christ to be wisdom for this very end and purpose, that he might guide us continually: 1 Cor. 1:30, 'But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption.'

3. You must seek it in the word; that maketh us wise to salvation, and by the continual study of it we obtain wisdom and discretion; there we have the best and safest counsel: 'It maketh wise the simple,' Ps. 19:7. No case can be put, so far as it concerneth conscience, but there you shall have satisfaction: Col. 3:16, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom.' You must not content yourselves with a cursory reading, but mark the end and scope of it, that you may be made completely wise, by frequent reading, hearing, meditation upon it, and conferring about it. There you find all things necessary to be believed and practised, therefore you must hear it with application, read it with meditation. (1.) Hear it with application. The

Lord blesseth us in the use of instituted means; both light and flame are kept in by the breath of preaching. Where visions fail, the people perish, men grow brutish and wild. It is a dispute which is the sense of learning, the ear or the eye. By the eye we see things, but by reason of innate ignorance we must be taught how to judge of them: James 1:19, 'Wherefore, my brethren, let every man be swift to hear;' take all occasions. And we must still apply what we hear. Nunquid ego talis? Rom. 8:31, 'What shall we then say to these things?' Job 5:27, 'Lo, this we have searched, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good;' Heb. 2:3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' Return upon thine own heart. (2.) Reading scripture is every man's work who hath a soul to be saved. Other writings, though good in their kind, will not leave such a lively impression upon the soul. All the moral sentences of Seneca and Plutarch do not come with such force upon the conscience as one saying of God's word. God's language hath a special energy; here must be your study and your delight: Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night;' 2 Tim. 3:16, 17, 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.' These make you wise unto salvation. Your taste is not right when you relish and savour human writings, though never so good, more than the word of God. A draught of wine from the vessel is more fresh and lively; that conviction which doth immediately rise out of the word is more prevailing. We suspect the mixture of passion and private aims in the writings of others; but when conscience and the word are working together, we own it as coming from God himself. Besides, those that are studying, and reading, and meditating on the word have this sensible advantage, that they have promises, doctrines, examples of the word ready and familiar upon all occasions; others are weak and unsettled because they have not scriptures ready. In

the whole work of grace you will find no weapon so effectual as the sword of the Spirit. Scriptures seasonably remembered and urged are a great relief to the soul. No diligence here can be too much. If you would not be unprofitable, sapless, indiscreet with others, weak and comfortless in yourselves, read the scriptures. We have Sic scriptum est against every temptation. Besides, you have the advantage to see with your own eyes the truth as it cometh immediately from God, before any art of man, or thoughts of their head pass upon it, and so can the better own God in what you find.

4. Long use and exercise doth much increase judgment, especially as it is sanctified by the Spirit of God. You get a habit of discerning, fixing, directing, guiding your ways: διὰ τὴν ἔξιν τὰ αἰσθητήρια γεγυμνασμένα ἔχοντες, Heb. 5:14, 'Who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil.' As men of full age, by long use and exercise of the senses of seeing, smelling, tasting, have acquired a more perfect knowledge to discern what food is good and wholesome and what is unwholesome, so by much attention, studying, and meditation, men who have exercised the intellectual faculty to find out the scope and meaning of the word of God do attain a more discerning faculty, and understand better the truth of the word, and can judge what doctrine is true and what false, and more easily apprehend higher points when taught unto them; they discern and know the differences of things to be understood. God's blessing doth accompany use and frequent exercise, and make it effectual to this end; by degrees we come to a solidness.

5. Sense and experience doth much increase judgment. When smarted for our folly, tasted the sweetness of conversing with God in Christ: 1 Peter 2:3, 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' Optima demonstratio est a sensibus. Col. 1:6, 'Which bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day you heard of it, and knew



the grace of God in truth.' God is not taught by experience, to whose knowledge all things are present, and at all times, and before all times; but we are. God is fain to teach us by briars and thorns, as Gideon taught the men of Succoth.

6. Avoid the enemies to it or hindrances of it. I shall name two:—

[1.] A passionate or wilful addictedness to any carnal things. Most men live by sense, will, and passion, whereby they enthrall that wisdom which they have, and keep it in unrighteousness. Perit omne judicium cum res transit in affectum—truth is a prisoner to their sinful passions and affections, rejecting all thoughts of their future happiness. A man cannot be wise to salvation, and passionately addicted to any temporal interest.

[2.] Pride; that maketh us either rash or presumptuous, either not using a due consideration, or not humble enough to subject our minds to it. Besides we cast off God's assistance: 'The humble and meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way,' Ps. 25:9. Men that lean on their own understandings reject him: Prov. 3:5, 6, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.'

## **SERMON LXXV**

**For I have believed thy commandments.—  
VER. 66.**

THIS latter clause may be considered absolutely or relatively; in itself, or as it containeth a reason of the foregoing petition.

First, Absolutely. These words deserve a little consideration, because believing is here suited with an unusual object. Had it been, For I have believed thy promises, or, obeyed thy commandments, the sense of the clause had been more obvious to every vulgar apprehension. To believe commandments sounds as harsh to a common ear as to see with the ear and hear with the eye. But for all this, the commandments are the object; and of them he saith not, I have obeyed, but I have believed. To take off the seeming asperity of the phrase, some interpreters conceive that commandments is put for the word in general; and so promises are included, yea, they think principally intended, those promises which encouraged him to hope for God's help in all necessary things, such as good judgment and knowledge are. But this interpretation would divert us from the weight and force of these significant words. Therefore—

1. Certainly there is a faith in the commandments, as well as in the promises, as I shall fully prove by and by.
2. The one is as necessary as the other; for as the promises are not esteemed, embraced, and improved, unless they are believed to be of God, so neither are the precepts; they do not sway the conscience as the other do, nor incline the affections, but as they are believed to be divine.
3. The faith of the one must be as lively as the other. As the promises are not believed with a lively faith unless they draw off the heart from carnal vanities to seek that happiness which they offer to us, so the precepts are not believed rightly unless we be fully resolved to acquiesce in them as the only rule to guide us in the obtaining that happiness, and to adhere to them and obey them. As the king's laws are not kept as soon as they are believed to be the king's laws, unless also upon the consideration of his authority and power we subject

ourselves to them, so this believing noteth a ready alacrity to hear God's voice and obey it, and to govern our hearts and actions according to his counsel and direction in the word.

Doct. That the commandments of God must be believed as well as his promises; or, The precepts of sanctity and holiness bind the conscience to obey God, as well as the promises bind us to trust in God.

1. What we must believe concerning the commandments.
2. The necessity of believing them if we would be happy.
3. The utility and profit.

1. What we must believe concerning the commandments.

[1.] That they have God for their author, that we may take our duty immediately out of his hand, that these commands are his commands. The expressions of his commanding and legislative will, whereby our duty is determined and bound upon us, that is a matter of faith, not a matter of sense. We were not present at the giving of the law as being past, but we ought to be affected with it as if we were present, or had heard the thunderings of Mount Sinai, or had them now delivered to us by oracle or immediate voice from heaven. God doth once for all give the world sensible and sufficient satisfaction, and then he requireth faith. See Heb. 2:2–4, 'For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience obtained a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own

will?' The apostle compareth the first promulgation of the law and the first publication of the gospel. After ages did not hear the sounding of the dreadful trumpet, nor see the flaming smoking mountain, were not conscious to all those circumstances of terror and majesty with which the law was given; yet it was λόγος βέβαιος, a steadfast word. God owned it in his providence: the punishment of transgressors is proof of God's authorising the doctrine. So we were not present when the miracles by which the gospel law was confirmed were wrought; yet there is a constant evidence that these things were once done; and God still owneth it in his providence, therefore we must receive the gospel law as the sovereign will and pleasure of our lawgiver, as if we had seen him in person doing these wonders, heard him with our own ears. It is not only those that were present at Mount Sinai that were bound, but all their posterity. God giveth arguments of sense once for all. This belief is the more required of us as to precepts and commandments, because they are more evident by natural light: Rom. 2:14, 15, 'For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the law written in their hearts.' There is veritas naturalis and veritas mystica. Some objects of faith depend upon mere revelation, but the commands of the moral law are clearer than the doctrines of faith; they are of duties and things present, not of privileges to be enjoyed hereafter, such as the promises offer to us. Now, it is easier to be convinced of present duties than to be assured of some future things promised.

[2.] That these commandments be received with that reverence that becometh the sovereign will and pleasure of so great a lord and lawgiver. It is the work of faith to acquaint us with the nature of God and his attributes, and work the sense of them into our hearts. The great governor of the world is invisible, and we do not see him that is

invisible but by faith: Heb. 11:27, 'By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.' It is ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων, 'the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. 11:1. Temporal potentates are before your eyes, their majesty may be seen, and their terrors and rewards are matter of sense. That there is an infinite, eternal, and all-wise Spirit, who made all things, and therefore hath right to command and give laws to all things, reason will in part tell us; but faith doth more assure the soul of it, and impresseth the dread and awe of God upon our souls, as if we did see him with bodily eyes. By faith we believe his being: Heb. 11:6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is.' His power, so as to oppose it to things visible and sensible: Rom. 4:21, 'Being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform.' That there is no standing out against him who with one beck of his will can ruin us everlastingly, and throw the transgressor of his laws into eternal fire: a frown of his face is enough to undo us; he is not a God to be neglected, or dallied with, or provoked by the wilful breaking of his laws. He hath truly potestatem vitæ et necis—the power of life and death: James 4:12, 'There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.' These considerations are best enforced by faith, without which our notions of these things are weak and languid. You are to charge the heart with God's authority, as you will answer it to him another day, not to neglect or despise the duty you owe to such a God. No terror comparable to his frowns, no comforts comparable to his promises or the sense of his favour.

[3.] That these laws are holy, just, and good: Rom. 7:12, 'Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.' This is necessary, because, in believing the commandments, not only assent is required, but also consent to them, as the fittest laws we could be governed by: Rom. 7:16, 'If, then, I do that which I would not, I consent to the law that it is good.' Consent is a mixed act of the

judgment and will: they are not only to be known as God's laws, but owned and embraced, not only see a truth, but a worth in them. The mandatory part of the word hath its own loveliness and invitation; as the promises of pardon and eternal life suit with the hunger and thirst of conscience, and the natural desires of happiness; so the holiness and righteousness of God's laws suit with the natural notions of good and evil that are in man's heart. These laws were written upon man's heart at his first creation, and though somewhat blurred, we know the better how to read a defaced writing when we get another copy or transcript to compare with it. Especially when the heart is renewed, when the Spirit hath wrought a suitableness, there must needs be a consenting and embracing: Heb. 8:10, 'This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts.' There is a ready willing heart to obey them and conform to them in the regenerate, therefore an assent is not enough, but a consent; this is that they would choose and prefer before liberty; they acquiesce and are satisfied in their rule as the best rule for them to live by. But let us see the three attributes, holy, just, and good. (1.) They are holy laws, fit for God to give and man to receive. When we are convinced of this, it is a great help to bridle contrary inclinations, and to carry us on cheerfully in our work. They are fit for God to give, they become such a being as God is: his laws carry the express print and stamp of his own nature upon them. We may know how agreeable they are to the nature of God by supposing the monstrousness of the contrary. If he had forbidden us all love, and fear, and trust in himself, all respect and thanks to our creator, or bidden us to worship false gods, or change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to a corruptible man, as birds, four-footed beasts, and creeping things, or that we should blaspheme his name continually, or despise his glory shining forth in the work of his hands, and that we should be disobedient to our

parents, and pollute ourselves as the beasts with promiscuous lusts, and fill the world with adulteries, robberies, and thefts, or slander and revile one another, and leave the boat to the stream, give over ourselves to our passions, discontents, and the unruly lusts of our corrupt hearts; these are conceits so monstrous that, if the beasts were capable of having such thoughts transfused into them, they would abhor them, and would infer such a manifest disproportion in the soul as it would in the body to walk with our hands and do our work with our feet. And they are fit for man to receive if he would preserve the rectitude of his nature, live as such an understanding creature, keep reason in dominion, and free from being a slave to the appetites of the body. To be just, holy, temperate, humble, meek, chaste, doth not only concern the glory of God and the safety of the world, but the liberty of the reasonable nature, that man may act as a creature that hath a mind to know things that differ, and to keep him from that filthiness and pollution which would be a stain to him, and infringe the glory of his being. There is no middle thing; either a man must be a saint or a beast, either conform himself to God's will, and look after the interests of his soul, or lose the excellency of his nature, and become as the beasts that perish; either the beast must govern the man, or the man ride upon the beast, which he doth when he taketh God's counsel. (2) Just, because it referreth to all God's precepts. I take it here not strictly but largely, how just it is for God to command, and how reasonable it is that we should obey the supreme being. His will is the reason of all things; and who should give laws to the world but the universal sovereign who made all things out of nothing? Whatsoever you are, you receive it from the Lord; and therefore, whatsoever a reasonable creature can do, you owe it to him: you are in continual dependence upon him, for 'in him you live, and move, and have your being,' Acts 17:28. And he hath redeemed you, called you to life by Christ: 1 Cor. 6:19, 20, 'What, know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which

is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.' You owe all your time, and strength, and service unto him, and therefore you should still be doing his will and abounding in his work. (3.) He enjoineth nothing but what is good: Deut. 5:29, 'Oh, that there were such a heart in them that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever;' Deut. 6:24, 'And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.' God hath tempered his sovereignty towards the reasonable creature, and ruleth us not with a rod of iron, but with a sceptre of love: 'He draweth us with the cords of a man,' Hosea 11:4; that is, with reasons and arguments taken from our own happiness. Man being a rational and free agent, he would lead and quicken us to our duty by the consideration of our own benefit; and when he might say only, Thus shall ye do; I am the Lord; yet he is pleased to exhort and persuade us not to forsake our own mercies, or to turn back upon our own happiness, and to propound rewards that we may be encouraged to seek after him in that way of duty which he hath prescribed to us. The reward is everlasting glory, with the mercies of this life in order to it: Heb. 11:6, 'God is, and he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.'

[4.] How indispensably obedience to his commandments is required of us. As long as the heart is left loose and arbitrary, such is the unruliness and self-willedness of man's nature, Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' The carnalist will not be held to his duty, but leaves that which is honest for that which is pleasing, and is governed by his appetite rather than his reason; therefore faith hedgeth up his way, showeth him 'that without holiness it is



impossible to see God,' Heb. 12:14; that there is no coming to the end unless we take the way; that there is no hope of exemption or excuse for the breaches of his law allowed but the plea of the gospel, which doth not evacuate but establish obedience to God's commands, requireth a renouncing of our former course, and a hearty resolution, 'to serve God in holiness and righteousness all our days,' Luke 1:74, 75. Our duty is the end of our deliverance. In the kingdom of grace we are not our own masters, or at liberty to do what we will. Christ came not only as a saviour, but as a lawgiver; he hath his laws to try our obedience: Heb. 5:9, 'And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.' He came not to lessen God's sovereignty or man's duty, but to put us into a greater capacity to serve God. He came to deliver us from the curse and indispensable rigours of the law upon every failing; not from our duty, nor that we might not serve God, but serve him without fear, with peace of conscience and joy of heart, and requireth such a degree of grace as is inconsistent with any predominant lust and affection.

[5.] That God loveth those that obey his law, and hateth those that despise it, without respect of persons: Acts 10:35, 'In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him;' Ps. 5:5, 'Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity;' Prov. 11:20, 'They that are of a froward heart are an abomination to the Lord, but such as are upright in their way are his delight.' The more obedient, the more God loveth us; the less obedient, the less God loveth us. Therefore, unless we love what God loveth, and hate what God hateth, do his commands carefully, and avoid the contrary, we cannot be acceptable with him, for God would not make a law in vain, but order his providence accordingly.

[6.] That one day we shall be called to an account for our conformity and inconformity to God's law. There are two parts of government—legislation and execution: the one belongeth to God as king, the other as judge. Laws are but a shadow, and the sanction a mockery, unless there shall be a day when those that are subject to them shall be called to an account and reckoning. His threatenings are not a vain scarecrow, nor his promises a golden dream; therefore he will appoint a day when the truth of the one and the other shall be fully made good; and therefore faith enliveneth the sense of God's authority with the remembrance of this day, when he will judge the world in righteousness.

## 2. The necessity.

[1.] The precepts are a part of the divine revelation: the object of faith is the whole word of God, and every part of divinely inspired truth is worthy of all belief and reverence. The word worketh not unless it be received as the word of God: 1 Thes. 2:13, 'For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.' Now we cannot receive the word as the word of God unless we receive all. There are the same reasons to receive one as the other; therefore, if any part take good rooting, the whole is received. There may be a superficial affection to one part more than another; but if there be a right faith, we receive all. It is the engrafted word that is effectual to the saving of our souls, James 1:21; if we would engraft the word, the precepts must stir up answerable affections as well as the promises. Every part must affect us, and stir up dispositions in us which that part is apt to produce. If the promises stir up joy and trust, the precepts must stir up love, fear, and obedience. The same word which calleth upon us to believe the

free pardon of our sins, doth also call upon us to believe the commandments of God for the regulating and guiding of our hearts and ways.

[2.] It is such a part as hath a necessary connection with the promises, as without which they can do us no good; therefore, if we mean to be happy, we must regard both; the one is as necessary and fundamental to our happiness as the other. Our consent to God's covenant is required, not as if we were to debate and alter the terms at our pleasure, but that we may take it as God hath stated it, and bind our duty upon us by our consent to God's authority. We cannot prescribe conditions and laws of commerce between God and us, but only God alone. Man did not give the conditions, or treat about the making of them, what they should be, but is only bound to submit to what God was pleased to offer and prescribe. We are not left free to model and bring down the terms to our own liking, to take hold of them, not to appoint them: Isa. 56:4, 'For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and do the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant;' for though he condescendeth to treat with us, yet still he keepeth the place of a sovereign: and therefore, if we believe promises, and do not believe God's commandments, it is not God's covenant, but one of our own devising, when we take and leave, and part and mingle, and chop and change at our own pleasures. The covenant requireth a total, universal, unlimited resignation of ourselves to the will of God: 'I will be your God, you shall be my people.'

[3.] The gratitude that resulteth necessarily from faith, or believing the promises, will put us upon this; it apprehendeth love, and leaveth the stamp of it upon the soul, and worketh by love, Gal. 5:6. Now, how are we to express our love to God? Not in a fellow-like familiarity, but dutiful subjection to his laws: 1 John 5:3, 'For this is

the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous;' and John 14:21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me;' not by glavering respects, or a fond remembrance and esteem of his memory, Mat. 7:11. If we live to God, not to the world, not to the flesh, if faith be lively, it will put us upon this: 2 Cor. 5:15, 'And that he died for all, that they that live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again.'

[4.] Our trust in the promises is always commensurable to our fidelity in the commandments. Faith in the one is maintained by faithfulness in the other, and assurance of acceptance with God cannot be greater than our care of obedience. When love to the world and the flesh tempt us to omit any part of our duty, then do we weaken our confidence thereby, and sin will breed distrust if we be serious and mind our condition: 'The fruit of righteousness is peace;' 1 John 3:21, 'Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God;' and Heb. 7:2, 'Being by interpretation king of righteousness, and after that also king of Salem, which is king of peace;' and Christ saith, Mat. 11:29, 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' Confidence and comfort follow grace, as heat doth fire; and fears and doubts follow sin, as pain doth the pricking of a needle, or any sharp thing wherewith a man pierceth himself; therefore, when sensual objects oversway us, and take us off from obedience to the command, they will also make us doubt of the mercy of God, as well as transgress our duty. We cannot trust him when we have offended freely and without restraint; sin will breed shame and fear.

At present all sinners feel it not; yet hereafter that sin that now weakeneth the faith we have in the commandments, will in time

weaken the faith we have in the promises. Every part of our trust in God's declared will cometh to be tried one time or another: our confidence in God's mercy is not fully and directly assaulted till the hour of death, and the time of extraordinary trial. When the evil day cometh, then the consciousness of any one sin whereunto we have been indulgent, and of the delight and pleasure we took in transgressing God's commandments, will be of force to withdraw our assent from God's mercies: 1 Cor. 15:56, 'The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.'

[5.] Faith in the promises, if it be not a conceit and a vain dream, is not only an act enforced by our necessity, but done in obedience to God's will; therefore we believe because God hath commanded it: 1 John 3:23, 'And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ;' John 6:29, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.' It sensibly appeareth many times, a poor soul hath no other motive or encouragement. It ventureth, notwithstanding all discouragements to the contrary, in the strength and sense of a command; as Peter, Luke 5:5, 'Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.' Now that which is done, if rightly done, merely in obedience to a command, cannot be the ground of disobedience in other things. We must not pick and choose. Certainly if we believe the promises on God's command, we will make conscience of other things commanded also; for he is truly obedient to no precept that doth not obey all enforced by the same authority.

### 3. The utility.

[1.] That we may begin with God, to yield up our wills absolutely to his will; it is upon a belief that this is his will concerning us; for his

will concerning our duty is revealed in his precepts: 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' Micah 6:8. Certainly an obedient creature desireth to know no more but what God will have him to do; and therefore it is needful we should believe what is God's will, that we may resolve upon his will: Rom. 12:1, 2, 'I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service; and be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.' The first thing that we do in grace is to arm ourselves with a resolution to obey God's will, though it be never so contrary to our own, or to the wills of men, or the course of the world's fashions: 1 Peter 4:1, 2, 'Forasmuch, then, as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.' Now, that this resolution may be made knowingly and with the greater strength, not only with the strength of inclination or our own resolved, renewed will, but in the sense of God's authority, a strong belief is necessary that this course of life is pleasing to God.

[2.] That we may hold on with God in an awe-ful, watchful, serious course of godliness, it is necessary that the belief of the commandments be deeply impressed upon us. Alas! otherwise we shall be off and on, forward and backward, according to the impulsion of our own inclinations and affections, and the sense of our interest in the world. Many of the commandments are crossing to our natural inclinations and corrupt humours, or contrary to our interests in the world, our profit, pleasure; and nothing will hold the heart to our duty but the conscience of God's authority: This is the

Lord's will, then the gracious soul submitteth: 1 Thes. 4:3, 'For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication;' and 1 Peter 2:15, 'For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.' That is reason enough, and instead of all reasons, to a believer, to awe and charge his heart, that we may not shift and distinguish ourselves out of our duty, that we may shake off sloth and negligence, much more deceits, and fraudulency, and corrupt affections. Many shifts will be studied by a naughty heart that dispense with our credit, esteem, honour, preferment in the world for our loyalty to God. Nothing but a deep belief of the sovereignty of God and the sight of his will can be of sufficient power to the soul when such temptations arise, and our duties are so contrary to the inclinations of the flesh: Heb. 11:8, 'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out not knowing whither he went;' and ver. 17, 18, 'By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son; of whom it is was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called;' Gen. 12:3, 'In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.' Oh! how have believers need to bestir themselves upon such an occasion, and to remember no evil can be compared with God's wrath, no earthly good with his favour: that transitory delights are dearly bought if they endanger the soul to compass them: 'That the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us!' Rom. 8:18. The ordinary experience of believers in lesser temptations is enough to evince this, &c.

Use. 1. For reproof.

1. That men do so little revive the belief of God's commandments, hence sins of omission: James 4:17, 'Therefore to him that knoweth

to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin;' of commission: Jer. 8:6, 'I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.' Would men venture to break a known law if they did consider that it was the command of God that hath power to save and to destroy? Surely want of faith in the precepts is a great cause of their coldness in duty, boldness in sinning: Prov. 13:13, 'Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed; but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.' Now any one would fear God's commandment if he did consider it in all its circumstances.

2. Those that would strongly believe the promises, but weakly believe that part of the word that requireth their duty from them, all for privileges, seldom reflect upon their own qualification: it is a good temper when both go together: Ps. 119:166, 'I have hoped for thy salvation, and have done thy commandments;' so Ps. 147:11, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.' But when asunder, all is naught. God's promises cannot comfort us if we be not of the number of them to whom they do belong; not only consider what God is, but what we are, and what is required of us our qualification as well as his goodness, our duty as well as his mercy.

Use 2. To believe the commandments with a lively faith. We should be tender of disobeying God's law. The law may be considered as a covenant of works, or as a rule of life. As a covenant of works, so it is satisfied by Christ for those that have an interest in him, and serveth to quicken us to get this interest in him. As it is a rule of life, so in the new covenant we give up ourselves to God to walk according to the tenor of it; as Israel by a voluntary submission: Exod. 19:8, 'All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do.' So in the church of the New



Testament we engage ourselves by a voluntary submission to walk according to the will of God, and confirm it by the sacraments, baptism, and the Lord's supper. Well, then, we are still to regard it as a binding rule, looking for grace to perform it. It is not only a rule given us for advice and direction, but for a strong obligation to urge and enforce us to our duty. So Ps. 40:8, 'Thy law is in my heart; I delight to do thy will, O God.'

Use 3. Do we believe the commandments? Then—

1. We will not please ourselves with a naked trust in the promises, while we neglect our duty to God. That which God hath joined together no man must put asunder. The prophet saith, Hosea 10:11, 'Ephraim is an heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn;' compared with Deut. 25:4, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.' We are addicted to our own ease, prize comforts, but loathe duty. Oh, make more conscience of obedience!

2. Their faith will be lively and operative, cause to keep God's charge and observe his commandments; otherwise it is but an opinion and a dead faith: James 2:20, 'Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?' Many may discourse of the necessity of duty that have little sense of it; as the children in the furnace, the fire had no power over them, neither was one hair of their heads singed, nor their coats changed; not a lust mortified, no good by their strict notions.

3. They must be obeyed as God's commands, abstaining from evil because God forbiddeth it, practising that which is good because God commandeth it. Notitia voluntatis: 1 Thes. 4:3, 'This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication;' 1 Thes. 5:8, 9, 'But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the

hope of salvation: for God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ;' 1 Peter 2:15, 'For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.' Certainly no private respect, desire of our own pleasure and profit, should hinder us; but we must respect one command as well as another, otherwise our obedience is partial. *A quatenus ad omne valet consequentia*; if we believe the commandments, we must believe all. Where a disposition is allowed to break any one of God's laws, the heart is not right. God's sovereignty, once acknowledged, is alike potent to restrain every inclination to acts displeasing to God and contrary to our duty, one as well as another.

Secondly, The text may be considered relatively, with respect to the matter in hand; and so it may be conceived as a reason of asking, or as a reason of granting.

1. As a reason of asking.

[1.] It giveth a character of them that believe; they that believe God's commandments will desire to know them more, to be more accurate in knowing their duty, and the weight and consequence of it;—they are willing to practise all that it requireth, and so are willing to 'prove what is the acceptable will of the Lord:' Eph. 5:17, 'Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is;' they would not do anything doubtingly: Rom. 4:23, 'He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin;' nor according to the wills of men: Gal. 1:10, 'For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.' They would avoid all appearance of evil: 1 Thes. 5:22, Occasions to evil; Rom. 13:14,

'Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.' They know the weight and consequence of these things.

[2.] It giveth us an intimation of the necessity of growth: none believe so much but they may believe more: 1 John 5:13, 'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God;' and they may obey more, embrace the word more. David beggeth he may do so: always there is some new thing to be learned in the scripture.

[3.] That faith planted in the heart is nourished and increased by more knowledge and understanding: 2 Peter 1:5, 'Add to your faith, virtue; to virtue, knowledge.' There is an implicit and an explicit faith; oportet discentem credere, swallowing pills, not chewing them.

2. As a reason of granting. Believing God's commandments is a disposition that hath a promise of more knowledge to be communicated.

[1.] God by one act of grace maketh way for another. First, he giveth this first favour of receiving the word by faith as divine, worthy to be believed and obeyed; then, to understand it and apprehend it more perfectly, discretion and judgment to go about duties wisely.

[2.] God giveth according to the creatures' receptions; they that are dutiful and docile and willing to comply with their duty already known, shall know more.

Use. The use is, if we expect more illumination, let us believe as much as is manifested already to us, with a mind to practise.

## **SERMON LXXVI**

## **Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.—VER. 67.**

IN this verse you may observe two things:—

1. The evil of prosperity, before I was afflicted I went astray.
2. The good of adversity, but now have I kept thy word. Before wandering, but now attentive to his duty. Or, if you will, here is the necessity of afflictions and the utility of them.

1. The necessity, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray.' Some think that David in his own person representeth the wantonness and stubbornness of all mankind. If it should be so, yet the person in whom the instance is given is notable. If this was the disposition of the prophet and man of God, and he needed this discipline, we much more: if he could say it in truth of heart that he was made worse by his prosperity, we need always to be jealous of ourselves; and were it not for the scourge, we should forget our duty and the obedience we owe to God.

2. The utility and benefit of afflictions, 'But now have I kept thy word.' Keeping the law is a general word. The use of God's rod is to bring us home unto God, and the affliction driveth us to make better use of his word: it changeth us from vanity to seriousness, from error to truth, from stubbornness to teachfulness, from pride to modesty. It is commonly said, παθήματα μαθήματα; and the apostle telleth us that Jesus Christ himself learned obedience by the things which he suffered, Heb. 5:8; and here David was the better for the cross; so should we. Or rather, you may in the words observe three things:—

1. A confession of his wandering, 'I went astray.'

2. The course God took to reduce him to his duty, 'I was afflicted.'

3. The success or effect of that course, 'I have kept thy word.'

Theodoret expresseth this in three words, ἡρρώστησα, ἐτμήθην, ἐρρώσθην—I was sick; I was cut, or let blood; I was well, or recovered my health again.

1. The one giveth us the cause of afflictions; they are for sin, 'I went astray;' wherein there is a secret acknowledgment of his guilt, that his sin was the cause of the chastisement God brought upon him.

2. The true notion and nature of affliction to the people of God. The cross changeth its nature, and is not pæna, a destructive punishment, but remedium delinquentium, a medicinal dispensation, and a means of our cure.

3. The end of them is obedience, or keeping God's word. The sum of the whole is, I was out of the way, but thy rod hath reduced me, and brought me into it again. Aben Ezra conceiveth that in this last clause he intimateth a desire of deliverance, because the rod had done its work; rather, I think he expresseth his frame and temper when he was delivered; and accordingly I shall make use of it by and by.

I might observe many points, but the doctrine from the whole verse is—

Doct. That the end of God's afflicting, is to reduce his afflicted and straying people into the right way.

I shall explain the point by these considerations.

1. That man is of a straying nature, apt to turn out of the way that leadeth to God and to true happiness. We are all so by nature: Isa.

53:6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray.' Sheep, of all creatures, are exceeding subject to stray, if not tended and kept in the better, unable to keep out of error, and having erred, unable to return. This is the emblem by which the Holy Ghost would set forth the nature of mankind. But is it better with us after grace received? No; we are in part so still. The best of us, if left to ourselves, how soon are we out of the right way? into what sad errors do we run ourselves? Ps. 19:12, 'Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret sins.' Since grace, we all have our deviations; though our hearts be set to walk with God for the main, yet ever and anon we are swerving from our rule, transgressing our bounds, and neglecting our duty. Good David had cause to say, Ps. 119:176, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep: oh, seek thy servant!' We go astray not only out of ignorance, but out of perverseness of inclination: Jer. 14:10, 'Thus have they loved to wander; they have not restrained their feet.' We have hearts that love to wander; we love shift and change, though it be for the worse; and so will be making excursions into the ways of sin.

2. This straying humour is much increased and encouraged by prosperity, which, though it be good in itself, yet, so perverse are we by nature, that we are the worse for it. That the wicked are the worse for it, is clear: Isa. 26:10, 'Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will they not learn righteousness.' The sunshine upon the dunghill will produce nothing but stinks, and the salt sea will turn all that falleth into it into salt water; the sweet dews of heaven, and the tribute of the rivers all becometh salt when it falleth into the sea. So wicked men convert all into their humour: neither God's mercies nor judgments will have any gracious and kindly work upon them: but, if it be well with them, they take the more liberty to live loosely and profanely: the fear of God, which is the great holdback from all wickedness, is lessened and quite lost in them when they see no change: Ps. 55:19, 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear

not God.' That little slavish fear which they have, which should keep them back from wandering, is then lost, and the more gently God dealeth with them, the more godless and secure they are. When they go on prosperously and undisturbedly, the more obdurate ever. But is it not so with the people of God also? Yes, verily. David, whose heart smote him when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment when he was wandering in the wilderness, could plot the death of Uriah, his faithful servant, when he was at ease in his palace. We lose much tenderness of conscience, watchfulness against sin, much of that lively diligence that we should otherwise show forth in carrying on the spiritual life, when we are at ease, and all things go well with us. We are apt to indulge the flesh when we have so many baits to feed it; and to learn how to abound is the harder lesson of the two than to learn how to be abased, Phil. 4:12; and therefore, did not God correct us, we should grow careless and negligent. The beginning of all obedience is the mortification of the flesh, which naturally we cannot endure. After we have submitted and subjected ourselves to God, the flesh will be seeking its prey, and be rebelling and waxing wanton against the spirit, till God snatch its allurements from us. Therefore the Lord by divers afflictions is fain to break us and bring us into order. We force him to humble us by poverty, or disgrace, or diseases, or by domestic crosses, or some inconveniency of the natural and animal life, which we value too much. Besides, our affections to heavenly things languish when all things succeed with us in this world according to our heart's desire; and this coldness and remissness is not easily shaken off. Many are like the children of Reuben and Gad, Num. 32, who, when they found convenient pastures on this side Jordan, were content with it for their portion, without seeking aught in the land of promise. So their desires insensibly settle here, and have less respect to the good of the world to come.

3. When it is thus with us, God seeth fit to send afflictions. Much of the wisdom of God's providence is to be observed;—partly in the season of affliction, in what state and posture of soul it surpriseth us, when we are wandering, when we most need it, when our abuse of prosperity calleth aloud for it; when the sheep wander, the dog is let loose to fetch them in again. God suiteth his providence to our necessities: 1 Peter 1:6, 'For a season ye are in heaviness, if need be.' Alas! we often see that afflictions are highly necessary and seasonable, either to prevent a distemper that is growing upon us, or to reclaim us from some evil course in which we have wandered from God. Paul was in danger to be lifted up, and then God sendeth a thorn in the flesh. This discipline is very proper and necessary before the disease run on too far. Partly in the kind of affliction. All physic doth not work upon the same humour; divers lusts must have divers remedies. Pride, envy, covetousness, wantonness, emulation, have all their proper cures. All sins are referred to three impure fountains: 1 John 2:16, 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.' From the lusts of the flesh do arise not only the gross acts of wantonness, fornication, adultery, gluttony, drunkenness, which the more brutish and base part of mankind are taken with, but an inordinate love of pleasures, vain company, and vain delights, carnal complacency, or flesh-pleasing, wherewith the refined part of the world are too often captivated and bewitched. The lust of the eyes, covetousness and worldly-mindedness, produce wretchedness, rapines, contentions, strife, or that immoderate desire of having or joining house to house, field to field, and building up ourselves one storey higher in the world. From pride of life cometh ambition, lofty conceit of ourselves, scorn and contempt of others, affectation of credit and repute in the world, pomp of having multitudes of servants, or greatness of train, fineness of apparel, and innumerable vanities. Now God, that he may meet with his servants when they are



tripping in any kind, he sendeth out afflictions as his faithful messengers to stop them in their career, that the flesh may not sail and carry it away with a full and clear gale. Against the lusts of the flesh he sendeth sicknesses and diseases; against the lusts of the eyes, poverty and disappointments in our relations; against pride, disgraces and shame: and sometimes he varieth the dispensation, for his providence doth keep one tenor, and every cure will not fit every humour; all will not work alike upon all. He sendeth that affliction which is sure to work; he knoweth how to strike in the right vein: thus he cureth Paul's pride by a troublesome disease. None that study providence but may observe the wisdom of God in the kind of affliction, and how suitable it is to the work it is to do; for God doth all things in number, weight, and measure. Partly by the manner how it cometh upon us, by what instruments, and in what sort. How many make themselves miserable by an imagined cross! and so, when all things without are well, their own humours and passions make them a burden to themselves, and when they are not wounded in point of honour, nor lessened and cut short in estate, nor assaulted in their health, nor their relations diminished and cut off, but are hedged round about with all temporal happiness, there seemeth to be no room or place for any affliction or trouble in their bosoms, yet, in the fulness of their sufficiency, God maketh them a terror and burden to themselves, either by their own fears or misconceit, or the false imagination of some loss or disgrace: God maketh them uncomfortable and full of disquiet; and though they want nothing, yet they are not at ease, yea, more troubled than those that are called out to conflict with real, yea, the greatest evils. Haman is an instance: he was one of the princes of the kingdom of Persia, flowing in wealth and all manner of delights, in degree of dignity and honour next the king himself, and flourishing in the hope of a numerous and fair issue; yet because Mordecai, a poor Jew, did not do him expected reverence, 'All this availeth me nothing,' Esther 5:13. So soon can

God send a worm into the fairest gourd, and a dissatisfaction into the most flourishing estate in the world, that men shall have no rest night and day, especially if a spark of his wrath light into the conscience: Ps. 39:11, 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for his iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity, Selah.' There is a secret moth that eateth up all their contentment; they are under terror, discouragement, and want of peace: God teacheth them that nothing can be satisfactorily enjoyed apart from his blessed self: 'A fire not blown shall consume them,' Job 20:26. Partly in the continuance of afflictions. God ordereth, taketh off, and layeth on afflictions at his own pleasure, and as he seeth it conducive to our profit. Variety of afflictions may meet together on the best and dearest of God's children, there being in the best many corruptions both to be discovered and subdued, and many graces to be tried: 1 Peter 1:6, 'Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness, through manifold temptations;' and James 1:2, 'My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.' One trouble worketh into the hands of another, and the succession of them is as necessary as the first stroke. We often force God to renew his corrections, *ab assuetis nulla fit passio*—things to which we are accustomed do not affect us; therefore, under a general affliction there come in many special ones to rub up our sense, and make it work the better. Under public calamities we have a private one, and they come one in the neck of another like waves. When God hath begun he will make an end, and bring his discipline to some more comfortable and perfect issue. In all these things the wisdom of God is to be observed.

4. The affliction so sent hath a notable use to reduce us to a sense and care of our duty. This is often pressed in the scripture: 'The fruit of all shall be to take away their sin.' Afflictions are compared in scripture to fire that purgeth away our dross: 1 Peter 1:7, 'Now for a

season, if need be, ye are in manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.' To the fan that driveth away the chaff: Mark 3:12, 'Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' To a pruning-hook, that cutteth off the luxuriant branches, and maketh the others that remain the more fruitful: John 15:2, 'Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit.' To physic, that purgeth away the sick matter: Isa. 27:9, 'By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin.' To ploughing and harrowing of the ground, that destroyeth the ill weeds, and fitteth it to receive the good seed: Jer. 4:3, 'Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.' To the file that worketh off our rust, and the flail that maketh our husk fly off. So Heb. 12:11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised therewith.' The affliction hath a necessary tendency to so comfortable an effect. But because generals do but beat the air, and do not so well fit themselves in the mind, I shall show you it is either the means of our first conversion, or subservient to the reformation of those that are converted.

[1.] It is a means of our first conversion. How many begin with God upon the occasion of afflictions! The time of sorrows is a time of loves. The hot furnace is Christ's workhouse, where he formeth the most excellent vessels of honour and praise for his own use. Manasseh, Paul, and the jailer in the Acts, were all chosen in the fire; as the Lord saith, Isa. 48:10, 'I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction,' where God began to discover his choice by his working on

their affections. All men are vessels capable of any form, therefore God puts them into the furnace. Most of us are taken in our month, as the ram that Abraham offered was caught in the thickets. When stout and stubborn sinners are broken with want and distress, then they come to themselves, and think of returning to their Father: Luke 15:17, 18, 'And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father,' amp;. Afflictions make us more serious; conscience is then apt to work. Before, we were guided by the wisdom of the flesh, and governed by our carnal appetite, never minded heavenly things, till God get us under, and then we bethink ourselves. Have you never known any instance in this kind? that whilst they were young, rich, strong, noble, all their humour was for vain pleasure, to-day hunting, tomorrow hawking, another day feasting, and then brawling, fighting, drinking, carousing, dancing; all the warnings of parents, the good counsel of tutors and governors, the grave exhortations of ministers and preachers, will do no good upon them; they are always wandering up and down from God and from themselves, cannot endure a thought of God, of death, of heaven, of hell, of judgment to come; but when God casts them once into some grievous disease, or some great trouble, they begin to come to themselves, and then they that would hear nothing, understand nothing, despised all grave and gracious counsel given, as if it did not belong to them, scoffed at admonitions, thought the day lost in which they had not acted some sin or other, when the cross preacheth, and some grievous calamity is upon them, then conscience beginneth to work, and this bringeth to remembrance all that they have heard before, then they come to themselves, and would fain if they could come to Christ. Sharp affliction is a sound, powerful, rousing teacher: Job 36:8, 9, 'And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction, then he showeth them their work, and their transgressions that they have

exceeded.' Grace worketh in a powerful but yet in a moral way, congruously but forcibly, and by a fit accommodation of circumstances. One place more: Jer. 31:18, 'Truly I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.' Affliction awakeneth serious reflections upon our ways; therefore take heed what ye do with the convictions that arise upon afflictions; to slight them is dangerous. Nothing breedeth hardness of heart so much as the smothering of convictions. Iron often heated grows the harder. On the other side, see they do not degenerate into despair, either the raging despair which terrifieth, or the sottish despair which stupefieth: Jer. 18:12, 'They said, There is no hope, but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.' The middle between both is a holy sensibleness of our condition, which is a good preparation for the great duties of the gospel. The work of conversion is at first difficult and troublesome, but pass over this brunt, and all things will be sweet and easy: the bullock at first yoking is most unruly, and fire at the first kindling casts forth most smoke; so when sin is revived it brings forth death: Rom. 7:9, 'For I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' But yet cherish the work till God speak peace upon sound terms.

[2.] It is a great help to those that are converted already. How many are reduced to a more serious, lively practice of godliness by their troubles! We are rash, inconsiderate, inattentive to our duty, but the rod maketh us cautious and diligent. We follow the world, not the word of God; the vanities thereof take us off from minding the promises or precepts of the word, till the affliction cometh. In short, there are none of us so tamed and subdued to God but that we need to be tamed more. We are all for carnal liberty; there is a wantonness

in us. We are high-minded, earthly-minded, till God come with his scourge to reclaim us. He chasteneth us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness, Heb. 12:10; some lust still needeth mortifying, or some grace needeth exercising; our pride needs to be mortified, or our affections to be weaned from the world. The almond-tree is made more fruitful by driving nails into it, because that letteth out a noxious gum that hindereth its fruitfulness; so when God would have you thrive more, he makes you feel the sharpness of affliction. You have heard Plutarch's story of Jason of Chærea, that had his imposthume let out by a casual wound. There is some corruption God would let out. We are apt to set up our rest here, and therefore we need to be disturbed, to have the world crucified to us, Gal. 6:14, that the cumber of the world may drive us to seek for rest where it is only to be found, and to humble us by outward defects, that we may look after inward abundance, that, by being poor in this world, we may be rich in faith, James 2:5, and having nothing in the creature, we may possess all things in God, 2 Cor. 6:10, and be enlarged inwardly as we are straitened outwardly; in short, that we may be oftener with God. God sent a tempest after Jonah. Absalom set Joab's barley-field on fire, and then he came to him, 2 Sam. 14:30. Isa. 26:16, 'Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them;' Hosea 5:15, 'In their affliction they will seek me early.' It were endless to run out in discourses of this nature.

5. The affliction of itself doth not work thus, but as sanctified and accompanied with the Spirit of God. If the affliction of itself and by itself would do it, it would do so always, but that we see by experience it doth not. In itself it is an evil and a pain that is the consequent and the fruit of sin, and so breedeth impatience, despair, murmuring, and blasphemy against God. As it is a legal curse, other fruit cannot be expected of it but reviving terrors of heart and

repinings against the sovereignty of God. We see often the same affliction that maketh one humble, maketh another raging; the same poverty that maketh one full of dependence upon God, maketh another full of shifts and evil courses whereby to supply his want. No; it is understood of sanctified crosses, when grace goeth along with them to bless them to us: Jer. 31:19, 'Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth;' after God had wrought a gracious change in him by his afflicting hand and Spirit working together. So Ps. 94:12, 'Blessed is he whom thou chastenest, and instructest out of thy law.' The rod must be expounded by the word, and both must be effectually applied by the Spirit. Grace is God's immediate creature and production; he useth subservient means and helps, sometimes the word, sometimes the rod, sometimes both; but neither doth anything without his Spirit.

6. This benefit, though gotten by sharp afflictions, should be owned, and thankfully acknowledged as a great testimony and expression of God's love to us. So doth David to the praise of God. It is a branch that belongeth to the thanksgiving mentioned ver. 65, 'Thou hast done well with thy servant, according to thy word;'—the first of this octonary. We are prejudiced against the cross out of a self-love, a mistaken self-love; we love ourselves more than we love God, and the ease of the body more than the welfare of the soul, and the world more than heaven, and our temporal pleasure and contentment more than our spiritual and eternal benefit; and therefore we cannot endure to hear of the cross, much more to bear it. Oh! this doth not become men; surely it doth not become Christians! Would you have your consolation here? Luke 16; your portion here? Ps. 7. Would you value yourselves by the flourishing of the outward man, or the renewing of the inward man? 2 Cor. 4:16. Should we be so impatient

of the cross? Afflictions are bitter to present sense, but yet they are healthful to the soul: they are not so bitter in present feeling as they will be sweet in the after-fruits. Now, we are greatly unthankful to God, if the bitterness be not lessened and tempered by this fruit and profit. Consider, when are we most miserable? When we go astray, or when we are reduced into the right way? when we are engaged in a rebellion against God, or when brought into a sense of our duty? Hosea 4:17, 'Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.' Let him alone is the heaviest judgment that can be laid upon a poor creature. Providence, conscience, ministry let him alone; the case is desperate, and we are incorrigible when we are left to our own ways. There needeth no more to make our case miserable and sad than to be suffered to go on in sin without let and restraint; there is no hope of such: God seemeth to cast them off, and to desert and leave them to their own lusts. It is evident he mindeth not their salvation, but leaveth them to the world, to be condemned with the world. Well, then, doth God do the elect any harm when he casts them into great troubles? If we use violence to a man that is ready to be drowned, and, in pulling him out of the waters, should break an arm or a leg, would he not be thankful? Yes, saith he, I can dispense with that, for you have saved my life. So may God's children bless his name. O blessed providence! I had been a witless fool, and gone on in a course of sin, if God had not awakened me. A philosopher could say that he never made better voyage than when he suffered shipwreck, because then he began to apply himself to the study of wisdom: surely a Christian should say, Blessed be God that he laid his chastenings upon me, and brought me to a serious heavenly mind: I should otherwise have been a carnal fool, as others are. Wicked men are left to their own swing. When the case of the sick is desperate, physicians let them alone, give them leave to take anything they have a mind unto. The apostle speaketh much to this purpose: Heb. 12:6, 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he



receiveth.' Sharp afflictions, which in their visible appearance seem tokens of God's hatred, are rather tokens of his love. There is a twofold love of God—*Amor benevolentiae et complacentiae*—the love of good-will, whereby the Lord out of the purposes of his own free grace doth regenerate us, and adopt us into his family; and having loved us, and made us amiable, he doth then delight in us. The text alleged may be expounded of either. Oh! then, why do not we more own God in our afflictions? If he use us a little hardly, it is not an argument of his hatred, but his love. Thou darest not pray, Lord, let me have my worldly comforts, though they damn me; let me not be afflicted, though it will do me good. And if thou darest not pray so, will you repine when God seeth this course necessary for us, and taketh away the fuel of our lusts? Is it not a good exchange to part with outward comforts for inward holiness? If he take away our quiet, and give us peace of conscience, our worldly goods, and give us true riches, have we cause to complain? If outward wants be recompensed with an abundance of inward grace, if we have less of the world that we may have more of God, a healthy soul in a sickly body, it is just matter of thanksgiving: 3 John 2, 'I wish, above all things, that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.' We can subscribe to this in the general; all will affirm that afflictions are profitable, and that it is a good thing to be patient and submissive under them; but when any cross cometh to knock at our door, we are loath to give it entrance; and if it thrust in upon us, we fret and fume, and our souls sit uneasy, and all because we are addicted so unreasonably to the ease of the flesh, the quiet, happiness, and welfare of the carnal life, and have so little regard to life spiritual.

7. At the first coming of the affliction we do not see this benefit so well as in the review of the whole dispensation: 'Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I have kept thy word.' So Heb. 12:11, 'Now no

chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby.' There is a perfect opposition; the root and the fruit are opposed—affliction and fruit of righteousness, the quality of the root, and the quality of the fruit: οὐ χαρᾶς εἶναι ἀλλὰ λύπης, καρπὸν εἰρηνικὸν, the appearance and the reality, δοκεῖ and ἀποδίδωσις. Then the season, πρὸς τὸ παρὸν and ὕστερον. God's physic must have time to work. At first it may not be so, or at least not appear; for things are before they appear or can be observed for the present. We must tarry God's leisure, and be content with his blows, till we feel the benefit of them: it is first matter of faith, and then of feeling; though we do not presently understand why everything is done, we must wait. The hand on the dial doth not seem to stir, yet it keeps its course; while it is passing we see it not, but that it hath passed from one hour to another is evident So is God's work with the soul; and spiritual renovation and increase is not so sensible at the first though it be carried on ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρα, day by day, 2 Cor. 4:16, but in view of the whole it will appear. What are we the better? Doth sin decay? and what sin? Do we find it otherwise with us than it was before?

8. This profit is not only when the affliction is upon us, but after it is over the fruit of it must remain. Their qualms and pangs most have: Ps. 78:34–37, 'When he slew them, then they sought him, and returned and inquired early after God: and they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.' Many have a little forced religion in their extremities, but it weareth off with their trouble.' Sin is but suspended for a while, and the devil chained up; they are very good under the rod, they are frightened to it; but after the deliverance

cometh, the more profane. It is true many may begin with God in their troubles, and their necessities drive them to the throne of grace; and Christ had never heard of many, if fevers and palsies, and possessions and blindness, deafness and dumbness, had not brought them unto him, thanks to the disease. But if a course of godliness begins upon these occasions, and continues afterwards, God will accept it; he is willing to receive us upon any terms. Men will say, You come to me in your extremity; but he doth not upbraid us, provided we will come so as to abide with him, and will not turn the back upon him when our turn is served. If you do so, take heed; God hath other judgments to reach you: as John said, Mat. 3:11, 12, 'He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' So that which cometh after is mightier than that which went before; the last judgment is the heaviest: 'The axe is laid to the root of the tree; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire,' Mat. 3:10. He will not only lop off the branches, but strike at the root; as the Sodomites that escaped the sword of Chedorlaomer perished by fire from heaven. The Israelites that were not drowned in the Red Sea, were stung to death by fiery serpents: 'As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him,' Amos 5:19. When you avoid one judgment, you may meet another, and find a stroke where you think yourselves most secure.

Use 1. Let us consider these things, that we may profit by all the chastenings of the Lord. It is now a time of affliction, both as to public judgments and as to the private condition of many of the people of God. We have been long straying from God, from our duty,

from one another; it was high time for the Lord to take his rod in his hand, and to scourge us home again. Upon these three nations there is somewhat of God's three great judgments—war, pestilence, and famine; they are all dreadful. The pestilence is such a judgment as turneth populous cities into deserts and solitudes in a short time; then one cannot help another: riches and honours profit nothing then, and friends and kinsfolks stand afar off: many die without any spiritual helps. In war, what destructions and slaughters, expense of blood and treasure! In famine, you feel yourselves to die without a disease, know not where to have fuel to allay and feed the fire which nature hath kindled in your bodies. But, blessed be God, all these are in moderation. Pestilence doth not ragingly spread, the war is at a distance, the famine only a scarcity. Before God stirreth up all his wrath, he observeth what we do with these beginnings. Besides, the people of God are involved in a heap of miseries on all hands; the oppressed, dejected party burdened with jealousies, and ready to be haled to prison and put under restraint. Holy men sometimes have personal afflictions added to the public calamities. Jeremiah was cast into the dungeon when the city was besieged. The chaff and grain both are threshed together, but the grain is, besides, ground in the mill and baked in the oven. Besides, who thinks of his strayings, and returning with a more serious resolution to his duty? If we would profit by afflictions we must avoid both the faulty extremes: Heb. 12:5, 'My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.' Slighting and fainting must be avoided.

1. Let us not slight them. When we bear them with a stupid senseless mind, surely that hindereth all profit. None can endure to have their anger despised, no more than their love: a father is displeased when his child slights his correction. That we may not slight it, let us consider:—

[1.] Their author, God. We think them fortuitous, from chance, but they 'do not rise out of the dust,' Job 5:6. Whoever be the instruments, or whatever be the means, the wise God hath the whole ordering of it. He is the first cause; he is to be sought to, he is to be appeased, if we would stop evil at the fountain-head; for all creatures willingly or unwillingly obey him, and are subject to his empire and government: Amos 3:6, 'Is there any evil in the city, and I have not done it, saith the Lord?' Isa. 45:7, 'I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things;' Job 1:21, 'The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away.'

[2.] The meritorious cause is sin: Lam. 3:39, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin?' That first brought mischief into the world, and still continueth it. God never afflicts without a cause; either we need it, or we deserve it: Micah 7:9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.' We should search for the particular sins that provoke God to afflict us; for while we only speak of sin in general, we do but inveigh against a notion, and personate mourning; but those we can charge upon ourselves are most proper and powerful to break the heart.

[3.] The end is our repentance and amendment, to correct sin past, or prevent sin to come.

(1.) For correction, to make us more penitent for sin past. We being in a lower sphere of understanding, know things better by their effects than their nature: Jer. 2:19, 'Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know, therefore, and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the

Lord of hosts.' Moral evil is represented to us by natural evil; pain showeth what sin is.

(2.) For prevention of sin for time to come. The smart should make us cautious and watchful against sin: Josh. 22:17, 18, 'Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed to this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord, but that ye must turn away this day from following the Lord? And it will be, seeing ye rebel to-day against the Lord, that to-morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel.' Afflictions also should stir up in us heavenly thoughts, heavenly desires, and more lively diligence in the exercise of those graces which before lay dormant in us through our neglect. Only I must tell you, that sometimes the affliction may be merely for prevention, and may go before sin. God hath always a cause, but he doth not always suppose a fault in act, but sometimes in possibility; looking into thy actions or thy temper, what thou hast done, or wouldst do, to cure or prevent a distemper in thy spirit, as well as a disorder in thy conversation.

2. Let us not faint. When the afflictions sit close and near, then we are apt to fall into the other extreme, to be dejected out of measure. An over-sense worketh on our anger, and then it is fretting; or on our sorrow, and then it is fainting. The former is the worse of the two, for that is to set up an anti-providence, or a being displeased with God's government, a practical disowning of his greatness and justice. All men will acknowledge God is great, yet what worm is there will submit to him any further than themselves please? We say we deserve nothing but evil from his hands, but yet are maddened like wild bulls in a net when the goad is in our sides. We say, Any other cross but this. We do not dislike trial, but this trial that is upon us. God thought this fittest for us; our murmuring will not ease our trouble, but increase and continue it. Certainly without submission

troubles will do us no good: 'Patience worketh experience,' Rom. 5:4. Fainting, properly so taken, is when we look upon God's work through a false glass, and mis-expound his dispensation. God puts forth his hand, not to thrust us off, but pull us to himself: Hosea 5:15, 'I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.' The very affliction giveth us hope that he will not let us go on securely in our sins. It is not our being afflicted and made miserable by trouble which God aimeth at: Lam. 3:33, 'He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.' Nor is it that which we should chiefly be affected with under affliction. We should mind another lesson taught by it, which if we neglect, our sense of trouble will be but perplexing. It is to subdue sin, to make us more mindful of heavenly things, to have our hearts humbled. No affliction should be counted intolerable which helpeth to purge our sin. We evidence our love to sin if we are overmuch troubled at it, or peevishly quarrel with God. Fainting showeth our weakness: Prov. 24:10, 'If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.'

Use 2. Something concerning the profit of it: value it, observe it.

1. Value it. What do you count a profit or benefit, to flow in wealth, or excel in grace; to live in ease, or to be kept in a holy, heavenly, and humble frame? Heb. 12:10, 'For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' Not that we might have the pelf of this world, but that we might be partakers of his holiness. It is better to have holiness than to have health, wealth, and honour; the sanctification of an affliction is better than to have deliverance out of it. Deliverance taketh away malum naturale—some penal evil which God bringeth upon us; sanctification, malum morale—the greatest evil, which is sin. I am sure this is that which we should look after.

Deliverance is God's work, the improvement of the trouble is our duty: do you mind your work, and God will not be wanting to do his part.

2. Observe it, and see how the rod worketh, what thoughts it begets in you, what resolutions it stirreth up, what solaces you run to, and seek after to this end.

[1.] In what temper and frame of heart you were when the affliction surprised you. Usually affliction treadeth upon the heels of some sin. If it be open, and in our practice, it discovereth itself; if secret, and in the frame of our hearts, it must be searched after. Usually it is some slightness and carelessness of spiritual and heavenly things; your hearts were grown in love with the world, you began to neglect your souls, grew more cold in the love of God, more formal in prayer, and indifferent as to your spiritual estate; you did not watch over your hearts; therefore the holy and jealous God cometh and awakeneth you by his smarting scourge. The foregoing distemper observed, will help you to state your profit.

[2.] How that is cured by God's discipline, or what benefit you have gotten by it? You are more diligent in your duty, careful in your preparations for a better state. A Christian should be able to give an account of the methods by which God bringeth him to heaven. David could give an account, as here, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word;' and ver. 71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes;' not good that I should be, as accepting the punishment, but that I have been, as owning the profit.

## **SERMON LXXVII**



## **Thou art good, and doest good: teach me thy statutes.—VER. 68.**

THE Psalmist in the first verse of this portion had expressed himself in a way of thankfulness to God for his goodness, ver. 65; then interrupteth his thanksgiving a little, and beggeth the continuance of the same goodness, ver. 66; and after that returneth again to show how this good came by means of affliction, ver. 67; and therefore once more praiseth God for his goodness, and reneweth his suit. God is ever good to his people, but most sensibly they have proof of it in their afflictions, when to appearance he seemeth to deal hardly with them; yet all that while he doth them good. Sanctification of afflictions is a greater mercy than deliverance out of them. We may learn our duty by the discipline of a smart rod: 'Thou dealest well with thy servant;' for, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I have kept thy word.' And then he falleth into thanksgiving and prayer again, 'Thou art good, and doest good: teach me thy statutes.' Here is —

1. A compellation and confession of God's goodness, both in his nature and actions.
2. A petition for grace, teach me thy statutes.

First, The compellation used to God, 'Thou art good, and doest good.' Divers have been the glosses of interpreters upon these words. Aben Ezra, Bonus es non petenti, et benefacis petenti—thou art good to them that ask not, but surely dost good to them that ask. Others, thou art good in this world, dost good in the world to come. Others better, God is good of himself and doeth good to us. Goodness is communicative of itself; he is good, that noteth his nature and inclination; and he doeth good, that noteth his work, whereby he

giveth proof of his goodness. Unumquodque operatur secundum suam formam—everything acteth according to its nature. So doth God; as is his being, so is his operation; he is good, and doeth good; the work must needs be answerable to the workman. The point is:—

Doct. It becometh all those that have to do with God to have a deep sense of his goodness.

1. What is God's goodness.
2. How it is manifested to us.
3. Why those that come to God should have a deep sense of it.

First, What is God's goodness? There is a threefold goodness ascribed by divines to God:—

1. His natural goodness, which is the natural perfection of his being.
2. His moral goodness, which is the moral perfection of his being.
3. His beneficial communicative goodness, called otherwise his benignity, which is of chief regard in this place. Besides the perfection and excellency of his nature, there is his will and self-propension to diffuse his benefits; the perfection of his nature is his natural and moral goodness, the other his bounty. All must be spoken to distinctly.

1. God is naturally good. There is such an absolute perfection in his nature and being, that nothing is wanting to it or defective in it, and nothing can be added to it to make it better. As Philo saith; Ὁ ὄντως ὦν τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν—the first being must needs be the first good. As soon as we conceive there is a God, we presently conceive that he is good. In this sense it is said, Mark 10:18, 'Why callest thou me

good? there is none good but one, and that is God.' He is good of himself, good in himself, yea, good itself. There is none good above him, or besides him, or beyond him; it is all from him and in him, if it be good. He is primitively and originally good, αὐτάγαθος, good of himself, which nothing else is; for all creatures are good only by participation and communication from God. He is essentially good; not only good, but goodness itself: the creature's good is a superadded quality; in him it is his essence. He is infinitely good; the creature's goodness is but a drop, but in God there is an infinite ocean and sea, or gathering together of goodness. He cannot be better, he is summum bonum—the chiefest good; other things are good in subordination to him, and according to that use and proportion they bear to him. He is not good as the means, but as the end. Things good as the means are only good in order, proportion, measure, and respect; but God is absolutely good; beyond God there is nothing to be sought or aimed at; if we enjoy him we enjoy all good to make us completely happy. He is eternally and immutably good, for he cannot be less good than he is; as there can be no addition made to him, so no subtraction, or aught taken from him.

2. God is morally good, that is, the fountain and pattern of all that virtuous goodness which is in the creatures. So Ps. 25:8, 'Good and upright is the Lord;' and Exod. 33:19, 'He said, I will make all my goodness go before thee, and proclaim my name.' As the creature hath a natural goodness of beauty, power, dominion, wisdom, so it hath a moral goodness of purity and holiness. Accordingly we must conceive in God his holiness, purity, veracity, justice, as his moral perfection and goodness, as his will is the supreme pattern and fountain of all these things in the creature.

3. God is communicatively and beneficially good; that implieth his bounty and beneficence, or his will and self-propension to diffuse his

benefits. It may be explained by these considerations:—

[1.] That God hath in him whatsoever is useful and comfortable to us. That is one notion we apprehend him by, that he is 'God all-sufficient,' Gen. 17:1, or that he hath all things at command, to do for us as our necessities shall require: Ps. 84:11, 'For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly;' Gen. 15:1, 'Fear not, Abraham; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.' The privative and positive part is expressed in both these places, whether we need life or comfort, or would be protected from all dangers, bodily or spiritual. Why should we seek good out of God? Riches, pleasures, honours might more happily be had if we could possess all things in God: Jer. 2:13, 'My people have committed two great evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.' God is the fountain of all those things which are necessary to give us all good and defend us from all evil. Possidet possidentem omnia: 2 Cor. 6:10, 'As having nothing, and yet possessing all things.'

[2.] That he hath a strong inclination to let out his fulness, and is ready to do good upon all occasions: 'Thou art good and dost good.' BONUM est primum, et potissimum nomen Dei, saith Damascene—the chiefest name by which we conceive of God is his goodness. By that we know him, for that we love him and make our addresses to him: we admire him for his other titles and attributes, but this doth first insinuate with us, and invite our respects to him. The first means by which the devil sought to loosen man from God was by weakening the conceit of his goodness; and the great ground of all our commerce with him is that God is a good God: Ps. 100:4, 5, 'Enter ye into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and bless his name; for the Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting.' He presently

inviteth the world to come to him, because he is good. As God is all-sufficient in himself, so he is communicative of his riches unto his creatures, and most of all to his own people. Goodness is communicative, it diffuseth itself, as the sun doth light, or as the fountain poureth out waters.

[3.] He is the fountain of all that good we have or are. We have nothing but what we have from God: James 1:17, 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights;' and Jer. 2:13, he is called 'the fountain of living waters.' As rivers are supplied by the sea, so the gathering together of all goodness is in God. All candles are lighted at his torch; there is nothing in the creature but what is derived from him: 'Who hath given to him first, and it shall be recompensed to him again?' Rom. 11:35, as the sun oweth nothing to the beam, but the beam oweth all to the sun, and the sea oweth nothing to the river, but the river oweth all to the sea.

[4.] There will a time come when he will be 'all in all,' 1 Cor. 15:28, when God will immediately and in a fuller latitude communicate himself to his creatures, and there will need nothing beside himself to make us happy. Here we enjoy God, but not fully or immediately. We enjoy him in his creatures, but it is at the second or third hand; the creature interposeth between him and us: Hosea 2:21, 22, 'And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord; I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel.' In ordinances it is but a little strength and comfort that we get, such as is consistent with pain and sorrow; it is not full, because it is not immediate. A pipe cannot convey the whole fountain, nor the ordinances the full of God in Christ, only a little supply either as we need, or are able to receive; but then God will be all in all, he will do

his work by himself; the narrowness of the means shall not straiten him, nor the weakness of the vessel hinder him to express the full of his goodness in full perfection.

Secondly, How is his goodness manifested to us?

1. In our creation, in that he did raise us up out of nothing to be what we are, and form us after his own image. God made us, not that he might be happy, but liberal, that there might be creatures to whom to communicate himself; our beings and faculties and powers were the fruits of his mere goodness. When God made the world, then was it verified, 'He is good, and doeth good,' Gen. 1; for as the goodness of his nature inclined him to make it, so his work was good: after every day's work there cometh in his approbation, Behold it was good; and when he had made man, and set him in a well-furnished world, and compared all his works together, then they were 'very good,' ver. 31. That he still fashioneth us in the womb, and raiseth us into that comely shape in which we afterwards appear, it is all the effect of his goodness.

2. In our redemption; therein he commendeth his love and goodness in providing such a remedy for lost sinners. There is *φιλανθρωπία*—Titus 3:4, 'But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared.' In creation he showed himself *φιλάγγελος*; in redemption, *φιλάνθρωπος*. God is brought nearer to us as subsisting in our nature: 1 Tim. 3:16, 'Great is the mystery godliness, God manifested in the flesh.' And so God had greater advantages to communicate himself to us in a more glorious way by the Redeemer, that we might for ever live in the admiration of his love.

3. In daily providence; so the goodness of God is twofold:—

[1.] Common and general to all creatures, especially to mankind: Ps. 145:9, 'The Lord is good to all, his tender mercy is over all his works.' Upon all things and all persons he bestoweth many common blessings, as natural life, being, health, wealth, beauty, strength, and supplies necessary for them. There are none of God's creatures but taste of his bounty, and have sufficient proof that a good God made them and preserveth them. The young ravens: Ps. 147:9, 'He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry,' ἐπιβάλλει τοὺς νεόττους ἢ κόραξ. So the wicked: Mat. 5:45, 'He maketh his sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust;' Acts 14:17, 'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, ἀγαθοποιῶν, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' These common mercies argue a good God that giveth them, though not always a good people that receiveth them. This goodness of God showeth itself daily and bountifully.

[2.] Special; God is good to all, but not to all alike. So he is good to his people, whom he blesseth with spiritual and saving benefits. So Lam. 3:25, 'The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.' So Ps. 86:5, 'For thou, O Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.' For this kind of goodness, a qualification is necessary in the receiver. Satan will tell you God is a good God, but he leaveth out this—to those that love and fear him, and wait upon him. This peculiar goodness yieldeth spiritual and saving blessings, such as pardoning of sins: Isa. 55:7, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon;' instruction in the ways of God in the text, 'Thou art good, and doest good: teach me thy statutes.' And, in short, all the means and helps that are necessary unto everlasting glory: 2 Thes. 1:11,

'Wherefore also we pray always for you, that God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.' Once more, to the objects of his peculiar love common blessings are given in love, and with an aim at our good: Ps. 84:11, 'No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.' So that the ordinary favours which others enjoy are sanctified to them. They are from love, and in bonum, for good. God is ready to help them onwards to their everlasting hopes, and that estate which they expect in the world to come, where, in the arms of God, they shall be blessed for evermore.

Thirdly, Why ought those that come to God to have a deep sense of this?

1. What is this deep sense?

[1.] It must be the fruit of faith, believing God's being and bounty, or else it will have no force and authority upon us: Heb. 11:6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' If we have but cold notions or dead opinions of the goodness of God, they will have little power on us. It is faith sets all things awork; there must be a sound belief of these things if we would practically improve them.

[2.] It must be the fruit of constant observation of the effects of his goodness vouchsafed to us, so that we may give our thanks and praise for all that good we do enjoy. Careless spirits are not sensible of the hand of providence, never take notice of good or evil; therefore the Psalmist saith, Ps. 107:8, 'Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!' He repeateth the same, ver. 15, 21, 31, and concludeth all ver. 43, 'Whoso is wise, and will observe those things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.' We are more backward



to the observation of the goodness of God than we are to any duty; therefore doth the Psalmist stir up all sorts of persons to note the invisible hand of providence that reacheth out supplies to them: whether they have business by sea or by land, whether in sickness or in health, in all the varieties of the present life, he is still stirring them up to mind their mercies, and inviteth them by God's late favours to the praise and acknowledgment of his goodness, his communicating his goodness so freely to undeserving and ill-deserving persons, and following them with more and more mercies. There are none of us but have reasons enough and obligations enough lying upon us to make observations in this kind; every experience and new proof should put us upon this acknowledgment. Certainly they are the wisest sort of men who do observe God's providence.

[3.] It is the fruit of deep and ponderous meditation. Glances never warm the heart; it is our serious and deliberate thoughts which affect us; therefore the children of God should be thinking of his goodness displayed in all his works, especially in redemption by Christ: Eph. 3:18, 19, 'To comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of God which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God.' To be ravished with love, affected with love, always thinking of love, speaking of love, expressing their sense of love, that is a work behoving saints. We should often meditate upon and set our minds awork upon this goodness by frequent and serious thoughts of it, for the strengthening of our faith and quickening of our love to God.

[4.] It is the fruit of inward and spiritual taste: 1 Peter 2:3, 'If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' So Ps. 34:8, 'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.' Do not be content with hearsay, but get a taste; that is, an inward and experimental knowledge of the

goodness of God in Christ, that we may know it, not only by guess and imagination, but by sense and feeling: the one half of it cannot be told you. *Optima demonstratio est a sensibus.*

2. Why we need to labour so much after a deep sense of this.

[1.] To check our natural legalism, and the dark and distrustful prejudices of our own hearts. There is a secret guiltiness in us that breedeth misgiving thoughts of God. We have many suspicious thoughts of him, being guilty creatures, because we only represent him to ourselves as a consuming fire, or as clothed with justice and vengeance, watching an opportunity of doing us harm, and shut out all thoughts of goodness and mercy; yet when he proclaimeth his name, he telleth Moses he would make his goodness pass before him. God is wonderfully good in his nature, and he delighteth in the communications of his goodness: nothing pleaseth him better than his word; the business of it is to represent him good. Mercy pleaseth him: Micah 7:18, 'Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.' 'Mercy rejoiceth over judgment;' Ps. 118:1, 'Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; because his mercy endureth for ever.' His works speak him good; there is no part of the world that we can set our eyes upon but it offereth matter of praise to God for his bounty to his creatures, especially to man: Ps. 33:5, 'The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord;' the whole earth is full of his goodness, and will you draw an ill picture of him in your minds, as if he were harsh and severe, and his service were intolerable? No; 'The Lord is good, and doth good.'

[2.] That we may justify God against the prejudices of the unbelieving world, and invite them from our own experience to make

trial of God. So Ps. 34:8, 'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him.' A report of a report signifieth little; what we have found ourselves we can confidently recommend to others. When we have felt his dealing with ourselves, we can entreat them to see what waiting upon God will come to; let any man make the experiment, keep close to God in obedience and reliance, and he shall find him to be a gracious master; others that have dark thoughts of God, like the spies, they bring an ill report upon his ways.

[3.] To humble the creature. We have not a right sight of God unless all created perfections vanish before him. The creatures are but some shadows, pictures, resemblances, or equivocal shapes of God. Whatever name they have of good, wise, strong, beautiful, true, or such like, it is but a borrowed speech from God, whose image they have; and if the creature usurpeth its being as originally belonging to themselves, it, is as if the picture should call itself a true and living man. 'I am, and there is none beside me,' holdeth true of God's being, and all his perfections, natural or moral. The creatures may be good, or better, or best, compared among themselves; but we are frail and nothing if compared with God: 'There is none good but one, and that is God.' That goodness which we have in participation from him will appear no goodness in comparison of him. 'The heavens themselves are not clean in his sight:' Job 25:5, 6, 'Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea the stars are not pure in his sight: how much less man that is a worm, and the son of man which is a worm?' And elsewhere, Job 4:18, 'Behold, he putteth no trust in his servants, and his angels he chargeth with folly'—mutability in the angelical nature. When Isaiah had seen God, and heard the angels cry out, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts,' Isa. 6:5, 'Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; and mine eyes have seen the king, the

Lord of hosts.' The consideration of his goodness obscureth all the glory and praise of the creature; as when the sun is up the lustre of the stars is no more seen. When we compare ourselves with one another, one may be called bad, another good; but with God no man is good. He is good, but we are evil; he is heaven, but we are hell; he is all perfection, we are all weakness. In respect of his goodness, nothing in us deserveth that name, as lesser light in the view of a greater is darkness. When Job had seen God, he could not look upon himself with any patience: Job 42:5, 6, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.' That is a true sight of God that abaseth and lesseneth all things besides God, not only in opinion, but in affection and estimation. Alas! the best of us are scarce dark shadows of his goodness.

[4.] God's goodness is the life of our faith and trust. So long as the goodness of God endureth for ever, we have no cause to be discouraged. If we want direction, in the text it is said, 'Thou art good, and dost good; teach me thy statutes.' If we want support and deliverance, Nahum 1:7, 'The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth them that trust in him.' In every strait the people of God find him to be a good God. When we feel the burden of sin, and fear God's wrath, Ps. 86:5, 'The Lord is good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon him.' David, when his old sins troubled him, the sins of his youth, Ps. 25:7, 'Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord.' When his enemies consulted his ruin, Ps. 51:1, 'Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God endureth continually.' They cannot take away the goodness of God from you, whatever they plot or purpose against you. Thus may faith triumph in all distresses upon the sense of the goodness of God. In

the agonies of death, the goodness of God will be your support. *Non sic vixi ut pudeat me inter vos vivere; nec mori timeo, quia bonum habeo Dominum.* We have a good master, who will not see his servants unrewarded. The goodness of God, and his readiness to be gracious to every one that cometh to him, is the fountain of the saint's hope, strength, and consolation.

[5.] The goodness of God is the great motive and invitation to repentance: Rom. 2:4, 'Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?' How so? God is good, but not to those that continue in their sins: Ps. 68:19–21, 'Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation, Selah. He that is our God is the God of salvation, and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death: but God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.' If goodness be despised, it will be turned into fury. How great soever the riches of the Lord's bounty and grace offered in Christ are, yet an impenitent sinner will not escape unpunished. God is good; oh! come, try, and see how good he will be to you, if you will turn and submit to him. There is hope offered, and goodness hath waited to save you; so that now you may seek his favour with hope to speed. While he sits upon the throne of grace, and alloweth the plea of the new covenant, do not stand off against mercies. God hath laid out the riches of his gracious goodness upon a design to save lost sinners; and will you turn back upon him, and despise all his goodness provided for you in Christ? In point of gratitude, the least kindness done men melteth them as coals of fire. The borrower is servant to the lender. God hath not only lent us, but given us all that we have; therefore it should break our hearts with sorrow and remorse that we should offend a God so good, so bountiful, so merciful. The odiousness of sin doth most appear in the unkindness

of it; that infinite goodness hath been abused, and infinite goodness despised, and that you are willing to lose your part in infinite goodness, rather than not satisfy some base lust, or look after some trifling vanity. Saul wept at the thoughts of David's kindness, 1 Sam. 24:16. Every man will condemn the wrongs done to one that hath done us no evil, but much good; and will you sin against God, who is so good in himself, so good to all his creatures, and so good to you, and waiteth to be better and more gracious; and return evil for all his good, and requite his love with nothing but unkindness and provocation? Oh, be ashamed of all these things! What heart is that that can offend, and so willingly offend, so good a God! Rom. 12:1, 'I beseech you by the mercies of God' (there is argument and endearment enough in that) 'that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service,' that ye consecrate, dedicate yourselves to his glory, address yourselves cheerfully to his service. Let the soul be warned into an earnest resolution to please him for the future, lest you make goodness your enemy, and justice take up the quarrel of abused grace.

[6.] The goodness of God is the great argument to move us to love God. If he be good, he is worthy to be loved, and that with a superlative love; for God is both the object and the measure of love. A less good should be loved less, and a greater good more. All that is not God is but a finite and limited good, and must be loved accordingly. God only is infinite and eternal, and therefore he is to be loved of all, and above all, with our chiefest and most worthy love, by preferring his glory above all things that are dear to us, and being content for his sake to part with all that we have in the world. But if any lower thing prevail with us, we prefer it before God, and so contemn his goodness in comparison of it. If the object of love be good, none so properly deserveth our love as God. For (1.) He is

originally good, the fountain of all good; therefore if we leave God for the deceitful vanities of this present life, we leave 'the fountain of living waters,' for a 'broken cistern,' Jer. 2:13. The creatures are but dry pits and broken cisterns. (2.) He is summum bonum, the chiefest good. Other things, what good they have, they have it from him; therefore it is infinitely better and greater in him than in them; all the good that is in the creature is but a spark of what is in God. If we find any good there, it is not to detain our affections, but to lead us to the greater good, not to hold us from him, but to lead us to him, as the streams lead to the fountain, and the steps of a ladder are not to stand still upon, but that we may ascend higher. There is goodness in the creature, but mixed with imperfection; the good is to draw to him, the imperfection to drive us off from the creature. (3.) He is infinitely good. Other things may busy us and vex us, but they cannot satisfy us; this alone sufficeth for health, wealth, peace, protection, grace, glory. Necessities that are not satisfied in God are but fancies, and the desires that are hurried out after them, apart from God, are not to be satisfied, but mortified. If we have not enough in God, it is not the default of our portion, but the distemper of our hearts. In choosing God for our portion, one hath not the less because another enjoyeth it with him: here is a sharing without division, and a partaking without the prejudice of copartners. We straiten others in worldly things so much as we are enlarged ourselves; finite things cannot be divided, but they must be lessened; they are not large enough to be parted; but every one possesseth all that is good in God who hath God for his portion; as the same speech may be heard of all, and yet no man heareth the less because others hear it with him, or as no man hath the less light because the sun shineth on more than himself: the Lord is all in all; the more we possess him the better. As in a choir of voices, every one is not only solaced with his own voice, but with the harmony of those that sing in concert with him. Many a fair stream is drawn dry by being dispersed into several

channels, but that which is infinite will suffice all. (4.) He is eternally good: Ps. 73:26, 'God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.' The good things of this life are perishing and of a short continuance; we leave other good things when we come to take full possession of God. At death wicked men perceive their error, when the good they have chosen cometh to be taken from them; but a man that hath chosen God then entereth into the full possession of him; that which others shun, he longeth for, waiting for that time when the creature shall cease, and God shall be all in all. Oh! let all these things persuade us to love God, and so to love him that our hearts may be drawn off from other things. Let us love him because of the goodness and amiableness of his nature, because of his bounty in our creation, redemption, and daily providence, and because he will be our God for ever.

[7.] God's goodness is our consolation and support in all afflictions. God is a gracious father, and all that he doth is acts of grace and goodness; even the sharpest of his administrations are absolutely the best for us: Ps. 73:1, 'Truly God is good to Israel;' all his work is good; as in the six days, so in constant providence, it is either good or it will turn to good: Rom. 8:28, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' God may change our condition, yet he doth not change his affection to us; he is all good, and doth that which we shall find good at length.

[8.] It is the ground of prayer; if we lack any good thing, he hath it, and is ready to communicate it. The goodness of God, as it doth stir up desire in us, so hope; as it stirreth a desire to communicate of his fulness, so a hope that surely the good God will hear us. He is not sparing of what he can do for us: James 1:5, 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and



upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.' Our wants send us to the promises, and the promises to God.

Use 1. To press us to imitate our heavenly Father; you should be good and do good, as he is good and doth good; for every disposition in God should leave an answerable character and impression upon their souls that profess themselves to be made partakers of a divine nature; therefore it should be our great care and study to be as good and do as much good as we possibly can. He is one like God that is good and doth good; therefore still be doing good to all, especially to the household of faith: Gal. 6:10, 'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith;' with Mat. 5:44, 45, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust;' Luke 6:35, 'But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil;' 2 Peter 1:7, 'Add to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.' Not doing good to our own party, or those of our friendship, but to all. So generally all good is to be done, as well as that of bounty and beneficence: Luke 6:45, 'A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things;' and it is said of Barnabas, Acts 11:24, 'He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.' A good man is always seeking to make others good, as fire turneth all things about it into fire. The title signifies one not only of a mild disposition, but of a holy, heavenly heart, that maketh it his business to honour God. So Joseph of Arimathea is said to be 'a good man, and a just;' this is to be like God.

Use 2. Direction to you in the business of the Lord's supper: God is good, and doeth good.

1. Here you come to remember his goodness to you in Christ. Now the goodness of God should never be thought on, or commemorated, but your hearts should be raised in the wonder and admiration of it: Ps. 31:19, 'Oh, how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee!' and Ps. 36:7, 'How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God I therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.' This should be delightful work to you, and not gone about with dead and careless hearts. We cannot express ourselves many times; strong passions do not easily get a vent; little things may be heightened by us, but great things indeed strike us dumb. However, our hearts should be deeply affected and possessed with this; we should be full of such admiring thoughts.

2. We come for a more intimate and renewed taste. By taste, I mean spiritual sense, to have 'the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given to us,' Rom. 5:5. We come to the feast of the soul that our hungry consciences may taste of the fatness of God's house, Ps. 65:4; that our thirsty souls may drink of the rivers of his pleasure, Ps. 16:11; to have some pledge of the joys of heaven, if not to ravishment and sensible reviving, yet such as may put us out of relish with carnal vanities; some gracious experiences that may make us long for more, and go away lauding God.

3. To stir up our love to God as the most lovely and suitable object to our souls; in him is nothing but good. God is goodness itself: he is one that has deserved your love, and will satisfy and reward your love. All the good we have in an ordinance it is from him, and to lead up our souls to him. Our business now is to 'love God, who loved us

first,' 1 John 4:19; to love him by devoting ourselves to him, and to consecrate our all to his service.

4. To desire more communion with him, and to long after the blessed fruition of him, when God shall be all in all, not only be chief, but all, when we shall perfectly enjoy the infinite God, when the chiefest good will give us the greatest blessings, and an infinite eternal God will give us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The word, sacraments, and prayer convey but little to you in comparison of that, when God is object and means, and all things. The soul is then all for Christ, and Christ all for the soul. Your whole employment is to love him, live upon him. Here we give away some of our love, some of our thoughts and affections, on other things; Christ, is crowded, hath not room to lay forth the glory of his grace; but there is full scope to do it.

## SERMON LXXVIII

### Teach me thy statutes.—VER. 68.

SECONDLY, we come to David's petition, 'Teach me thy statutes;' which I shall be brief in, because it doth often occur in the verses of this psalm. David's petition is to understand the word that he might keep it. Teaching bringeth us under the power of what is taught, and increaseth sanctification both in heart and life, as well as illumination or information.

Doct. One chief thing which they that believe and have a sufficient apprehension of God's goodness should seek of him in this world, is understanding the way of salvation.

This request is enforced out of the former title and compellation.

1. Because the saving knowledge of his will is one principal effect of his bounty and beneficence. As he showeth love to man above other creatures, in that he gave him such a life as was light, John 1:4—that is, had reason and understanding joined with it—so to his people above other men, that he hath given them a saving knowledge of the way of salvation since sin: Ps. 25:8, 'Good and upright is the Lord; he will teach sinners the way.' It is a great discovery of God's goodness that he will teach sinners, a favour not vouchsafed to the fallen angels: it is more than if he gave us the wealth of the whole world; that will not conduce to such a high use and purpose as this. More of his good will and special love is seen in this, to teach us the way how to enjoy him. Eternal life is begun by this saving knowledge: John 17:3, 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.'

2. This is one principal way whereby we show our sense of God's goodness. That is a true apprehension of God's goodness which giveth us confidence and hope of the saving fruits of it, when, the oftener we think of it, the more of sanctification we seek to draw from this fountain of goodness. That is an idle speculation that doth not beget trust, an empty praise, a mere compliment that doth not produce a real confidence in God, that he will give us spiritual blessings when we heartily desire them. True knowledge of God's name breedeth trust: Ps. 9:10, 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee;' and more particularly for this kind of benefit. It is a general encouragement: Mat. 7:11, 'If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?' But it is limited to the Spirit: Luke 11:13, 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Spirit to them that ask it?' Without this faith there is no commerce with God.

3. It is an argument of the good temper of our souls not to serve our carnal turns, but promote the welfare of our souls, when we would enjoy and improve the goodness of God to get this benefit.

[1.] They are affected according to the value of the thing. Of all the fruits of God's goodness which a holy man would crave for himself and challenge for his portion, this he thinketh fittest to be sought—sanctifying grace to understand and keep the law. If this be not the only, yet it is the chiefest benefit which they desire in the world. For other things, let God deal with them as he will; but they value this among the greatest things which God bestoweth on mankind. Observe here how much the spirit of God's children differeth from the spirit of the world; they account God hath dealt well with them when he bestoweth upon them wealth and honour: Ps. 4:6, 'Who will

show us any good?' but the other desire grace to know God's will, and to serve and please him: there is the thing they desire and seek after, as suiting their temper and constitution of soul. A man is known by his desires, as the temper of his body by his pulse.

[2.] They would not willingly sin against God, either out of ignorance or perverse affections; therefore, if God will direct them and assist them in the work of obedience, their great care and trouble is over. It is a good sign that a man hath a simple, honest spirit, when there is rooted in his heart a fear to offend God, and a care to please him. He may err in many things, but God accepts him as long as seeking knowledge in order to obedience, Eph. 5:15–17. All that God requireth, both for matter and manner, is, that we would not comply with sin; seeing the time is evil and full of snares, we should not be unwise in point of duty.

[3.] They have a holy jealousy of themselves. David desired to use every condition well, whether he were in prosperity or trouble. The context speaketh of afflictions that were sanctified; but a new condition might bring on a new alteration in the soul. Prosperity would make him forget God, and trouble overwhelm him, if God did not teach him. In what state soever we be, we must desire to be taught of God, otherwise we shall fail: Phil. 4:11, 12, 'For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content: I know how to be abased, and how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed.' Unless the Lord guide us, we shall be as Ephraim was, 'a cake not turned,' Hosea 7:8, baked but on one side, quite dough and raw on the other side; fail in the next condition, though passed over one well.

[4.] A sense of the creature's mutability. Comparing it with the former verse, I observe, that though he kept God's commandments,

yet he craveth further grace, and desireth that he may be still taught, because he knew not all that he might know, and was ready to err both in practice and judgment: and this must teach us to desire God's guidance and direction, not only when we have erred, but when we do well. Many, when they have smarted for their errors, will desire God to teach them; but David kept this continual dependence upon God for daily grace, both for turning away of evil, and also for doing good: Prov. 3:5, 6, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths;' which we are to follow in our places and callings. We are apt to ascribe too much to our present frame and resolutions. God must still be called to for his counsel and blessing in every business.

[5.] An evangelical frame. He pleadeth not merit, appealeth not to justice, but to God's grace and goodness. This should be the special groundwork of our prayers. The Lord doth all 'to the praise of his glorious grace,' Eph. 1:7; and he will not have that glory infringed, either in part or in whole. The Spirit of God is very tender of it in scripture, and we should be very tender of it in our addresses to God, that all conceits of our own worth be laid aside, and that we wholly fly to God's goodness and mercy. The whole work of sanctification, from its first step to its last period, is all of grace, all must be ascribed to God's free goodness.

[6.] The will of God revealed in scripture is a subject that is never perfectly known. While we are in the way to glory there is always some new thing to be learned of it and from it, even by those that are the greatest proficients in the knowledge of it; and therefore we must be still scholars in this school, and when we have learned never so much we must still be learning more. This is continued, lasting work, for David is ever and anon at his old request, 'Lord, teach me thy

statutes;' and not without reason, since it is not sufficient to know God's will in some few great and weighty actions of our lives, but in all, whether of greater or lesser concernments. And when we know generals, yet we are so apt to err in particular cases, and since the commandment of God is so exceeding broad, Ps. 119:96. Every day we may see more into it, and may be more fully informed of the mind of God, We every day see more in a promise than we did before, in a precept than we did before; therefore the apostle saith, 1 Cor. 8:2, 'And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.'

Use. Here is a pattern and precedent for us; especially now we have engaged our souls to God, let us seek this directive grace. It implieth pardon, and that maketh way for joy and comfort; for God teacheth pardoned sinners. A sure light and direction prevents many troubles of spirit and anxious doubts. It is a pledge and assurance of our getting home to God; those whom God guideth are sure to be safe in the issue.

1. It showeth what should be the matter of our prayers. David beggeth not to increase him in riches and honours, nor to flow in temporal delights. No; if God would show himself a good God to him, he desireth it may be in giving him the spirit of understanding, and some increase of holiness; this he would take as the principal sign of God's favour and grace to him. The world generally imploreth God's goodness to another end; they think they are dealt liberally with when every man hath his lust satisfied: they pray from the intemperateness of the flesh; but David professeth it was enough to him if he might find God answering him in that one thing which most others neglect and pass by in their prayers, or, if they mention it, it is for fashion's sake, and to comport with the usual way of



praying. But because there is great deceit, and we often pray for what we have no mind to have granted, let us see if this be our temper.

[1.] We must discover it in our thanksgiving and blessing God for this gift, though he denieth us other which make a fair show in the world: Mat. 11:25–27, 'At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.' Christ showeth that the mystery of grace is at God's disposing, who manifests it as he seeth good; that if he hath cut us short in other things, and been liberal to us in this, we should not only be contented, but highly thankful; and how contemptible soever we be in the world, yet it is matter of praise and thanksgiving in that God hath bestowed his grace and love to us according to his will and pleasure.

[2.] By our patience and contentedness in the want and loss of other things for this thing's sake; want, if God's providence be so; loss, if occasioned by our adherence to truth. Want: we have no reason to envy carnal men: Ps. 17:14, 15, 'From men which are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. But as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' We have no reason to repine; our present condition of entertaining communion with God in a practice of holiness countervaileth all their happiness, especially our future hopes to increase in knowledge and abound in the work of the Lord; and to own and stand up for a hated and despised truth will bring

more comfort to our souls than all the pleasure the wicked have in their sensual delights. Are they the happy men that go on in opposition against the ways of God? Prov. 3:31–33, 'Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways: for the froward is an abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but he blesseth the habitation of the just.' They are not happier than the godly; it is a greater happiness to know more of God's mind than anything they enjoy: John 15:15, 'Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I call you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.'

[3.] By our constancy in prayer, and earnest supplication to know more of the mind of God. They will not be put off with other things. God gave the Spirit to the rest of the apostles, but he gave the purse to the son of perdition. Men may have a fit of devotion in their prayers, but their general course is not answerable: Mat. 6:33, 'First seek the kingdom of God.' If we seek it in good earnest we shall show it in our conversation and demeanour: Prov. 4:7, 'Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding.' This must be the chiefest thing that beareth sway in our endeavours, that we may know more of God's mind in following our suits incessantly, we must not be put off; though God giveth other things, you must not cease your importunity. Lord, I expect something else from thy goodness; see Ps. 119:132, 133, 'Look upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do to them that fear thy name. Order my steps in thy word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me;' and Ps. 27:7, 'Hear me, O God, when I cry with my voice; have mercy upon me, and answer me;' if we do not suffer this desire to languish and die, but still it be recommended to God daily. My business is rightly to understand and perfectly to do thy will; this is my one and great request; which I will ever and ever urge.

I cannot give over this prayer till thou beest all in all, and showest me the utmost of thy bounty. We desire many things, but we are soon put out of the humour; as children, that seem passionately and pettishly to desire a thing, but by presenting other things to them they are diverted and stilled; hut it is not so with God's people. As Naomi said of Boaz, Ruth 3:18, 'For the man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day;' so a child of God will not be satisfied till his desire be in some measure accomplished.

2. In what manner we should pray.

[1.] With earnestness. Slight prayers bespeak their own denial: Prov. 2:1–5, 'My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear to wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.'

[2.] With confidence: he is wont to do it for you. Ask nothing contrary to his nature. We should come with a confidence of speeding; there is in him a propensity and inclination to help us. What would ye do to a hunger-bitten child if he cometh to you for a knife or an apple? You would deny him them, but not meat to satisfy his hunger. If for bread to play with, or meat when he hath enough, you would deny him, not gratify his fancy: if he come to be taught his book, you would readily hear him. So when we come not for temporal things, but spiritual comforts, when spiritual comforts are not asked out of course, and for form's sake, yea, not only for comforts, but necessary grace to do his will, surely it cannot be that he should cast off them that love him, and would fain be conformed

to his will, that come humbly, and long, and pray, and seek for his grace.

[3.] That this confidence must be evangelical. He sets before his eyes God's goodness, or readiness to be gracious to all that call upon him; so that all the hope we have to prevail should not be taken from anything in us, but something in God himself. We must expect and ask blessings from God, for God, and because of God's sake. It is not for any good we deserve, or have done, or can do, that God taketh care of his weak foolish children, but for the glory of his name, his grace and constant goodness. God is our fountain, our reasons are his goodness, our end his glory. This is the true way of addressing ourselves to God, deprecating sins for which he may harden us, and remembering his mercies on which we ground our hope. So doth David: Ps. 25:5, 6, 'Lead me in thy truth, teach me; for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day. Remember, O Lord, thy loving-kindnesses and thy mercies; for they have been ever of old.' His eternal love is assigned as the cause of all: Ps. 23:3, 'He leadeth us in paths of righteousness, for his name's sake.'

3. What should be the grounds and impelling principle of prayer.

[1.] A strong bent to please God, and that all your affections and actions may be ordered so as to be acceptable in his sight. Those that stand in awe of God are loath to offend him; they may expect direction and light in all difficult cases: Ps. 25:12, 'What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose;' ver. 14, 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant.'

[2.] A desire to enjoy him; for these things are valuable as they lead us to God. Our solid joy lieth not in outward things, but in our communion with God: Ps. 139:24, 'Lead me in the way everlasting;'

and Ps. 73:24, 'Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to thy glory.' Their business is to be happy hereafter, and well guided here, that they may attain that happiness. Now there is an inseparable connection between our walking in the time of this life, and receiving into heaven after this life; and he that is resolved to walk by the rule of God's direction, may promise himself to be received into glory after his journey is ended. So Ps. 43:3, 'Send out thy light and thy truth to lead me to thy holy hill.' They would fain take the nearest way to heaven, and follow God's counsel in all things. We have his word continually to guide us in this way, but we need also the assistance of his Spirit. The promised rest is much in their eye, and doth mightily prevail with him: they would have God to be their guide here, that he may be their rest hereafter.

## **SERMON LXXIX**

**It is good for me that I have been  
afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.—  
VER. 71.**

THE context speaketh of afflictions by occasion of persecutions. The proud had forged a lie against him, and involved him in many troubles, when in the meantime 'their heart was as fat as grease.' They wallowed in ease and pleasure, but David kept right with God; and yet his afflictions do not cease. God doth not presently take away opposition, because of our proud, unhumbed, unmortified spirits, though we hold fast our integrity for the main: therefore he comforteth himself in his spiritual protection under the affliction, though the affliction was not removed: 'It is good,' &c.

In the words there is—

1. An assertion, it is good for me that I have been afflicted.
2. The reason, that I might learn thy statutes. Or, here is a general truth explained by a particular instance. In the general, he saith it is good, and then what good he got by it.

Doct. That affliction, all things considered, is rather good than evil.

The assertion is a paradox to vulgar sense and the ears of the common sort of men. How few are there in the world that will grant that it is good to be afflicted! Yea, the children of God can scarcely subscribe to the truth of it till the affliction be over. While they are under it they feel the smart, but do not presently discern the benefit; but in the review they find God hath ordered it with much wisdom and faithfulness; and in the issue they say, as David doth, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.' Carnal sense is not easily persuaded, but the new nature prevaieth at length, and then they readily subscribe to the truth of it.

The word is clear on this point: Job 5:17, 'Behold, happy is the man whom the Lord correcteth.' The first word, behold, summoneth our attention and observation. What is the matter? As those that are before Joseph cried, Abreck, 'bow the knee,' Gen. 41:43, to show some eminent person was at hand, so this behold calleth for reverence and admiration; there is some strange truth to ensue and follow. Happiness in the lowest notion, it includeth a freedom from misery; and yet the scripture pronounces the man happy whom the Lord correcteth. There have been among the heathens many opinions about happiness. Two hundred and eighty-eight Austin reckoneth up; but none ever placed it in correction, in sickness, disgrace, exile, captivity, loss of friends, much less in God's correction, who is our supreme judge, to whom we ultimately appeal when others wrong us. And yet the corrected man, and the man

corrected by the Lord, is happy, though not with a consummate happiness; he hath not the happiness of his country, but he hath the happiness of the way. The man is kept by the way, that he may come to his country. His afflictions take nothing from him but his sin. Therefore his solid happiness remaineth not infringed, rather the more secured. So Ps. 94:12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest out of thy law.' To be chastened of God for what we have done amiss, and by that means to be reduced to the sense and practice of our duty, is one of the greatest blessings on this side heaven that can light upon us. It is an evidence of God's tender care over us, and that he will not lose us, and suffer us to perish with the unbelieving and sinful world.

The truth lieth clearly in the scripture; but to reconcile it with our prejudices—

1. I shall show by what measure we are to determine good and evil.
2. Prove that affliction is good.

First, For the measure.

1. This good is not to be determined by our fancies and conceits, but by the wisdom of God; for God knoweth better what is good for us than we do for ourselves, and foreseeth all things by one infinite act of understanding, but we judge according to present appearance; therefore all is to be left to God's disposal, and his divine choice is to be preferred before our foolish fancies, and what he sendeth and permitteth to fall out is fitter for us than anything else. Could we once assuredly be persuaded of this, a Christian would be completely fortified, and fitted not only for a patient but a cheerful entertainment of all that is or shall come upon him. Besides, he is a God of bowels, and loveth us dearly, better than we do ourselves; and

therefore we should be satisfied with his dispensations whatever they are, whether according to or against our will. The shepherd must choose the pastures for the sheep, whether lean or fat, bare or full grown; the child is not to be governed by his own fancy, but the father's discretion; nor the sick man by his own appetite, but the physician's skill. It is expedient sometimes that God should make his people sad and displease them for their advantage: John 16:6, 7, 'Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your hearts: nevertheless I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away.' We are too much addicted to our own conceits: Christ's dealing is expedient and useful when yet it is very unsatisfactory to us: he is to be judge of what is good for us, his going or tarrying, not we ourselves, who are short-sighted and distempered with passions, whose requests many times are but ravings, and ask of God we know not what, as the two brethren, Mat. 20:22, and seek our bane as a blessing, as children would play with a knife that would cut and wound them, pray ourselves into a mischief and a snare. It were the greatest misery if God should carve out our condition according to our own fancy and desires. Peter said, Mat. 17:4, 'Master, it is good for us to be here;' he was well pleased to be upon Mount Tabor, but little thought what service God had to do for him elsewhere, how much poor souls needed him and the other apostles' help. We would always be in the mount with God, enjoy our comforts to the full, even to surfeit; but God knows that is not good for us. His pleasure should satisfy us though we do not see the reason of it. So Jer. 24:5, God speaketh of the basket of good figs (whereby were represented the best of the people) whom I have sent into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. What can there be seemingly more contrary to their good than a hard and an afflicted lot out of their own country? Yet God, that foresaw all things, knew it was for their good; worse evils would befall the place where they had been. So to be kept under, to have no service for the present, no hopes to rise again for the future,



and to be laden with all manner of prejudices and reproaches, this is for good. We think not so, but God knoweth it is so, most for his glory and our benefit. So the selling of Joseph into Egypt, Gen. 50:20, 'God meant it to good.' Alas! what good to have the poor young man sold as a slave, to be cast into prison for his chastity and continency, and exposed to all manner of difficulties! But alas! many had perished if he had not been sent thither. So God taketh away many beloved comforts from us; he meaneth it for good. We think it is all against us; no, it is for us. So Ps. 34:10, 'They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.' Many times they want food and raiment, want liberty, at least in some degree; they may want many things that are comfortable; though they have things sparingly, though they have of the meanest, yet they have that which is good for them. So Ps. 84:11, 'No good thing will he withhold.' He may keep us low and bare, feed us *cibo extemporali*, as Lactantius; but that is good for us. If it were good for us to have larger revenues and incomes, we should not want them. The true and absolute ground of all submission is to think that which God sendeth is good, be it prosperity or adversity, the having or wanting children, or other comforts.

2. The next measure is this, that good is to be determined by its respect to the chief good or true happiness. Now, what is our chief happiness but the enjoyment of God? Our happiness doth not consist in outward comforts, riches, health, honour, civil liberty, or comfortable relations, as husband, wife, children; but in our relation to and acceptance with God. Other things are but additional appendages to our happiness, Mat. 6:33. Affliction taketh nothing from our essential solid happiness, rather helpeth us in the enjoyment of it, as it increaseth grace and holiness, and so we enjoy God more surely. That is good that sets us nearer to God, and that is evil which separateth us from him; therefore sin is evil, because it

maketh an estrangement between us and God, Isa. 59:2; but affliction is good, because many times it maketh us the more earnestly to seek after him: Hosea 5:15, 'In their afflictions they will seek me right early.' Therefore every condition is good or evil as it sets farther off or draws us nearer to God; that is good that tendeth to make us better, more like unto God, capable of communion with him, conduceth to our everlasting happiness. So 'It is good that a man bear the yoke from his youth,' Lam. 3:27, that he be trained up under the cross, in a constant obedience to God and subjection to him, and so be fitted to entertain communion with him. If afflictions conduce to this end, they are good, for then they help us to enjoy the chief good.

3. That good is not always the good of the flesh, or the good of outward prosperity; and therefore the good of our condition is not to be determined by the interest of the flesh, but the welfare of our souls. If God should bestow upon us so much of the good of the outward and animal life as we desire, we could not be said to be in a good condition if he should deny us good spiritual. We should lose one half of the blessings of the covenant by doting upon and falling in love with the rest: the flesh is importunate to be pleased, but God will not serve our carnal turns. We are more concerned as a soul than a body: Heb. 12:10, 'He verily for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.' Certain it is God will chasten us for our profit. What do we call profit? The good things of this world, the great mammon which so many worship? If we call it so, God will not; he meaneth to impart to us spiritual and divine benefit, which is a participation of his own holiness. And truly the people of God, if they be in their right temper, value themselves not by their outward enjoyments, but their inward, by their improvement of grace, not the enjoyment of worldly comforts: 2 Cor. 4:16, 'For this cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day.' A

discerning Christian puts more value upon holiness wrought by affliction than upon all his comforts. So that though affliction be evil in itself, it is good as sanctified.

4. A particular good must give way to a general good, and our personal benefit to the advancement of Christ's kingdom. The good of the church must be preferred before our personal contentment. Paul could want the glory of heaven for a while, if his continuance in the flesh were needful for the saints: Phil. 1:24, 'To abide in the flesh is more needful for you.' We must not so desire good to ourselves as to hinder the good of others. All elements will act contrary to their particular, for the conservation of the universe. That may be good for the glory of God which is not good for our personal contentment and ease. Now the glory of God is our greatest interest; if it be for the glory of God that I should be in pain, bereft of my comforts, my sanctified subjection to the will of God must say it is good. John 12:27, 28, there you have expressed the innocent inclination of Christ's human nature, 'Father, save me from this hour;' and the overruling sense of his duty, or the obligation of his office, 'But for this cause came I to this hour.' We are often tossed and tumbled between inclination of nature and conscience of duty; but in a gracious heart the sense of our duty and the desire of glorifying God should prevail above the desire of our own comfort, ease, safety, and welfare. Nature would be rid of trouble, but grace submits all our interests to God's honour, which should be dearer to us than anything else.

5. This good is not to be determined by present feeling, but by the judgment of faith. Affliction for the present is not pleasant to natural sense, nor for the present is the fruit evident to spiritual sense, but it is good because in the issue it turneth to good: Rom. 8:28, 'All things work together for good.' While God is striking we feel the grief, and

the cross is tedious, but when we see the end, we acknowledge it is good to be afflicted: Heb. 12:11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; but afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness.' A good present is the cause of joy, and an evil present is the cause of sorrow; but there are two terms of abatement: the sorrow is from the present sense, and the conceit of the sufferer. When we are but newly under the affliction, we feel the smart, but do not presently find the benefit; but within a while, especially in the review, it is good for me; it is matter of faith under the affliction, it is matter of sense after it. Good physic must have time to work. That which is not good may be good; though it be not good in its nature, it is good in its seasonable use, and though for the present we see it not, we shall see it. Therefore good is not to be determined by feeling, but by faith. The rod is a sore thing for the present, but the bitter root will yield sweet fruit. If we come to a person under the cross, and ask him, What! is it good to feel the lashes of God's correcting hand, to be kept poor and sickly, exercised with losses and reproaches, to part with friends and relations, to lose a beloved child? sense will complain. But this poor creature, after he hath been exercised and mortified, and gotten some renewed evidences of God's favour, ask him then is it good to be afflicted? Oh, yes! I had else been vain, neglectful of God, wanted such an experience of the Lord's grace. Faith should determine the case when we feel it not.

Secondly, That according to these measures you will find it good to be afflicted.

1. It is good as it is minus malum, it keepeth us from greater evils. Afflictions to the righteous are either cures of or preservatives from spiritual evils, which would occasion greater troubles and crosses. They prevent sin: 2 Cor. 12:7, 'And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelation, there was given me a

thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.' They purge out sin: Isa. 27:9, 'By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged out.' We are apt to abuse prosperity to self-confidence: Ps. 30:6, 7, 'In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong.' And luxury: Deut. 32:15, 'But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked; thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God that made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation.' The godly have evil natures as well as others, which cannot be beaten down but by afflictions. We are froward in our relations. Hagar was proud in Abraham's house, Gen. 16:4, her mistress was despised in her eyes; but very humble in the desert, Gen. 21:16. David's heart was tender and smote him when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment, 1 Sam. 24:5; but how stupid and senseless was he when he lived at ease in Jerusalem! 2 Sam. 12. His conscience was benumbed till Nathan roused him. Before we are chastened we are rebellious, frail, fickle, mutable, apt to degenerate without this continual discipline: we are very negligent and drowsy till the rod awakeneth us. God's children have strange failings and negligences, and sometimes are guilty of more heinous sins. It is a great curse for a man to be left to his own ways: Hosea 4:17, 'Let him alone;' so Ps. 81:12, 'I gave them up to their own hearts' lust.' Men must needs perish when left to themselves, without this wholesome, profitable discipline of the cross.

2. It is good, because the evil in it is counterpoised by a more abundant good. It is evil as it doth deprive us of our natural comforts, pleasure, gain, honour; but it is good as these may be recompensed with better pleasures, richer gain, and greater honour. There is more pleasure in holiness than there can be pain and trouble in affliction: Heb. 12:11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous,

but grievous, but afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.' More gain than affliction can bring loss: Heb. 12:10, 'But he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' More honour than affliction can bring shame, surely then it is good. There is a threefold profit we get by affliction:—

[1.] The time of affliction is a serious thinking time: Eccles. 7:14, 'In the day of adversity consider;' 1 Kings 8:47, 'Yet if they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive.' We have more liberty to retire into ourselves, being freed from the attractive allurements of worldly vanities and the delights of the flesh. Adversity maketh men serious; the prodigal came to himself when he began to be in want, Luke 15:17. Sad objects make a deep impression upon our souls; they help us to consider our own ways and God's righteous dealings, that we may behave ourselves wisely and suitably to the dispensation: Micah 6:9, 'The man of wisdom will hear the rod.'

[2.] It is a special hearing time; in the text, 'That I might learn thy statutes;' and it is said of Christ, Heb. 5:8, that 'He learned obedience from the things that he suffered;' he did experimentally understand what obedience was in hard and difficult cases, and so could the better pity poor sinners in affliction: we have an experimental knowledge of that of which we had but a notional knowledge before. We come by experience to see how false and changeable the world is, how comfortable an interest in God is, what a burden sin is, what sweetness there is in the promises, what a reality in the word. Luther said, *Qui tribulantur*, &c. The afflicted see more in the scripture than others do; the secure and fortunate read them as they do Ovid's verses. Certainly when the soul is humble, and when we are refined and raised above the degrees of sense, we are more tractable and teachable, our understandings are clearer, our affections more

melting. Our spiritual learning is a blessing that cannot be valued. If God write his law upon our hearts by his stripes on our backs, so light a trouble should not be grudged at.

[3.] It is an awakening, quickening time.

(1.) Some are awakened out of the sleep of death, and are first wrought upon by afflictions. This is one powerful means to bring in souls to God, and to open their ears to discipline. God began with them in their afflictions, and the time of their sorrows was the time of loves. The hot furnace is Christ's workhouse, the most excellent vessels of honour and praise have been formed there: Isa. 48:10, 'I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.' Manasses, Paul, the jailer, were all chosen in the fire; God puts them into the furnace, and chooseth them there, melts them, and stamps them with the image of Christ. The hog's trough was a good school to the prodigal. Well, then, doth God do you any harm by affliction when he saves you by it? If we use violence to a man that is ready to be drowned, and in pulling him out of the waters should break an arm or a leg, would he not be thankful? If you have broken my arm, you have saved my life. So God's children: It is good that I had such an affliction, felt the sharpness of such a cross. Oh, blessed providence! I had been a witless fool, and gone on still in a course of sin and vanity, if God had not awakened me.

(2.) It quickeneth others to be more careful of their duty, more watchful against sin, and doth exercise and improve us in heavenly virtues and graces of spirit, which lay dormant in us through neglect, since pleasing objects, which deaden the heart, are removed. Even God's best children, when they have gotten a carnal pillow under their heads, are apt to sleep; their prayers are dead; thoughts of heaven cold, or none; little zeal for God or delight in him: Isa. 26:16,

'Lord, in trouble they have visited thee; they pour out a prayer when thy chastening is upon them;' Hosea 5:15, 'In their afflictions they will seek me early.' Because they do not stir up themselves, God stirreth them up by a smart rod. The husbandman pruneth the vine, lest it run out into leaves; the baits of the flesh must be taken from us, that our gust and relish of heavenly things may be recovered.

Use 1. The use is to caution us against our murmurings and taxing of God's providence. How few are there that give him thanks for his seasonable discipline, and observe God's faithfulness and the benefit they have by afflictions, but rather murmur, repine, and fret through impatience! If it be good to be afflicted, let us accept of it, for good is matter of choice: Lev. 26:41, 'If their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity.' Now all affliction on this side hell is good, as it is a lesser evil; hic ure, hic seca, if God will cut here, burn here, lance here, as a surgeon, that we may not be destroyed for ever; corrected, that we may not be condemned, 1 Cor. 11:32. It is good, as it is a means to good; for the end putteth a loveliness also upon the means, though things in themselves be harsh and sour. We must not consider what things are in themselves, tut what they are in their reduction, tendency, and final use. So all things are yours, crosses, deaths, 1 Cor. 3:18; all their crosses, yea, sometimes their sins and snares, by God's overruling. We lose the benefit of our affliction by our murmurings, repinings, faintings, carnal sorrows and fears; an impatient distrustful mind spoileth the working of God: 'Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience.' It is not the bare affliction worketh, but the affliction meekly borne. Let us not misconstrue God's present way of dealing with us. There may be a seeming harshness in some of his dealings, but yet, all things considered, you will find them full of mercy and truth. Murmuring is



a disorder in the affections, misinterpreting in the understanding, to prevent it.

1. Consider you must not interpret the covenant by God's providence, but God's providence by his covenant. Certain it is that all new covenant dispensations are mercy and truth, Ps. 25:10, our crosses not excepted; by them God is pursuing his covenant and eternal purpose concerning our salvation. There is sometimes a seeming contradiction between his promises and his providences, word and works; his voice is sweet like Jacob's, but his hand rough like Esau's. Go unto the sanctuary, and God will help you to reconcile things, Ps. 73:16, 17; otherwise the difficulty will be too hard for you. The children of God, that have suspected or displeased him, have always found themselves in error, Isa. 49:14, 15. His promise is the light side, his providence the dark side of the cloud: Ps. 77:19, 'Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the deep waters', and thy footsteps are not known.' We cannot trace him, nor find out the reason of everything that God doeth; only, in the general, that 'he doeth all things well,' Mark 7:37; nay, what is best.

2. We must distinguish between a part of God's work and the end of it. We cannot understand God's providence till he hath done his work. He is an impatient spectator that cannot tarry till the last act, wherein all errors are reconciled: John 13:7, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou shalt know.' No wonder if we are much in the dark, if we look only to present sense and present appearance. Then his purposes are hidden from us; he bringeth one contrary out of another, light out of darkness, meat out of the eater. God knoweth what he is a-doing with you, when you know not: Jer. 29:11, 'I know my thoughts, to give you an expected end.' When we view providences by pieces, we know not God's mind; for the present we see him (it may be) rending and tearing all things; therefore let us

not judge of God's work by the beginnings, till all work together. Our present state may be very sad and uncomfortable, and yet God is designing the choicest mercies to us: Ps. 31:22, 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes; nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee;' Ps. 116:11, 'I said in my haste, All men are liars.' Haste never speaketh well of God nor his promises, nor maketh any good comment upon his dealings.

3. We must distinguish between that which is really best for us, and what we judge best for us: Deut. 8:15, 16, 'Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee out water out of the rock of flint; who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not; that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at the latter end.' Other diet is more wholesome for our souls than that which our sick appetite craveth. It is best with us many times when we are weakest: 2 Cor. 12:10, 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' Worst when strongest: 2 Chron. 26:16, 'When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his own destruction.' Lot chose Sodom, a fair and pleasant situation, but you know what inconveniences he met with there. Many times the buffetings of Satan are better for us than a condition free from temptation; so is poverty, emptiness, better than fulness, loss of friends than enjoyment of them.

Use 2. For information.

1. By what note we may know whether God chastens us in anger, yea or nay; whether our crosses be curses. The cross that maketh thee better cometh with a blessing. It is not the sharpness of the affliction we should look to, but the improvement of it. The bitter waters may be made sweet by experiences of grace; if we are made more godly,

wise, religious, it is a good cross; but if it leave us as careless and stupid, or no better than we were before, that cross is but a preparation to another; if it hath only stirred up our impatience, done us no good, God will follow his stroke, and heat his furnace hotter.

2. It informeth us that it is our duty not only to be good in afflictions, but we must be good after afflictions. David, when escaped, saith, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.' Wicked men are somewhat good in afflictions, but as soon as they are delivered they return to their old sins; as metals are melted while they are in the furnace, but when they are taken out, they return to their natural hardness; but the godly are better afterwards.

3. That every condition is as the heart is. Afflictions are good if we have the grace to make a good use of them. Look, as the good blessings of God by our corruption are abused to wantonness, and so made hurtful to us, so crosses, that are evil in themselves, when sanctified are good. All things are sanctified to us when we are sanctified to God. Other things that would be snares prove helps and encouragements, are great furtherances. The creature is another thing to the saints; if they are advanced, their hearts are enlarged to God; if afflicted, they grow more humble, watchful, serious. All things work together for the worst to the wicked. If God make Saul a king, Judas an apostle, Balaam a prophet, their preferment shall be their ruin. Haman's honour, Ahithophel's wit, and Herod's applause turned to their hurt—if in prosperity, they contemn God; if in adversity, deny and blaspheme him: Prov. 1:32, 'For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.' As the salt sea turneth all into salt water, so a man is in the constitution of his soul; all things are converted to that use.

Use 3. To persuade us to make this acknowledgment, that affliction is good. There needs many graces before we can thus determine.

1. Faith. It is not present, but it must be believed, hoped, and waited for. It is not fit all should be done in a day, and as early as we would; in the Lord's time the fruit will appear. The word doth not work by and by, so not the rod. Faith can see good in that in which sense only can find smart: Phil. 1:19, 'I know this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ;' and 'We know that all things shall work together for good,' Rom. 8:28. Though it doth not appear, yet we know.

2. Love. The children of God, out of their love to God and present submission to God, do count whatsoever he doth to be good: Ps. 73:1, 'Yet God is good to Israel.' Though he seemeth to deal with his people hardly, yet love pronounceth the dispensation to be good; it can see a great deal of love in pain, and smart, and chastenings. I have read once and again of such a rabbi, that, when told of an affliction, would say, This is good, because it cometh from God.

3. Spiritual wisdom and choice to esteem things according to their intrinsic worth. A high value of holiness, profiting in sanctification, is more than enough to recompense all the trouble we are put to in learning it. This will make us yield to be lessened in our worldly comforts for the increase of spiritual grace: as Paul would cheerfully part with his health that he might have more experience of Christ: 2 Cor. 12:10, 'I will take pleasure in infirmities, necessities, and distresses, for Christ's sake.' Surely the loss of outward things should trouble us the less, and we should be the sooner satisfied in God's dispensation, if he will take away our earthly comforts, and make us more mindful of that which is heavenly; if by an aching head God will

give you a better heart, by the death of friends promote the life of grace.

4. Diligence and heedfulness—(1.) To observe afflictions; (2.) To improve them.

[1.] To observe what falleth out, from what hand it cometh, to what issue it tendeth; otherwise, if we observe it not, how can we acknowledge it, give God the glory of his wisdom and goodness? In heaven, when we shall know as we are known, it will be a great part of our lauding of God to look back on his providence conducting us through troubles, as it is pleasant for travellers in their inn to discourse of the deepness and danger of the ways. And now, when we rather are known than know, Gal. 4:9, it is useful and comfortable to take notice of God's dealing with us. Oh, what a deal of wisdom, faithfulness, and truth may we see in the conduct of his providence! Gen. 32:10, 'I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands;' Ps. 119:75, 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.' What necessity of his chastisement to prevent our pride, security, negligence! with what wisdom was our cross chosen! how did God strike in the right vein! you were running on apace in some neglect of God till he awakened you. This observation will help us to love God, who is vigilant and careful of our welfare. It will allay all the hard thoughts that we have of the seeming severity of his dispensations.

[2.] Diligence to improve it for the bringing about of this good. We must not be idle spectators, but active under God; we must more stir up ourselves, and exercise ourselves to godliness. The affliction of itself is a dead thing; there must be help: Phil. 1:19, 'For I know this

shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ;' 2 Cor. 1:11, 'Ye also helping together by prayer for us.' It is not the nature of the cross, nor the power of inherent grace, without the actual influence of the Spirit, that makes troubles profitable. We must excite ourselves also, for the saints are not only passive objects, but active instruments of providence. We are not merely to be passive: Heb. 12:11, 'It yieldeth the pleasant fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.' God exerciseth us with the rod, and we must exercise ourselves under the rod. We are engaged to use all holy means to this end, searching, praying, rousing up ourselves, learning our proper lessons; then we will come and make our acknowledgment, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.'

## **SERMON LXXX**

### **The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver.—VER. 72.**

THESE words may be conceived as a reason of what was said in the foregoing verse. David hath told us there that it was good for him that he was afflicted, because of the benefit obtained by his afflictions; he had learned God's statutes, knew more of his duty, and had a heart to keep closer to it. Now this gain was more to him than his loss by affliction; for he doth not value his happiness by his temporal interests so much as by his thriving in godliness. All the wealth in the world was not so much to him as the spiritual benefit which he got by his sore troubles; for 'the law of thy mouth,' &c.

The text is a profession of his respect to the word, a profession which containeth in it the very spirit of godliness, a speech that becometh

only such a man's mouth as David was, one that is sincerely godly. Many will be ready to make this profession, but other things do not suit; the profession of their mouths is contradicted by the disposition of their hearts, and the course and tenor of their lives. Observe here two things:—

1. The things compared.

2. The value and preference of the one above the other.

[1.] The things compared. On the one side there is the law of God's mouth; on the other, thousands of gold and silver.

[2.] The value and preference of the one above the other, it is better to me, it is better in itself. There was reason for his esteem and choice. Many will say it is better in itself, but David saith it is better to me. Let us explain these circumstances as they are laid.

[1.] The things compared.

(1.) On the one side there is 'the law of God's mouth;' it is God's own word, and we should be as sure of it as if we had heard him utter and pronounce it with his own mouth, or had received it immediately by oracle from him. And indeed that is one way to raise this esteem: 1 Thes. 2:13, 'Receiving it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which worketh effectually in you that believe.' In the word we must consider two things—the authority of it, and the ministry of it. If we consider the authority of it, so it cometh from God's mouth; if we consider the ministry of it, so it cometh by man's mouth, for he speaketh to us by men: 2 Peter 1:21, 'Holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' If we look to the ministry only, and not to the authority, we are in danger to slight it; certainly shall not profit by it. Many do so, as Samuel thought Eli called him,

when it was the Lord, 1 Sam. 3:7, 8; but when we consider who is the author of it, then it calleth for our reverence and regard.

(2.) On the other side, 'thousands of gold and silver.' Where wealth is set out—(1.) By the species and kind of it—gold and silver; gold for hoarding and portage, silver for present commerce. (2.) The quantity, 'thousands,' that is, thousands of pieces, as that addition is used, Ps. 68:30, 'They shall submit themselves with pieces of silver,' or talents, as the Chaldee paraphrase expoundeth it. 'Money answereth all things,' Eccles. 10:19. It can command all things in the world, as the great instrument of commerce.

[2.] The value and preference of the one above the other, 'it is better,' and it is 'better to me.' It is better in itself, that noteth the intrinsic worth of the word; it is better to me, that implieth his own esteem and choice. To say, in the general only, It is better, implieth but a speculative approbation, which may be in carnal men: Rom. 2:18, 'And approvest the things that are more excellent;' but to say, It is better to me, implieth a practical esteem, which is proper only to the regenerate. It is more dear, precious, and sweet to them than the greatest treasure. Could we have such a holy affection to the word, and say also, To me, and to me, we should thrive more in a course of godliness; for a man is carried on powerfully by his choice and esteem, his actions are governed and determined by it.

Doct. The word of God is dearer to a gracious heart than all the riches in the world.

Let me bring proofs: Ps. 19:10, 'More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold.' So speaking of spiritual wisdom, which is only to be had by the word of God, he saith, Prov. 3:14, 'That the merchandise thereof is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.' So Prov. 8:11, 'For wisdom is better



than rubies, and all the things which are to be desired are not to be compared with it.' These expressions are frequently used, because the greatest part of mankind are miserably bewitched with the desire of riches; but God's children are otherwise affected, they have a better treasure.

Let me prove two things:—

1. That the word of God, and the benefit we get by it, is better than thousands of gold and silver.

2. That the children of God do so esteem it. Both must be proved; the one to show the worth and excellency of the word, the other to show the gracious disposition of the hearts of God's children. There is no question but that if these things were well weighed, the law of God's mouth, and thousands of gold and silver, we should find there is a great inequality between them; but all men have not a judgment to choose that which is most worthy. Many take glass beads for jewels, and prefer toys and trifles before a solid good. Gold and silver draw the hearts of all men to them, and their affections blind their judgment; and then, though the weights be equal, if the balances be not equal, wrong will be done. We do not weigh things with an equal balance, but consider them with a prejudiced mind, and a heart biassed and prepossessed with worldly inclinations.

First, then, for the things themselves; surely gold and silver, which is digged out of the bowels of the earth, is not worthy to be compared with the law that cometh out of the mouth of God. If you compare the nature, use, and duration of these benefits that you have by the one and the other, you will see a vast difference.

1. The nature. The notion of riches is abundance of valuable things. Now there are true riches and counterfeit riches, which have but the

resemblance and show. The true riches is spoken of Luke 16:11, and is opposed to that mammon and pelf which the world doteth upon. Grace giveth us the true riches and wealth. It is good to state what are the true riches and the false. The more abundance of truly valuable things a man hath, the more he hath of true riches. A child counteth himself rich when he hath a great many pins and points and cherry-stones, for those suit his childish age and fancy. A worldly man counteth himself rich when he hath gold and silver in great store by him, or lands and heritages, or bills and bonds; but a child of God counteth himself rich when he hath God for his portion, Christ to his redeemer, and the Spirit for his guide, sanctifier, and comforter; which is as much above a carnal man's estate in the world as a carnal man's estate is above a child's toys and trifles, yea, infinitely more. Well, then, surely the word of God will make us rich, because it revealeth God to be our God, according to our necessity and capacity: Ps. 16:5, 6, 'The Lord is my portion: I have a goodly heritage;' and it revealeth unsearchable riches of grace in Christ, Eph. 2:1, 3:8, pardon of sins, and life eternal. They that have Christ want nothing, but are completely happy. So for the Spirit; what are all the riches of the world to those treasures of knowledge, comfort, and holiness which we have by the Spirit! What is in one evangelist, 'He will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him,' Luke 11:13, is in another, Mat. 7:11, 'He will give good things to them that ask him.' The Spirit is instead of all good things, so that the word is able to enrich a man more than all the wealth of the world can. It giveth us abundance, and abundance of better things; so that a man is not absolutely poor that wants gold and silver, but he that wants the benefits which the word of God offereth and conveyeth to us. Gold and silver are but one sort of riches, and but the lowest and meanest sort. You do not count a man poor if he have lands, though he hath not ready-money; much less is a man poor if he hath gold, though he hath not silver. So a Christian is not poor if he hath God and Christ

and the Spirit, though he say, with the apostle Peter, 'Silver and gold have I none,' Acts 3:6. Angels are not poor though they have not flocks and herds and yearly revenues; they have an excellency suitable to their natures. So a Christian is not poor while he possesseth him who possesseth all things. But that I may not seem only to say that the treasures of grace are the true riches, I shall prove it by two arguments:—

[1.] That is the true riches which can buy and purchase all other things, but all other things cannot buy and purchase it. Now all the riches in the world cannot buy and purchase those benefits which the word offereth to us. They cannot purchase the favour of God; 'For what hope hath the hypocrite, if he hath gained, when God comes to take away his soul?' Job 17:8. Many a carnal wretch doth not make a saving bargain of it; but be it so, he looketh for worldly gain and hath it. What will this stead him when God puts the bond of the old covenant in suit, and demandeth his soul from him? He is loath to resign it, but God will have it: 'What can he give in exchange for his soul?' Money cannot purchase the grace of the Redeemer: 1 Peter 1:18, 'Ye are not redeemed with corruptible things;' and Ps. 49:6–8, 'The redemption of the soul is precious.' Men would, if they could, give a thousand worlds for the pardon of their sin, when they come to receive the fruit of it; but all will not do: the wrath of God must be appeased, and the justice of God satisfied, by another kind of ransom. They cannot purchase the grace of the Spirit. Simon Magus would give money for the gifts of the Holy Ghost, but Peter said to him, 'Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money,' Acts 8:20. His request was base and carnal; yet thus far it yieldeth a testimony to the truth in hand, that he thought the gift of the Holy Ghost better than money, or else he would not have offered his money for it; yea, the lowest and far less necessary gift than his sanctifying, guiding, and

comforting work. Well, then, all other things cannot purchase these benefits. But, on the other side, these benefits procure all other things. Grace giveth us an advantage in worldly things above others, for certainly 'Man doth not live by bread only,' Mat. 4, and his life doth not lie in worldly abundance: the natural, much more the sanctified and comfortable, use of the creatures dependeth on the favour of God and his fatherly care and providence, which is assured to the heirs of promise: Mat. 6:33, 'First seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things shall be added;' 1 Tim. 4:8, 'Godliness hath the promise of this life and that which is to come;' Prov. 3:15, 16, Wealth is not to be compared with wisdom; because 'in her right hand is length of days, and in her left hand riches and honour.' A child of God that is obedient to the word hath more advantage for the world than a wicked man hath: he hath a promise which the other hath not, a warrant to cast his care upon God; he gets more by the want of worldly things than a wicked man by the possession of them, for his want is sanctified, and worketh for good.

[2.] The world cannot recompense and supply the want of that grace we get by the word, but this can easily supply the want of the world. The worth and value of things is known by this, what we can least want. Now there is no earthly thing but may be so supplied as that its want should be better to us than its enjoyment. Sickness may be better to us than health, because of experiences of grace, 2 Cor. 12:10. Poverty may be better than wealth, because we may be rich in grace, James 1:9; so James 2:5; so 1 Tim. 6:6, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain.' Slender provision with a contented heart is much better than a great deal more wealth. Godliness can supply the room of wealth, but wealth cannot supply the room of godliness. If the want of wealth helps us to an increase of grace and communion with God, it helpeth us to that which is of higher and greater value than the enjoyment of wealth could afford. But now, on the other

side, the world will not give us a recompense for the want of godliness: Mat. 16:26, 'What is a man profited if he shall gain the world and lose his soul?' What shall be given to the party for that loss? His soul is lost, not in a natural sense, but in a legal sense, forfeited to God's justice. We may please ourselves in our carnal choice for a while, but death bloweth away all our vain conceits: Jer. 17:11, 'At his latter end he shall be a fool.' He was a fool before all his lifetime, but now in the judgment and conviction of his own conscience. His conscience shall rave at him, O fool, madman! to hazard the love of Christ for worldly things. These things cannot be recompensed by any other. What poor rewards can the world yield you for the loss of Christ and heaven! Alas! then, you lose your treasure, and have nothing to comfort you but rattles and baubles, which will no more comfort us than fine flowers will a man going to execution. Thus in the nature of riches.

2. Let us come to the use and end of these things, the use of the law of God's mouth, and the use of wealth. The use of wealth is to support and maintain the present life and the bodily state during our pilgrimage and passage through the world; but the use of the word is to guide and direct us in the way to the blessedness of the world to come. The world supplieth our bodily necessities; 'But the law of God is perfect, converting the soul,' Ps. 19:7. It discovereth a man's soul-misery and remedy, as it directeth to Christ, and enforceth our obedience to God, and prescribeth a universal adherence to him and dependence on him. Our souls are fallen off from God by sin into a most doleful state, and have no other way of recovery than is prescribed in this blessed word of God. There are three uses of the word of God, and they do all commend and endear it to our respects:

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[1.] It is the great means to sanctify and convey a divine principle and nature in us; it is not only the rule, but the seed of the new life: 1 Peter 1:23, 'He hath begotten us, not by corruptible, but incorruptible seed,' &c.; James 1:18, 'He hath begotten us by the word of truth;' 2 Peter 1:4, 'To us are given great and precious promises, that we might be made partakers of the divine nature;' John 17:17, 'Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.' All this is said of the word: it is the means to sanctify us, the immortal seed, the beginning of the new life, the divine nature to make us live after a godlike manner; therefore it is 'better than thousands of gold and silver.' A child of God findeth a greater treasure in one chapter of the Bible than worldly men in all their lands and honours and large revenues. A poor Christian meeteth with more true gain in a sermon than others can in their trades while they live. God begetteth him at first by the word of truth, and giveth him there the supply of the Spirit; therefore 'be swift to hear,' much in reading, and meditation day and night. Oh! there is the true treasure, the pearl of price; there their souls become acquainted with God.

[2.] It directeth us and keepeth us from being carried away with every deceit of sin: Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a light unto my path, and a lamp unto my feet.' Here are directions for all cases: here is a general direction, it is a light to our path; and showeth us what to do in particular actions, it is a lamp to our feet. So ver. 133, 'Order my steps in thy word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.' It is the word prevents the reign of any one sin. To have a sure rule to walk by in the midst of so many snares and temptations is a greater favour than to enjoy the greatest affluence of worldly felicity.

[3.] It supporteth us in all our afflictions and extremities. All the wealth in the world composed and put together cannot yield us that true contentment and satisfaction which the word of God doth to the

obedient soul. Wealth cannot allay a grieved mind nor appease a wounded conscience. The word directeth us where we may find rest for our souls: Jer. 6:16, 'Go ask for the good old way, and you shall find rest for your souls.' We lose ourselves in a maze of uncertainties till we come to the word of God: Mat. 11:28, 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' Here is ease for the great wound and maim of nature. The great maim of nature is sin. Now where shall we have a plaster for this sore, but only in the word of God? So for particular afflictions: Rom. 15:4, 'That ye, through the patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.' Comfort is the strengthening of the mind, or the fortifying the mind when it is vexed and weakened with doubts, fears, and sorrows: 'I had fainted in my affliction unless thy word had quickened me,' Ps. 119:50. The comforts of the world appear and vanish in a moment, cannot firmly stay and revive the heart; every blast of temptation scattereth them. Philosophy and natural reason cannot give us true ground of comfort: that was it they aimed at, how to fortify the soul and keep it quiet notwithstanding troubles in the flesh; but as they never understood the true ground of misery, which is sin, so neither the true ground of comfort, which is Christ. That which man offereth cannot come with such power and authority upon the conscience as that which God offereth, and bare reason cannot have such an efficacy as divine testimony and the law of God's mouth. This moonlight rotteth before it ripeneth fruits; but the word acquainteth us with Christ, who is the foundation of comfort; with the Spirit, who is the efficient cause of comfort; with the promise of heaven, which is the true matter of comfort; with faith, the great instrument to receive it.

3. Let us look to the duration. There is a vanity and uncertainty in all these outward things; they soon take the wing, and leave us in sorrow. If they continue with us till death, then they have done all

their work. Wealth may bring you to the grave, but it can stead you no further; then wealth is gone, but horror doth continue: Luke 16:24, 'Son, in thy lifetime thou enjoyedst thy good things.' These good things are only commensurate with life. Sometimes they do not last so long; but when we must leave the world, and launch out to those unknown regions, Job 27:8, how miserable shall we be! Worldly comforts will fail us when we have most need of them, as Jonah's gourd when the sun scorched him. So in the hour of death, what will bags of gold do then? But now, on the other side, wisdom is better than gold and silver, because 'with her are durable riches and righteousness,' Prov. 8:18, 19; therefore 'my fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold, and my revenue than choice silver.' If a man would labour for anything, labour for that which is eternal, John 6:27. No treasure can be compared to eternal life, and this the word assureth us of.

Secondly, Let us now come to examine why the children of God value it so.

1. Because they are enlightened by the Spirit, when others have their eyes dazzled with external splendour, and their judgment corrupted by their senses. It is not ignorance undoes the world so much as want of spiritual prudence. Spiritual and heavenly things can only be seen in the light of the Spirit, without which we can neither discern the truth or worth of them in order to choice: 1 Cor. 2:14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit;' and therefore, till we have this illuminating and sanctifying light of the Spirit, we shall not make a good choice for ourselves. Eph. 1:17, 18, the apostle prayeth, 'That the Lord would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.' That saving knowledge of divine mysteries which



causeth us to prefer and choose them above other things comes from the Spirit of wisdom and revelation; otherwise, in seeing we see not. There is a perfect contradiction many times between speculative and practical knowledge. The common wisdom and knowledge of divine mysteries is a gift that cometh from the Spirit, much more the spiritual discerning.

2. They are affected with their true necessities. Our real necessities are the necessities of the soul. Bodily wants are more urging and pressing upon us, but these are more dangerous; therefore gold and silver, which supplieth our bodily necessities, is not so welcome to them as the law of God's mouth, which provideth a remedy for their soul-defects. How to be justified, how sanctified, is more than what shall we eat and drink, and wherewith shall we be clothed. Usually soul-necessities are overlooked; we regard them not, or conceit we are well already: Rev. 3:17, 'Thou thoughtest thou wast rich, and increased with goods, and hadst need of nothing;' and then we have no relish for the offered remedy. The word of God is the offered remedy to repair our collapsed state. The gospel is not only true, but worthy to be embraced, 1 Tim. 1:15; but who will embrace it but the sensible sinner? for it is offered as a remedy to the sick and deliverance to the captive: it is not enough to see the excellency of things, but we must see our necessity of them. There are two hindrances that prejudice our salvation—either the necessity and excellency of the gospel is not considered, or the truth and reality of it is not believed.

3. They measure all things with respect not to this world but the world to come. It is a high point of religion to do all things and regard all things for eternal ends: 2 Cor. 4:18, 'Looking not to things seen, that are temporal, but to the things which are not seen, which are eternal;' making this our scope, and doing all to this end. Gold

and silver are the most valuable things in the world: what cannot gold and silver buy in this world? But there is another world, and believers look to things unseen. Within a while it will not be a pin to choose whether we have enjoyed much or little of this world's good things; but much will lie upon this, whether we have obeyed God, and glorified God, and accepted of Christ. The use of gold and silver ceaseth in the world to come: these things are not current in Canaan, nor accounted of in our heavenly country; therefore money should be a vile thing instead of grace. We can carry away none of these things with us when we die, Eccles. 5:15; and surely that which hath no power to free us from death, to comfort us in death, or go with us into another world after death, is no happiness or solid tranquillity.

4. They have had trial and experience of the word, what a comfort and support it hath been to them: 1 Peter 2:2, 3, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' There is an appetite followeth the new nature, and makes us desire spiritual food: Phil. 1:9, 10, 'And this I pray, that ye may abound in all knowledge and in all judgment, that ye may approve the things that are excellent.' When the Spirit giveth us a taste of the goodness of those things offered in the word of God, a taste of divine truth in our souls, when we find these comforts verified in us, then we come to approve the things that are excellent above all other things: Ps. 119:11, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.' We never know the worth of the word till we come to make trial of it by practice and experience. The pleasure of the word we find in practice, and the comfort and support of it in deep afflictions. It is not so with the world; try it, and loathe it; it is more in fancy than fruition, because the imperfections which formerly lay hid are discovered; but the more intimately acquainted with the word of God, the more we

prize it; we see there is more to be gained there than in all the world besides.

Use 1. To reprove and disprove those that prefer gold and silver before the word of God. This is done by four sorts:—

1. This is grossly done by those that revolt from the profession of the truth for the world's sake: 2 Tim. 4:10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, and embraced the present world;' that betray the cause of religion, as Judas sold his master for thirty pieces of silver; or by those who will transgress for a small hire. The devil needeth not offer great things to them, when they will accept of less with thanks; for two pence or three pence gain will profane the Sabbath or wrong their neighbour. Is the law of God's mouth dearer to them than gold and silver? Surely no. They may flatter themselves with love to the word, but when they can violate it for a trifle, for a pair of shoes, it is a sign that a little gain gotten by iniquity of traffic is sweeter to them than all the comforts of the promise.

2. It is done by them that will not forsake anything for the word's sake but when they are put upon an apparent trial. Here is gold and silver, and there the law of God's mouth; what will you do? obey God, or comply with your interests? You show your love by leaving the one rather than the other; as Moses 'counted the reproach of Christ better treasure than the riches of Egypt,' Heb. 11:26. Christ's worst is better than the world's best. The Thessalonians showed their love when they received the word in much affliction; but when you decline duty, and are loath to hazard your interests, it is evident what you prefer. To some this may be a daily temptation: If I should be conscionable in my calling, I should be poor; keep touch and honesty in all things, it would turn to my loss. How many are discouraged

from the ways of God, and discharging a good conscience, by inconveniency!

3. This is also in part done by them who turn back upon the word and ordinances of God for gain's sake, and fix their residence there, where they can neither enjoy God nor his people, nor the comfort of his ordinances; as merchants who remove for traffic, and settle their abode there where the true religion is not professed, it may be, suppressed with extreme rigour; especially when they send youth thither, and novices and persons not grounded in the faith. This is like turning a child loose among a company of contagious persons, or setting an empty pitcher to crack before the fire. Commerce and traffic with infidels or persons of a false religion is lawful; but to make our constant residence where there is no liberty for reading and hearing the word of God, no liberty of worship and ordinances, cannot be excused from sin. You make religion to stoop to gain. I will not urge so high and heroical an instance as Moses: Heb. 11:25, 'Choosing rather to suffer afflictions with the people of God, than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;' but of a Jew since the time of their degeneration. I have once and again read of one Rabbi Joseph, who, being allured with the hope and call to a place of great gain, to teach Hebrew where there was no synagogue, is said to have brought forth this scripture for his answer and excuse, 'The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver.' Let us Christians remember it, and consider the pertinency of it

4. It is more refinedly done by them who by earthly things are drawn off from the pursuit of heavenly, and are night and day cumbered with much serving, and never take time to refresh their souls with the pleasure of the word; like Martha, cumbered about many things, while Mary sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word, Luke 10. *Felix domus, saith Bernard, ubi Martha queritur de Maria*—it is a happy

house where Martha complaineth of Mary. But alas! in most places it is otherwise; religion is encroached upon, all remembrance of God and meditation of his word is jostled out of doors by the cares of the world.

Use 2. To press us to make this profession seriously, heartily.

1. When we have wealth this profession should be made to draw off the heart from it to better things. When our store is increased, our hearts are apt to be enchanted with the love of these things: Ps. 62:10, 'If riches increase, set not your hearts upon them.' Our hearts are very apt to be set upon the world; but we must remember this is not the true treasure; there are other manner of riches that we should look after—to be rich towards God, lest I be a carnal fool, Luke 12:21. Complacency in a worldly portion is a sure sign of a worldly heart, more than greedy desire.

2. When we want wealth we should make this profession to induce us to contentment. The good disciples had the Spirit; to Judas, as the bad one, he gave the purse. If you have spiritual wisdom and knowledge, you have that which is most excellent: James 2:5, 'God hath chosen the poor of the world to be rich in faith.'

3. When we lose wealth for righteousness' sake, we have that which is better. The knowledge of a hated truth is better than to shine with the oppressor: Prov. 3:31, 32, 'Envy not the oppressor, nor choose any of his ways: for the froward is an abomination to the Lord; but his secret is with the righteous.' You have your losses exchanged for a greater good.

Use 3. Of trial. Let us examine ourselves and see what esteem and account we have of the word of God. If any say that we are all ready to profess that we esteem the word of God more than all riches, then

let us bring it off from words to deeds. Do you prefer obedience before gain? do you seek after spiritual wisdom more than gain? Prov. 4:7, 'Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding.' Is this your main business, to be wise to salvation? How many afflict and torment themselves to get silver and gold, but how few to understand and embrace God's law! How little doth this esteem of the word control contrary desires and affections!

## SERMON LXXXI

**Thine hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.—VER. 73.**

IN these words we have two things:—

1. The man of God's argument, thy hands have made me and fashioned me.

2. His request, give me understanding to keep thy commandments.

1. For his argument. He pleadeth as God's creature. Man is God's immediate workmanship, both as to his body and his soul. Some apply the words, 'Thy hands have made me,' to the creation of the soul; and the other words, 'and fashioned me,' to the creation of the body; but we need not be so accurate. Both imply that he was wholly the work of God's hand, a mere creature of his framing, and a creature exactly made; so made that he was also fashioned, 'fearfully and wonderfully made,' Ps. 139:14. The structure of man's body darts a reverence and awe of God into the consciences of beholders; and he

saith in the 15th verse, 'I was curiously wrought;' the Vulgar reads it acupictus—painted as with a needle. Man's body is a curious piece of embroidery, that is to be seen in the bones, veins, and arteries, that spread and run throughout the body; which consideration increaseth the argument, not only as he was God's work, but framed with a great deal of artifice.

2. Here is his request, 'Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.' In which he beggeth grace, that the faculty might be well disposed, 'Give me understanding;' and rightly exercised, 'That I may learn thy commandments;' that he might both know and keep his commandments. Surely he meaneth a saving knowledge: and therefore, when the work of grace is expressed by knowledge, a theoretical and notional knowledge is not understood, but that which is practical and operative; such a knowledge as doth work such a change both in the inward and outward man, as that mind, heart, and practice do express a conformity to God's law. As Jer. 24:7, 'I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; for they shall return to me with their whole heart;' that is, all the blessings of the covenant he expreseth by giving them a heart to know him: they shall so know me as to acknowledge me for their God, and cany themselves accordingly in dutiful obedience to me. I will regard them as their God, and they shall regard me as my people. So when it is said, Col. 3:10, that 'the new man' is 'renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him,' it is meant of a saving knowledge or acknowledgment of God, such as doth produce a perfect conformity to his law in both the tables; it is such a knowledge as is set out in righteousness; these are parallel expressions, Eph. 4:24 Well, then, this new nature David prayeth for, 'Give me understanding;' not as though he were altogether a stranger to it, but as seeking further 'degrees of it; such a spiritual understanding of the will of God as

might bring him into a more perfect and entire submission thereunto: 'I am thy creature;' let me be thy new creature; give me a faculty so clearly renewed that I may know and keep thy commandments.

Doct. That as we are creatures, we are some way encouraged to ask of God the grace of the new creature.

I shall draw forth the sense of the text and the doctrine in these propositions.

1. That man was made by God, or is God's immediate workmanship. We have the first notice of it, Gen. 1:26, 'Let us make man after our own image and likeness.' God put more respect upon him than upon the rest of the work of his hands. His creation is expressed in other terms than were used before: 'He said, Let there be light, and it was light;' 'Let there be dry land,' &c. But here God speaketh as if he had called a consultation about it, 'Let us make man;' not as if there were more difficulty, or as if creating power were at a nonplus, but to show what special notice he taketh of us, and to point out the excellency which he did stamp upon man in his creation beyond the rest of the creatures. There was no creature but had some impress of God upon it, for everything which hath passed his hand carrieth God's signature and mark; it showeth that it came from a being of infinite power and wisdom and goodness. But man hath his image and likeness stamped upon him: there you may discern God's track and footprint, but here his very face. In his first moulding of him he would plainly and visibly discover himself. So again, when this making of man is explained, Gen. 2:7, 'And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.' Before we read that man was created, here we see in what sort: his body was framed with



great art, though of base materials; a handful of dust did God enliven and form into a beautiful frame. But for the frame within, he had a more excellent and perfect soul than God gave to any other creature; by the union of both these, man became a living soul. Heaven and earth were married in his person; the dust of the earth and an immortal spirit, which is called the breath of God, were sweetly linked and joined together, with a disposition and inclination to one another, the soul to the body, and the body to the soul. When he had raised the walls of the flesh, and built the house of the body with all its rooms, then he puts in a noble and divine guest to dwell in it, and both make up one man.

2. The making of man now is the work of God, as well as the making of the first man was. God's hands did not only make and fashion Adam, but David. He saith, 'Thy hands have made me and fashioned me.' The body of man is of God's framing: Ps. 139:15, 16, 'My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth: thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.' Our bodies, you see there, though the matter were propagated by our parents, yet his hands made them and fashioned them. God is more our father than our natural parents are. Our parents know not whether the child will be male or female, beautiful or deformed; cannot tell the number of the bones, muscles, veins, arteries: this God appointeth and frameth with curious artifice; so that of all visible creatures, there is none in any sort equalleth man in the curious composition of the body, whether we look upon the beauty and majesty of his person, or take notice of the variety, nature, and use of his several parts, with their composition and framing them together, with a wonderful order and correspondence one to another, as if they had been described by a

model and platform set down in a book: so secretly and curiously was the matter framed in passing through all the changes in the womb till it came to a perfect formation. Then for the soul, God infuseth that: Eccles. 12:7, 'Then shall our dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God that gave it.' God gave the body too, but especially the spirit, because there he worketh singly and immediately; therefore he is called 'the Father of spirits.' They do not run in the channel of carnal generation or fleshly descent, Heb. 12:9. So Zedekiah swore by 'the God that made his soul,' Jer. 38:16. So Zech. 12:1, 'He formed the spirit of man within him.' The parent doth instrumentally produce man in respect of his body, yet the soul is from God, and immediately created and infused into the body by him, and being put into that dead lump of clay, doth animate and quicken it for the most excellent employment.

3. Man, that was created by God, was created to serve him: 'He formed us from the womb to be his servants,' as well as the first man, Isa. 49:5. Adam indeed was appointed for this use; all other creatures were made to serve God, but man especially by the design of his creation: other things ultimately and terminatively, but man immediately and nextly. God made all things for himself, Prov. 16:4; and Rom. 11:36, 'For of him and through him are all things; to whom be glory for ever, amen.' Man is the mouth of the creation. Surely it is but reason that God should have the use of all that he gave us; that the author of life and being should have some glory by them; that he should dwell in the house he hath set up: he that made it hath most right to use it; that we should 'glorify him with our bodies and souls, which are his,' 1 Cor. 6:20. Man is designed, engaged by greater mercies, furnished with great abilities, as at first endowed with God's image; he hath faculties and capacities to know and glorify his creator. There are natural instincts given to other things, or inclinations to those things which are convenient to their own

nature; but none of them are in a capacity to know what they are, and have, and where they are: they cannot frame a notion of him who gave them a being. Man is the mouth of the creation to speak for them: Ps. 145:10, 'All thy works praise thee, O Lord, and thy saints bless thee.' He was made to love, and serve, and glorify God. The divine image inclined him to obedience at first.

4. We are not now what God made us at first, but are strangely disabled to serve him and please him: Eccles. 7:29, 'God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions:' there is man's original and his degeneration; what he was once made, and how far now unmade and departed from his primitive estate; his perfection by creation, and defection by sin: first made in a state of righteousness without sin, and now in a state of sin and misery without grace; was created with a holy disposition to enable and incline him to love, please, and obey God, but now hath found out many inventions, put to his shifts. Man was not contented to be at God's finding, but would take his own course, and hath miserably shifted ever since to patch up a sorry happiness. So Rom. 3:23, 'All have sinned, and are come short of the glory of God.' By glory of God is not meant his glorious reward, but his glorious image. Image is called glory, 1 Cor. 11:7, 'It is said of the man, that 'he is the image and glory of God, as the woman is the glory of the man.' So compare 2 Cor. 3:18, 'We beholding the glory of the Lord in a glass, &c. So here, we are 'come short of the glory of God,' that is, his glorious image. Hence it is that all our faculties are perverted, the mind is become blind and vain, the will stubborn and perverse, conscience stupid, the affections pre-occupied and entangled, and we find a manifest disproportion in all our faculties to things carnal and spiritual, sinful and holy. In the understanding there is a sharpness of apprehension in carnal things, but dull, slow, and blind in spiritual and heavenly things. Thoughts are spent freely and unweariedly

about the one, but there is a tediousness and barrenness about the other; a will backward to what is good, but a strange bent and urging to what is evil. In that which is good we need a spur, in evil a bridle. These things persevere with us; but how fickle and changeable in any holy resolution!—the memory slippery in what is good, but firm and strong in what is evil; the affections quick, easily stirred, like tinder, catch fire at every spark; but as to that which is good, they are like fire in green wood, hardly kept in with much blowing. Again, our delight is soon moved by things pleasing to sense; a carnal gust and savour is very natural to us, and rife with us, Rom. 8:5, but averse from the chiefest good, and everything that leadeth to it. Surely, then, we have need to go to God and complain of corruption, sometimes under the notion of a blind and dark mind, begging the illumination of the Spirit; sometimes under the notion of a dead, hard heart, or an unpersuadable will, begging his inclining as well as enlightening grace. Surely they are strangely hardened that do not see a need of a spiritual understanding. Nay, God's children, after grace received, though sanctified betimes, yet halt of the old maim, dull in spirituals, alive and active in carnal matters. Carnal and worldly men act more uniformly and suitably to their principles than the children of God to theirs: Luke 16:8, 'The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light;' that is, more dexterous in the course of affairs. Grace for the present worketh but a partial cure: we have the advantage in matter of motive, we have better and higher things to mind; but they have the advantage in matter of principle; their principles are unbroken, but the principles of the best are mixed. We cannot do what we would in heavenly things; there is the back-bias of corruption that turns us away; and therefore they need to be instant with God to heal their souls; sometimes a blind mind, and sometimes a distempered heart.

5. We must be new made and born again before we can be apt or able to know or do the will of God; as Christ inferreth the necessity of regeneration from the corruption of nature—he had been discoursing with Nicodemus—'You cannot enter into the kingdom of God; for that which is born of the flesh is flesh,' John 3:5, 6. Our souls naturally accommodate themselves to the flesh, and seek the good of the flesh, and all our thoughts and care, and life, and love run that way. Now, what was lost in Adam can only be recovered in Christ. It is not enough that God's hands have once made us and fashioned us, but there is a necessity of being made and fashioned anew, of becoming 'his workmanship in Christ Jesus,' Eph. 2:10; and so the words of the text may be interpreted in this sense: Thou hast made me once; Lord, new make me: thy hands made me; O Lord, give me a new heart, that I may obey thee. In the first birth God gave us a natural understanding; in the second, a spiritual understanding, that we may learn his commandments; first that we may be good, and then do good. The first birth gave us the natural faculty, the second, the grace, or those divine qualities which were lost by Adam's sin. Better never been born, unless born again; better be a beast than a man, if the Lord give us not the knowledge of himself in Christ. The beasts, when they die, their misery and happiness dieth with them, death puts an end to their pain and pleasure; but, we that have reason and conscience to foresee the end and know the way, enter into perfect happiness or misery at death. Unless the Lord sanctify this reason, and give us a heart to know him in Christ, and choose that which is good, man is but a higher kind of beast, a wiser sort of beast, Ps. 49:12; for his soul is only employed to cater for the body, and his reason is prostituted to sense; the beast rides the man. We are not distinguished from the brutes by our senses, but our understanding and our reason. But in a carnal man, the soul is a kind of sense; it is wholly employed about the animal life. There is not a more brutish creature in the world than a worldly wicked man. Well,

then, David had need to pray, Lord, thou hast given me reason; give me the knowledge of thy self and thy blessed will.

6. When we seek this grace, or any degree of it, it is a proper argument to urge that we are God's creatures. So doth David here. I am now come to my very business, and therefore I shall a little show how far creation is pleadable, and may any way encourage us to ask spiritual understanding and renewing grace.

[1.] In the general, I shall lay down this: It is a good way of reasoning with God to ask another gift because we have received one already. It is not a good way of reasoning with man, because he wastes by giving; but a good way with God, and that upon a double account. Partly because in some cases Deus donando debet—God by giving doth in effect bind himself to give more; as by giving life, to give food; by giving a body, to give raiment, Mat. 6:25. God, by sending such a creature into the world, chargeth his providence to maintain him, as long as he will use him for his glory. God loveth to crown his own gifts: Zech. 3:2, 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the burnings?' The thing pleaded there is, was not this a brand plucked out of the fire? One mercy is pleaded to obtain another mercy. So God bindeth himself to give perseverance, 2 Cor. 1:10; but this is not the case here; for by giving common benefits he doth not bind himself to give saving graces. And partly, too, because he doth not waste by giving: 'His mercy endureth for ever.' The same reason is given for all those mercies, Ps. 136; why the Lord chose a church, maintaineth his church, giveth daily bread: 'His mercy endureth for ever.' God is where he was at first: 'He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not,' James 1:5. He doth not say, I have given already. Now, a former common mercy showeth God's readiness and freeness to give; the inclination to do good still abideth with him; he is as ready and as free to give still; daily bread: 'His mercy endureth for ever;' spiritual wisdom:

'His mercy endureth for ever.' Indeed, the giving of daily bread doth not necessarily bind God to give spiritual wisdom; but that which is not a sure ground to expect may be a probable encouragement to ask. And learn this, that though nothing can satisfy unbelief, yet faith can pick arguments out of anything, and make use of the most common benefits of creation to strengthen itself.

[2.] God beareth much affection to man as he is his creature and the work of his hands; and the saints plead it when they would be spared and when they would be saved. As Job, chap. 10:3, 'Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands?' So ver. 8 of that chapter, 'Thy hands have made me and fashioned me, and yet thou dost destroy me.' The sum and effect of these pleas is, it is strange that God should despise his own workmanship, especially a piece of such excellency as man is. Surely God is the readier to do good to man because he is the work of his hands. We see artificers, when they have made an excellent work, they are very chary and tender of it, and will not destroy it and break it in pieces. An instinct of nature teacheth us to love that which is our own by natural production; so it is an argument moving the Lord to much compassion to tell him that we are his workmanship: Isa. 64:8, 9, 'But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, thou art our potter; we are all the work of thine hands: be not wroth with us very sore, O Lord.' This raiseth in us some hope of speeding and prevailing with God. The words of the text are emphatical, made and fashioned. God hath bestowed much care upon us to make and fashion us, and therefore he will pity us and spare us: Job 14:15, 'Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee; thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.' All these places show there is an argument in it that may raise our faith when other arguments fail.

[3.] Creation implieth some hope, because God forsaketh none but those who forsake him first. He might destroy us for our original sin, as we destroy serpents of a venomous nature before they have actually done any harm. Though man hath lost his goodness, God hath not. Every one of us in person doth actually break with God before he breaketh with us: 2 Chron. 15:2, 'If ye forsake him, he will forsake you.' 1 Chron. 28:9, David telleth Solomon, 'If thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever;' he will not acknowledge thee. Take this rightly: that God giveth grace to any is his goodness; that to one more than another, is his distinguishing and elective love; that he denieth grace to any, is along of themselves, chargeable upon the creature, who abuse that common grace which, if improved, might have made them better; yea, though all deserve to be denied the grace of the Redeemer, yet it is not denied till after many wilful refusals, and by gross impenitency we turn the back upon God, when wo will not implore our Creator's bounty, but obstinately refuse it.

[4.] Seeing God is our creator, and the end of our creation is to serve God, we may the more confidently ask the grace which is necessary to enable us to serve him, that the same creating mercy which layeth on the obligation may help to discharge the debt. God is no Pharaoh, to require brick and give no straw, to appoint work and not to provide grace. Though he hath not absolutely promised to every individual person converting grace, yet he hath appointed certain means for the ungodly which they are bound to use in order to conversion; and if we consider the goodness of God, and the nature of those means, it is a great encouragement. Surely the assistances of grace are always ready: Mat. 22:5, 'Come to the feast, all things are ready.' None can tax him of backwardness. So our Saviour taxes the Jews: Mat. 23:37, 'I would have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing, but ye would not.' When did God ever fail the waiting soul, or put away the creature that sought after grace to



serve him? He is often beforehand with us, never behindhand; and we grossly and heinously forfeit all our means and helps before we lose them.

[5.] There is encouragement to faith a pari, from the resemblance and likeness that is between his making us at first and his new-making of us in Jesus Christ. It is called a creation, Eph. 2:10; Eph. 4:24, 'The new man, which after God is created,' &c.; 2 Cor. 4:6, 'God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts.' The author is the same God to whom it belongeth to create. We have the human nature from him, and can have it from no other, much less can we have the divine nature from any other but him, Ps. 51:5, or else we should not have it at all. It is not implanted in our nature, or attainable by any industry of ours: 'It is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth,' Rom. 9:16, but the immediate work of God; it is the work of his omnipotency. So dead and indisposed are we by nature to holiness and grace, that no less than creating power is required to work it in us. Besides, we were created freely, without any merit of ours; so we expect from the same goodness such saving knowledge as may change our hearts. There is this double encouragement—there is God's omnipotent power, and his free giving us his image at first, Rom. 4:17.

[6.] If we consider the manner of pleading, and the good frame of heart implied in the pleader, we may better understand the cogency of the argument; and though the argument itself doth not necessarily infer the help of grace, yet the manner of pleading showeth some preparative work of grace, and such meet the Lord in the stated order of commerce between him and his creatures, and shall receive his blessing. And then the argument will be strong in this petition, 'Give understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.' Here are many

things implied, such as are wrought by God in those to whom God will vouchsafe the grace.

(1.) An acknowledgment of the debt, that man, being God's creature, is obliged to serve him; as he was not made by himself, so not for himself; and should no more cease from intending God as an end, than he can cease from depending on God as a principle. Now, it is long ere we are brought to this. You know how the rebels are described and set out, Ps. 12:4, 'Our tongues are our own; who is lord over us?' Now God hath gained one great end with us when we are sensible of our obligation to him, and are brought to acknowledge the debt, and that love, duty, and service we owe to him. Wherefore doth God press duty upon carnal men, who are no way competent or able to perform it? Divines tell us, to demand his right, as a creditor doth of a prodigal debtor, and to make us sensible that we stand bound to God in the debt of obedience.

(2.) Here is a will to pay, or a heart set upon service and obedience; for this is a speech becoming one heartily devoted to God, 'Thy hands have made me,' &c. He would willingly return to his creator's service, and glorify him with what was made by him: I acknowledge that I am obliged, as I am the work of thine hands, to live in a faithful obedience to thee; Lord, I give up myself to this work. Mark, this is a good spirit; he doth not beg his own comfort, but ability for service, that he might so know his master's will as to do it. Now this is repentance towards God, when we are heartily willing to return to our duty more than to our comfort, Acts 2:21; there is more hope of that soul that rather seeketh obedience than comfort, and where there is a resolved will and purpose to devote ourselves to the Lord, to please him, and serve him. This was God's end in his new covenant grace, and Christ's end in redemption, to restore us to obedience as well as to favour, and put us into a capacity of service

again: Heb. 9:14, 'Purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God;' 1 Peter 2:24, 'Who his own self bare our sins in his body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, might live unto righteousness.' He died to weaken the love of sin in our hearts, and to advance the life and power of grace and righteousness.

(3.) There is implied in it a confession of impotency, that God cannot be glorified and served by him unless he be renewed and strengthened by grace; not by him as a creature till he be made a new creature, or have renewed influences of grace from him. God permitted the lapse and fall of mankind, that they may come to him as needy creatures, and take all out of his hands. Man's great error, which occasioned his fall, was that he would live alone apart from God, be sufficient to his own happiness. We greedily caught at that word, 'Ye shall be as gods,' Gen. 3:5. The meaning was, not in a blessed conformity, but a cursed self-sufficiency. Man would be his own god, desired to have his stock in his own hands, and would be no more at God's finding: Gen. 3:22, 'The man is become as one of us,' to live as an independent being. Well, then, to cure this, God would reduce him to an utter necessity, that he might bring him to an entire dependence, and might come as a beggarly indigent creature, expecting all from God, putting no confidence in his own righteousness for his justification, nor natural power and strength for sanctification: Gal. 2:19, 'I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.' The rigorous exaction of perfect obedience under the hazard of the curse of the law maketh them dead to the law; the curse of the law puts them so hard to it, that they are forced to fly to Christ to be freed from condemnation; and the spiritual nature of the law, as it is a rule of obedience, driveth them to see there is nothing in themselves tending to righteousness, and holiness, to the glory of God, without the power of his Spirit: they that 'serve in the newness of the spirit,' Rom. 7:6. God bringeth us at

last to this: Mat. 19:26, 'With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' Well, then, when we are brought to see our impotency, we are at a good pass, and lie obvious to his grace.

(4.) It implies an earnest desire after grace; and that is a good frame of heart, when not satisfied with common benefits. David was not satisfied with his natural being, but seeketh after a spiritual being. What is that he prayeth so earnestly for, but an enlightened mind and a renewed heart, and all that he might be obedient to God? Thus we are more fitted to receive grace. A conscience of our duty is a great matter in fallen man, who is turned rebel against God and a traitor to his maker, who is impatient and self-willed, and all for casting off the yoke, Ps. 2:3. Well, to have a heart set upon duty and obedience, that is the next step; the third was a sense of impotency; now this fourth a desire of grace: such the Lord hath promised to satisfy, Mat. 5:6. These open unto God, and are ready to take in his grace. Come as creatures earnestly desiring to do your creator's will, and in the best manner, and will God refuse you? Because I am thy creature, teach me to serve thee, who art my creator.

(5.) There is one thing more in this plea, a persuasion of God's goodness to his creatures. This is the very ground and reason why this plea is used: Ps. 145:9, 'The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.' There is a great deal of fatherly care and mercy to his creatures, till by their impenitency, persisted in against the means of grace, they render themselves incapable of it. The first battery which Satan laid to man's heart tended to undermine the sense of God's goodness to the creature, as if God were envious: Gen. 3:5, 'Doth not God know that in the day ye eat thereof;' as if God envied their happiness: this the devil would instil. To have good thoughts of God is a great means to reduce us and bring us back again to him. We frighten ourselves away from him by

entertaining needless jealousies of him, as if he sought our destruction, or delighted in it Surely he will not destroy a poor soul that lieth submissively at his feet, and is grieved he can no better please him and serve him. The man that had hard thoughts of God neglected his duty: Mat. 25:24, 25, 'I knew thou wast an austere master, therefore I hid my talent in a napkin;' that is the legalism and carnal bondage that is in us, which makes us full of jealousies of God, and doth mightily hinder and obstruct our duty.

Use. The use is to press you to come to God as creatures, to beg relief and help for your souls: this will be of use to us in many cases.

1. To the scrupulous, who are upon regenerating, that are not sure that the work of grace is wrought in them. You cannot call God Father by the spirit of adoption; yet own him as a creator. Come to him as one that formed you: your desire is to return to him.

2. It is of use to believers when under desertions, and God appeareth against them in a way of wrath, and all God's dispensations seem to speak nothing but wrath: yet come to him as the creator. Lord, 'we are the work of thy hands.' If you cannot plead the covenant of Abraham, which was made with believers, plead the covenant of Noah, which was made with man and all creatures: Isa. 54:9, 'For this is as the waters of Noah unto me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee;' there may be a great storm, but no deluge. When all is wrath to a poor soul, let it come to him in the covenant of Noah.

3. It will be of use in pleading for grace for your children, who are as yet, it may be, graceless and disobedient: 'Thy hands have made and fashioned them.' Desire him to renew his image upon them by the spirit of grace.

In short, the sum of all is, here is encouragement: God is good to all his creatures, especially to man, most especially to man seeking after him, and seeking after him for grace, that we and ours may obey him, and do him better service than ever yet we have done.

## SERMON LXXXII

**They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.  
—VER. 74.**

THIS verse containeth two things:—

1. The respect of the faithful to David, they that fear thee will be glad when they see me.
2. The reason of this respect, because I have hoped in thy word.

First, The respect of God's faithful servants to David, and there take notice of the character by which God's servants are described, 'They that fear thee;' then their respect to David, they 'will be glad when they see me;' which may bear a double sense.

1. How comfortable it is for the heirs of promise to see one another, or meet together! *Aspectus boni viri delectat*—the very look of a good man is delightful; it is a pleasure to converse with those that are careful to please God, and awe-ful to offend him.
2. How much affected they are with one another's mercies: 'They will be glad to see me,' who have obtained an event answerable to my hope; they shall come and look upon me as a monument and spectacle of the mercy and truth of God. This sense I prefer, though

not excluding the other. But what mercy had he received? The context seemeth to carry it for grace to obey God's commandments; that was the prayer immediately preceding, to be 'instructed and taught in God's law,' ver. 73. Now they will rejoice to see my holy behaviour, how I have profited and glorified God in that behalf. The Hebrew writers render the reason, Because then I shall be able to instruct them in those statutes, when they shall see me, their king, study the law of God. It may be expounded of any other blessing or benefit God hath given according to his hope; and I rather understand it thus: they will be glad to see him sustained, supported, and borne out in his troubles and sufferings; they will be glad when they shall see in me a notable example of the fruit of hoping in thy grace, and this hope leaveth not ashamed.

Secondly, The reason is, 'Because I hoped in thy word;' and there compare this with the first clause. God's children are described to be those that fear God, and David is described to be one that hopes in his word. Both together make up a good character and description of the Lord's people; they are such as fear God and hope in his word. They are elsewhere coupled: Ps. 33:18, 'Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, that hope in his mercy;' and Ps. 147:11, 'The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him, that hope in his mercy.' A sincere Christian is known by both these; a fear of God, or a constant obedience to his commands, and an affiance, trust, and dependence upon his mercies. Oh, how sweetly are both these coupled; a uniform sincere obedience to him, and an unshaken constant reliance on his mercy and goodness! The whole perfection of the Christian life is comprised in these two—believing God and fearing him, trusting in his mercy and fearing his name; the one maketh us careful in avoiding sin, the other diligent to follow after righteousness; the one is a bridle from sin and temptations, the other a spur to our duties. Fear is our curb, and hope our motive and encouragement; the one

respects our duty, the other our comfort; the one allayeth the other. God is so to be feared, as also to be trusted; so to be trusted, as also to be feared. And as we must not suffer our fear to degenerate into legal bondage, but hope in his mercy; so our trust must not degenerate into carnal sloth and wantonness, but so hope in his word as to fear his name. Well, then, such as both believe in God and fear to offend him are the only men who are acceptable to God and his people. God will take pleasure in them, and they take pleasure in one another: 'They that fear thee will be glad when they see me.' The first part of the character, 'They that fear thee;' the fear of God is an excellent grace, a strong bridle to hold the soul from sin; not that servile, but filial and child-like fear, that is afraid to sin against God or break his laws: Prov. 28:14, 'Blessed is the man that feareth always;' this grace should always bear rule in our hearts: 1 Peter 1:17, 'Pass the time of your sojourning in fear;' our whole course must be carried on under the conduct of this grace. Look, as the fear of man is a bridle upon the beasts to keep them from hurting man, Gen. 9:2, 'The fear and dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth;' so when the fear of God is rooted in our hearts, we are kept from disobeying and dishonouring God. Joseph is an instance of the power of this holy fear: Gen. 39:9, 'How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' Secondly, the other character, 'I hope in thy word:' a Christian liveth by faith, whereas the brutish worldling liveth by sense; the one liveth by bread only, the other by the word of God; the one is a higher sort of beast, the other is a kind of earthly angel, for he liveth with God, and dwelleth with God, and expecteth all out of God's hands: Ps. 130:5, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope;' there is his charter and inheritance, and his solace and support; he fetcheth all from the word. Both these graces, as they are very acceptable unto God, so are they most lovely and beautiful to behold by men; to be among the company of them that fear God, and hope in his word, is the most



pleasant thing to a gracious heart that can be; for while others are taken up about toys and trifles, they are taken up about the only serious matters. If Balaam was constrained to say of God's people, 'How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!' oh, how pleasant is it much more to the people of God, to see one another, to come among them that fear God, and are loath to offend him, and also that hope in his word! They can speak of the life of faith, and blessedness to come, and take off the veil of the creature, and are mainly taken up with another world; their business is not to offend God here, and hope fully to enjoy him hereafter: Rom. 1:12, 'Comforted by the mutual faith both of you and me.'

Doct. That God's mercies bestowed upon some of his children should be and are an occasion of joy and comfort to all the rest. When David was a pattern of God's gracious help and deliverance, he saith, 'They that fear thee will be glad when they see me.' I shall give you some scriptures: Ps. 142:7, 'The righteous shall compass me about, for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.' When any one of God's children are delivered, all the rest flock about him, to assist and join in thanksgiving, and to help one another to praise the Lord. So Ps. 34:2, 'My soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear thereof and be glad;' that God had preserved and reserved David still. So Ps. 64:10, 'The righteous shall be glad in the Lord and trust in him, and the upright in heart shall glory;' that is, when David was delivered, when God had showed mercy to him, then all the upright would come, and make their own profit and advantage by such an experience and deliverance.

The reasons of the point.

1. They are all members of one body, they are all called into one body, and the good and evil of one member is common to the whole.

This reason is rendered by the apostle: 1 Cor. 12:25, 26, 'But that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the rest rejoice with it;' ver. 27, 'Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.' The meaning of that place is, that the church altogether is the body of Christ, and every several person a member, and every member should be as solicitous for one another as for itself; they have the same common interests and concernments, whether of suffering or rejoicing. You know in the natural body, when the toe is trode on, the tongue crieth out, You have hurt me. We are concerned in the good or ill of our fellow-members; their joy is joy to us, and their sorrow sorrow to us: to this sense some expound that place, Heb. 13:3, 'Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them, and them that suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.' Some understand it of Christ's mystical body; when they suffer, our souls are bound with them. But I think it bears another sense there: to be 'in the body' is to be in the flesh, during which state we are liable to many vexations and miseries; and therefore, if God doth so order it that the whole body, or all the members of the church, should not be afflicted at one time, but whilst some are afflicted others are free, and when we are not involved by passion there may be compassion. While we are in the body we are obnoxious to the same adversities, and should pity and comfort them as ourselves, and use all means to do them good; but if it be not the truth of the place, yet it is a truth, the more any partake of the spiritual life the stronger is spiritual sympathy: they 'rejoice with them that rejoice, and mourn with them that mourn,' Rom 12:15; are bound with them that are in bonds, and enlarged with them that are enlarged. One part of us is in bonds when they are in bonds, one part of us is enlarged when they are enlarged; still we should have common interests and affections with our brethren; and for those that fear God to be selfish and senseless of the condition of

others, it is a kind of self-excommunication, or an implicit renouncing the body: because we are in the body, we should be affected as they are. Look, as there was the same spirit in Ezekiel's vision in the living creatures and the wheels, I say the same spirit was in both; when one moved the other moved: so there is the same spirit in Christ's mystical body. We should be affected as they are; it is a kind of depriving ourselves of the privileges of the mystical body if we are not.

2. It is for the honour and glory of God; God hath most glory when praised by many. Therefore they flock together, 2 Cor. 1:11, 'That for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many in our behalf.' God loveth to have us act with joint consent both in prayer and praise, because he would interest us in one another's mercies and comforts, and so knit our hearts together in more holy love. Prayers made by many are mighty with God—when we come to God with many supplicants, make up a great party to besiege heaven: so praises rendered by many are the more honourable to God, and acceptable with him: 2 Cor. 4:15, 'That the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God.' When many are engaged, and many are affected with it, God's glory is the more diffused, the revenue of the crown of heaven increased. One string maketh no music; when there are many, and all in tune, there is harmony. There are three things in it—many righteous persons, and joining together with one spirit in the same work, then the Lord hath more honour than he could have in a single person. In heaven God is praised in concert; we are brought all together, that we may make one body and congregation to laud, and praise, and serve God for evermore: so here, they that fear God and hope in his mercy, they often flock together to congratulate and join in thanksgiving for the mercies which any one of them hath received. When Christ was born there was a whole concert of angels: Luke

2:13, 'A multitude of the heavenly host praising God, saying, Glory to God on high, on earth peace, good-will towards men.' It is a kind of heaven upon earth when all the people of God are led by one spirit to praise and glorify God: a closet prayer or thanksgiving is not so honourable as that of the congregation.

3. It is for the profit and comfort of all; partly because by this means they come to understand one another's experiences for their mutual support and edification. What God is to one that feareth him, he is to all that fear him sincerely, affected to them all; therefore the goodness of God to one believer bringeth joy and comfort to all the rest. They are spectacles and monuments of mercy for the saints to look upon, that they may learn thereby to depend upon God. Look, as in converting Paul, a persecutor, the apostle saith, 1 Tim. 1:16, 'Christ did show forth all long-suffering in me, for a pattern to them that should after believe on him,' in pardoning so great a sinner, in saving such a distressed soul, to invite others to Christ; so in all other cases, when God delivereth one, he inviteth others to the same hope; they are precedents of mercy to the rest, as David implieth here they would be encouraged by his example cheerfully to expect the same deliverance from God. In the example of one sufferer there is a pawn given to all the rest; it is for the edification and encouragement of others to be acquainted with our experiences of God's mercy to us: Ps. 66:16, 'Come near, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul;' all are concerned, for they have the same necessities, have interest in the same God, the same promises, the same mediator, and the same covenant; so that to be acquainted with the passages of divine providence towards others is a great help to teach us more of God, that we may learn to magnify his power. And partly by this means their hearts are more knit to one another in spiritual love; when they pray for one another as for their own souls, and rejoice as in their own deliverance, it maintaineth unity among

us. God loveth to pleasure many of his children at once, and to interest them in the same mercy; and so we receive the mercy others intercede for, and give thanks for it. Love in the spirit is seen in praying and praising God for one another. And partly, too, because it doth oblige us to more frequent acts of worship; we can never want an errand to the throne of grace, or an opportunity of worship for ourselves or others, to pray with them, or to offer praise with them and for them.

4. Joy is communicative; mourning apart is good: Peter 'went out and wept bitterly,' Mat. 26:75. And Jeremiah saith, when he would weep for the people, Jer. 13:17, 'My soul shall weep in secret places for your pride;' and Zech. 12:12, 13, 'They shall mourn every family apart, the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart,' &c. Sorrow affecteth solitude and retiredness, where no eye seeth but God's; but joy doth best in company and in consort, as the woman called her neighbours to rejoice with her, Luke 15, because she had found the lost groat. So we must stir up one another to rejoice in God. Besides, mercies may be told to many, but not our griefs; therefore the godly will be flocking together to help them in praises as well as prayers. It is not only commendable to beg their help in prayer, but we should call upon them to praise God with us: Ps. 34:3, 'O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.' We are bound to be witnesses of one another's thankfulness, and to assist one another in the praises of God.

Use. Information of five things:—

1. It showeth us the lawfulness, yea, the conveniency, yea, in some sort, the necessity, of public thanksgiving for private mercies. It is lawful; we read of paying vows in the great congregation, Ps. 22:22, 40:9. It is highly convenient and useful, partly that the people of God

may flock together, and make a crown of praise for God: Ps. 22:3, 'He inhabiteth the praises of Israel;' he delighteth to be in the midst of his people when they praise him. And partly that by the thankfulness of others we may be quickened to remember our own mercies, as one bird sets all the flock a-chirping. And partly that we may quicken others by our help; and partly to show a Christ-like love to them, by being affected with their miseries, and rejoicing in their mercies. Well, these things should quicken us to join with others in their thanksgiving for their private mercies, so to raise a spiritual affection in us in the performance of those duties. And as it is lawful, so it is necessary; other men's mercies may be our mercies as well as theirs; you are concerned in the mercy if you have prayed for it. We are to love God for hearing our prayers for others as well as ourselves. Eli gave thanks and solemnly worshipped God for Hannah's sake, because he had before prayed for her, and therefore praised God for her, who had heard his prayers in her behalf: compare 1 Sam. 1:28. When Hannah told him what the Lord had done, Eli falls a worshipping the Lord; he had prayed for her before in ver. 7, 'The Lord grant thee thy petition which thou askest of him.' Every answer of prayer is a new proof or fresh experience of God's love and special respect to us; it is a sign that God regardeth us and is mindful of us, nay, it is a sign of God's favour, when he will not only hear us for ourselves, but for others also. If a man come to a king, he will say, If you had asked for yourself I would have granted you; it is a special honour to intercede for others, which God putteth upon his choice servants: Gen. 20:7, 'Abraham shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live;' Job 42:8, 'My servant Job shall pray for you, and him will I accept.' God will hear his servants for others when he will not hear them for themselves. If our prayers had returned into our own bosoms, as David's for his enemies, Ps. 35:13; if God as an answer had given you only the comfort of the discharge of your duty: Luke 10:6, 'If they be not worthy, your peace shall return to you again;'

this were matter of praise, much more now the mercy is obtained. All this is spoken to show that there should be more life and spiritual affection in those duties which we perform in the behalf of others.

2. It informeth us of the excellency of communion of saints; there is such a fellowship and communion between all the members of Christ's mystical body, that they mourn together, and rejoice together; the grace vouchsafed to one is cause of rejoicing to all the rest; they drive on a joint trade for heaven, and rejoice in one another's comforts as if they were their own, in one another's gifts and graces as if they were their own, in one another's supports and deliverances as if they were their own. We read of joy in heaven at the conversion of sinners; they rejoice at our welfare, praising and lauding God; so there is also joy on earth when any spiritual benefit is imparted; if any be gotten to a godlike nature, they give thanks to God: 'They that fear thee will be glad when they see me;' Acts 4:32, 'The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul;' there was a great multitude, many thousand souls. Here was the primitive simplicity, the Christians were so united as if they had but one heart and soul among them; and it was a usual saying, *Aspice ut se mutuo diligunt Christiani*—see how the Christians love one another. It was otherwise afterwards; no wild beasts are so fierce to one another as one Christian has been to another. Surely it concerneth all that fear God and hope in his word to be of one heart and of one mind as much as may be. Lesser differences should not make void this Christ-like love. The bonds of Christ's communion are the essentials of religion, if they fear God and hope in his word. Though Christians may be distinguished by several denominations, yet an angry brother cannot cast us out of our Father's family. We set up walls of partition between Christian and Christian, but God will not measure his fold by our enclosure: *Lingua Petiliani non est ventilabrum Christi*—it is well Petilian's tongue is not Christ's fan.

Surely when we meet with our everlasting companions they should be dear to us, and for some private differences we should not omit the necessary duties of Christianity. This mutual and cordial respect we should have for one another.

3. It informs us of the mischief and evil of a private spirit, which doth not take notice of the favours of God done to others, nor is affected with others' mercies. Most men 'seek their own things,' Phil. 2:21. Nature is sensible of nothing but natural bonds, the lines of its communication are too narrow, either their own flesh, the smart and ease of their own bodies, or their own kindred. Now, the saints have a more diffusive love, they can strive with God earnestly in prayer for those whose face they never saw in the flesh, Col. 2, and can be thankful for their mercies as far as they come to their notice. All Christians are not only of the same kind, but of the same body; though they have not a private benefit by the mercy, yet they can heartily praise God for it; the angels praise God for us, Luke 2, for his good-will to men, they are only spectators, not the parties interested. When the Lord set afoot that blessed design, it was good-will to men, yet the multitude of the heavenly host rejoiced and praised God. We had both honour and benefit by Christ's incarnation. So to praise God for the good of others argueth a good spirit like the angels, but to envy the good of another and be grieved thereat is devilish, like the spirit of the devil. In heaven we shall not only rejoice in our own, but in one another's salvation, because there shall be no envy, no privateness of affection. Why are we so selfish and senseless now? 'Who is afflicted and I mourn not?' said Paul. Now to those that mourned for others' calamity, their deliverance is a kind of relief. Will you lose your evidence of being in the body for want of rejoicing in their mercies, gifts, and deliverances?



4. It informeth us—(1.) How much it concerneth us to preserve an interest in the hearts of God's people, and to behave ourselves so that they that fear God may be glad of our mercies, and bless God for them. The communion of saints is a sweet thing; we must not forfeit this privilege by our inordinate walking, pride, contention, sourness and bitterness of spirit, unusefulness to the church, as having an interest divided from the church. Those whose mercies are apprehended as a public benefit are the strictly conscientious, those that fear God and hope in his word, who labour to keep themselves from the snares of the present world, and look for the happiness of the world to come; the one is the fruit of fearing God, the other of hoping in his word—the tender conscience and the heavenly-minded Christian. Partly because they are our everlasting companions; we shall live for ever with them: they were chosen from all eternity to be heirs of the same grace together with us; therefore it is sweet to praise God for any good that befalleth them: Ps. 66:16, 'Come near, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul;' Ps. 22:22, 'I will declare thy name unto my brethren.' But when a man walketh questionably, he obscureth the life of God in himself, or, like a string that is out of tune, spoileth the harmony. The saints may mourn for the wicked, but they cannot so easily bring their hearts to rejoice with them; they may give thanks for their mercies, it is true, 1 Tim. 2:1, 2, but not with that cheerfulness, with that sense. The conscience of our duty engageth us to bless God that he hath spared them, reprieved them a little longer, given them more time to repent, and correct their errors; but it is very sweet to join with them who are our brethren and companions, not only now, but to all eternity. And partly because our mercies proceed from the covenant, upon which is built all our hope and all our desire, and so we are edified by the support and help which God affordeth to them that fear him and hope in his word; thereby we see that they that wait long wait not in vain on the word of God's promise, and so learn to

wait with patience ourselves, because those who depended on his promised assistance are then answered and supported; yea, it is a ground of hope to all that so many will be gratified by the deliverance of one, when we so work for the deliverance of one that at length both he and others will have cause to be glad. (2.) Another thing is, it doth encourage others' prayers and praises for us, when we are useful and profitable, and bring in that supply to the body which may be justly expected from us according to the measure of that part which we sustain in the body. Look, as in the natural body the blood and the life passeth to and fro, there is a giving and receiving between all the members that live in the communion of it, so mutual obligations pass between the children of God. Many are interested in their mercies that are of use in the church: Rom. 5:7, 'For a good man some would even dare to die,' such as David or Paul; yet this is no discouragement to the meanest or weakest, for they have their honour and use: 'When ye fail they shall receive you,' Luke 16:9; they have their ministry and service: 'Now the head cannot say to the foot, I have no need of thee,' 1 Cor. 12:21. (3.) The humble and the meek, for the proud procure their own just dislike and disappointment. Solomon telleth us, 'Only by pride cometh contention,' Prov. 13:10. Pride is the great impediment and let to all Christian offices. We cannot so heartily pray for one another, nor praise God for one another, when pride and contention prevaieth. We should overcome this stomach and spleen: 'Bless them that curse you;' as David fasted for his enemies when they sought his life, Ps. 35:12. You should not lay this stumbling-block in the way of their duty; it is a great discouragement.

5. It informeth us how comfortable and how pleasant the converse and conference of godly persons is, and how much it excelleth the merriest meetings of the carnal. The special love which the godly have to one another doth exceedingly sweeten their converse, for the

very presence of those we most dearly love is a pleasure to us to see, but much more their holy conference. When Christians meet together and find their own persuasions of the love, power, mercy and wisdom of God backed with the experience and testimony of others, it is a mutual strength and support to us; and therefore the apostle saith, Rom 1:12, 'That I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith of you and me.' When we converse with them that can speak, not by hearsay only, but by experience, of the power of the blood of Christ in purifying their consciences, and his Spirit to sanctify their hearts, it is a mighty prop: 2 Cor. 1:4, 'And that we may comfort others with the comforts wherewith we are comforted of God.' Report of a report is a cold thing, not valued, but a report of what we witness and experience ourselves comes warmly upon our hearts. Nay, many times it may fall out that people of less knowledge, but more feeling and experience, may abundantly confirm the more knowing, and excite them to a greater mindfulness of God and heavenly things. But alas! the meetings of carnal persons, what are they to this? It may be they will fill your ears with stories of hawking and hunting, the best wine and delicious meats, of honours and purchases in the world, all which tend but to increase the gust of the flesh, and the carnal savour which is baneful to us; or else with idle stories, the clatter of vanity, which are impertinent to our great end; or else about the world, thriving in the world: nothing about those high and excellent and necessary things of the grace of God in Christ, and the truth of the promises, and the glory of the world to come: Ps. 37:30, 31, 'The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment: the law of God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide;' and 'The mouth of the righteous is as choice silver;' they have a sense of better things. But alas! from others you hear nothing but unsavoury vanity, which is as different from the discourse of the children of God as the melody of a bird from the grunting of a hog or swine.

## SERMON LXXXIII

**I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.—VER. 75.**

WE have need all to prepare for afflictions, for we are to take up our cross daily. Now, to help you to a right carriage under them, these words, well considered, will be of some use to you; they are the confession of a humble soul abundantly satisfied with God's dispensations. In them observe:—

1. A general truth or point of doctrine concerning the equity of God's judgments, thy judgments, O Lord, are right.
2. A particular application or accommodation of this truth to David's case and person, in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.
3. His sure and firm persuasion of both, I know. Let us explain these branches and parts of the text as they are laid forth.

1. The general truth, the Lord's judgments are right. In which proposition there is the subject and the predicate. The subject or things spoken are the Lord's judgments. The word is often put in this psalm and elsewhere for God's statutes, or precepts, or righteous laws; and in this sense some take it here, and make out the sense thus: 'Lord, I know that thy judgments,' viz., thy precepts, are holy, just, and good; and this persuasion is not lessened in me, though thou hast sharply afflicted me: I have as great a value and esteem for thy word as ever. But rather, by the Lord's judgments are meant the passages of his providence, as the latter clause showeth; those

judicial dispensations whereby he doth punish the wicked, or correct his children. And let it not seem strange that the troubles and afflictions of the godly should be called judgments; for though there be no vindictive wrath in them, yet they are called so upon a double reason: partly because they are acts of God's holy justice, correcting and humbling his people for sin, according to the sentence of his word. Thus it is said, 1 Peter 4:17, that 'judgment shall begin at the house of God;' where the trials and troubles of the godly are plainly called judgments. And partly because the Lord judiciously measureth and directeth them as the state of his children requireth and their strength will bear. So it is said, Jer. 10:24, 'Correct me, but in judgment.' The first notion implieth God's justice, the second his wisdom. And mark, it is said distinctly in the text, 'Thy judgments, O Lord.' His enemies might unjustly persecute him, but 'thy judgments;' so far as the Lord hath a hand in it, all was just and right: this is the subject or thing spoken of. Secondly, Here is the predicate, or what is said of it, 'are right;' the Hebrew, tsedec; the Septuagint, ὅτι δικαιοσύνη τὰ κρίματα σου, are righteousness itself; thy dispensations are wholly made up of perfect justice; how smart soever they be, they are right as to the cause, right as to the measure, right as to the end. The first of these respects concerneth God's justice, the two other his wisdom. First, Right as to the cause; they never exceed the value of their impulsive: Job 34:23, 'He will not lay upon man more than is right, that he should enter into judgment with him.' God never afflicteth his people above their desert, nor gives any just occasion to commence a suit against his providence. Secondly, Right as to the measure, not above the strength of the patient. In his own people's afflictions it is so: Isa. 27:8, 'In measure when it shooteth forth thou wilt debate it; he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind.' God dealeth with his own with much moderation, meting out their sufferings in due proportion. So Jer. 30:11, 'I will correct thee in measure.' Thirdly, Right as to their end

and use. God knoweth how to strike in the right vein, and to suit his providence to the purpose for which it is appointed: the kind of the affliction is to be considered as well as the measure. The Lord chooseth that rod which is most likely to do his work. Paul had a thorn in the flesh, that he might not be exalted above measure, 2 Cor. 12:7. He was a man inured to dangers and troubles from without, these were familiar to him, therefore he could the better bear them; but God would humble him by some pain in the flesh, which should sit near and close.

2. The particular accommodation of it to David, 'In faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.' Pray mark, in the general case he observeth justice; in his own, faithfulness. The book called Midrash Tillim referreth these words to David's flight from Absalom, when he went to Mount Olivet weeping; it was an ill time then with David, he had no security for his life; being driven from his house and home, 'He went up Mount Olivet, going and weeping,' 2 Sam. 15:30. Then, when so great and sore trouble was upon him, then he saith, 'I know that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.' Mark the emphasis; he doth not barely acknowledge that God was faithful, though, or notwithstanding he had afflicted him, but faithful in sending them. Affliction and trouble are not only consistent with God's love plighted in the covenant of grace, but they are parts and branches of the new covenant administration. God is not only faithful notwithstanding afflictions, but faithful in sending them. There is a difference between these two; the one is like an exception to the rule, *quæ firmat regulam in non exceptis*; the other makes it a part of the rule. God cannot be faithful without doing all things that tend to our good and eternal welfare: the conduct of his providence is one part of the covenant engagement: as to pardon our sins, and sanctify us, and give us glory at the last, so to suit his providence as our need and profit requireth in the way to heaven. It is an act of his sovereign

mercy, which he hath promised to his people, to use such discipline as conduceth to their safety. In short, the cross is not only an exception to the grace of the covenant, but a part of the grace of the covenant. The meaning is, God is obliged in point of fidelity to send sharp afflictions: Ps. 89:32, 'I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.' Sharp rods and sore stripes not only may stand and be reconciled with God's loving-kindness and truth, but they are effects and expressions of it; it is a part of that transaction, viz., his covenant love.

3. The third thing to be explained is his sense of these truths, 'I know.' Knowing implies clearness of apprehension and firmness of persuasion; so that, I know, is I fully understand, or else, I am confident or well assured of this truth. But from whence had David his knowledge? how knew he all God's judgments to be right? Not from the flesh, or from natural sense. No; the flesh is importunate to be pleased, will persuade us to the contrary. If we consult only with natural sense, we shall never believe that, when God is hacking and hewing at us, he intendeth our good and benefit, and that when sore judgments are upon us, his end is not to destroy, but to save, to mortify the sin, and save the person. Sense will teach us no such thing, but will surely misinterpret and misexpound the Lord's dealings; for the peace of God is a riddle to a natural heart, Phil. 4:7. Whence then had David his knowledge? Partly from the word of God, and partly from his own observation and particular experience.

[1.] From the word of God; for it is a maxim of faith that God can do no wrong, that 'he is righteous in all his ways, and just in all his works,' Ps. 145:17; and again, Deut. 32:4, 'He is the rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment and truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he.' These are undeniable truths revealed in the word of God, and must satisfy us, whatsoever sense saith to the

contrary. The causes and end of God's particular judgments are sometimes secret, but they are always just: Ps. 97:2, 'Clouds and darkness are round about him, but righteousness and truth are the habitation of his throne.' Therefore when we see not the reason of God's particular dispensations, we must believe the righteousness and goodness of them.

[2.] David knew by his own observation and particular experience: he had much studied his own heart, and considered his own ill-deservings and soul-distempers, and therefore saw the Lord's discipline was necessary for him. We should better understand God's work, and sooner justify him both in point of justice and faithfulness, if we did use more observation, and did consider what need and profit there is of affliction: 'Tribulation worketh experience,' Rom. 5:4, 5. We see what need there was of affliction, and how seasonable the Lord's work was. This is a more sensible way of knowledge than the former. Faith is a surer ground, but spiritual observation hath its benefit. Natural conscience doth represent our guilt, but experience showeth God's faithfulness, how seasonably God took us in our month, and suited his providence to our present condition.

Doct. That it would much quiet the minds of the people of God about all the sad dispensations of his providence, if they would seriously consider the justice and faithfulness of them.

So did David silence all his murmurings when the hand of God was sore upon him; so should we silence all our murmuring, all our suspicions of God's dealing, when wo are under the cross. I know the Lord doth nothing unjust, but is faithful; he will not retract his covenant love, and I know his covenant love binds him to lay on us seasonable affliction and correction. I shall do two things:—

First, Illustrate the point by some considerations.



Secondly, Show that there is much of justice and faithfulness in all the troubles and afflictions of God's people.

Consid. 1. We are not only to grant in the general that God's judgments are right, but that he hath in faithfulness afflicted us. So doth David, when the stroke of God was heavy upon himself. Many will assert the righteousness of God when they speak to others in their afflictions, but do not indeed justify him in the afflictions that come upon themselves. We are hasty to censure, but backward to humble our own souls before God: they will give him the praise of his justice when he chasteneth others, but think God dealeth harshly and rigorously with them when his scourge is upon their own backs. Such a difference is there between knowledge speculative and experimental, between that conscience which we have in others' concernments, and that knowledge which self-love giveth us in our own. David here doth not only own the general truth, but sees God's faithfulness when the stroke lighted upon himself. So Job 4:3–5, you shall see this was objected to Job, that he could comfort others, but now the hand of God was upon him, his soul fainted. They that stand upon the shore may easily say to those that are in the midst of the waves and conflicting for life or death, Sail thus. When we are well, we give counsel to the sick; but if we were so, how would we take it ourselves? So can we say patiently, All is just, and keep silence to God?

Consid. 2. We must not only grant this truth, that God is faithful, when at ease, but when under the sharpest and smartest discipline. We use to praise God in prosperity, but we should bless him also when he seemeth to deal hardly with us; speak good of God when under the rod. When we view a cross at a distance, or in the doctrinal contemplation of this truth, we say that God may exercise us with the greatest evil, and that we need these methods to bring us to heaven;

but when afflictions come thick, and near, and close, and we are deprived of our nearest and dearest comforts, credit, liberty, health, life, children, then we have other thoughts. It is more easy to speak of trouble than to bear it. We read of Jesus Christ that he learned by experience, Heb. 5:8. He had an actual experience by the things he suffered; and he saith, 'Now is my soul troubled,' John 12:27. There is a vast difference between the most exact apprehension in the judgment, and the experimental feeling of it in the senses: the one may be without so much vexation as the other will produce. Though Christ understood perfectly what his sufferings should be, and had resolved upon them, yet when he came to feel it, his very righteous soul was under perplexity, as a glass of pure water may be tossed and shaken. Affliction is another thing to present sense and feeling than it is to guess and imagination. Much more doth it hold good in us, for we have not such a perfect foresight of sufferings as Christ had. We suppose they may be avoided, or shifted off one way or other. I speak this that we may not depend upon our present resolutions when out of trouble, but labour to be more prepared than usually we are, that when trouble cometh upon us, we may glorify God.

Consid. 3. This acknowledgment must be the real language of our hearts, and not by word of mouth only: thus we must give unto God the praise of his truth and righteousness. We tip our tongues with good words, and learn such modesty in our language, as to say God is just, and do not rave against his providence in wild and bold speeches; but justice and faithfulness must be acknowledged not with the tongue so much as with the heart. It is the language of the heart which God looketh after, when the soul keepeth silence to God, and a due and suitable impression is left upon it of his justice, by a meek and humble submission: Micah 7:9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, for I have sinned against him.' When God is angry, and chastiseth for sin, we must stoop humbly under his afflicting hand,

bear it patiently and submissively, for the rod is dipped in our own guilt; that stoppeth our mouths and checketh repinings. So, seeing his faithfulness, it maketh us 'accept the punishment of our iniquities,' Lev. 26:41, that is, yield to it, as a man would to a bitter potion, or a medicinal preparative for his health; so to afflict is a means to get rid of sin, which would be the bane of the soul.

Consid. 4. It is not enough to acknowledge justice, but we must also acknowledge faithfulness; not only his just severity in the punishments of the wicked, but his fidelity and love in the correction of his children: it is not enough that we justify God, and forbear to murmur against his afflicting us, but we must see his love and faithfulness in it, and that he performeth his covenant love. His wisdom and justice, that suppresseth murmurings; his love and faithfulness, that giveth hope, and comfort, and courage: the one concerneth the honour of God, he righteth himself by his just judgments; the other concerneth our benefit and eternal welfare. Faithfulness is to us, and for our good. Pharaoh could own justice: Exod. 9:27, 'The Lord is righteous, but I and my people are wicked.' But it is a higher thing to own faithfulness; that supposeth faith, as the other doth conviction. Guilt will sooner fly in our faces, and extort from us an acknowledgment of God's justice, than we can own the grace of the new covenant, especially when carnal sense and smart seemeth to speak the contrary. The sight of his justice checketh murmurings, the sight of his faithfulness fainting and discouragement. God's dispensations are just with respect to the sentence of the law, faithful with respect to the promises of the gospel. In short, the cause of all affliction is sin, therefore justice must be acknowledged; their end is repentance, and therefore faithfulness: the end is not destruction and ruin, so they might be acts of justice, as upon the wicked; but that we may be fit to receive

the promises, such to whom God will perform the promise of eternal life, and so acts of faithfulness.

Consid. 5. Faith must fix this as a ground not once to be questioned, much less to be doubted of or denied, that God is just, upright, and faithful in all his dealings, though weak man be not able to conceive the reasons of them. His justice may be dark, as when he permitteth us to the will of wicked men, who afflict us without a cause, and lay on without any mercy and pity, and God seemeth to befriend their cause, at least doth not restrain them, nor give check to their fury. We are apt to be tempted to thoughts of rigour and injustice in God's dispensations, but we must consider not men's dealing, but God's. It is unjust as to men, but we have no cause to be angry with God, and complain of God, as if he did not do right. No; though we do not see the reason of it, yet it is just. 'God's judgments are a great deep.' We should believe the righteousness and goodness of God in the general, Ps. 36:7, before we can find it out. The people of God have maintained their principle, when they have been puzzled and embrangled in interpreting God's providence: Jer. 12:1, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee;' and Ps. 73:1, 'Yet God is good to Israel.' In all such cases it is best to acknowledge our own ignorance, and rather accuse ourselves of blindness than God of injustice. This is a fixed truth, that God is righteous, though we cannot so clearly make it out. And sometimes we are tempted to doubt of his fidelity and truth, when we feel nothing but the smart of the rod: the benefit is future, not an object of sense, but faith; and it must be evident to faith before it is evident to feeling: Heb. 12:11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; but afterwards it bringeth the quiet fruit of righteousness.' When all is sharp and hard to sense, faith can see all is for our profit, for our good. Here is nothing repugnant to God's truth, nothing but what is necessary to make good his truth. Faith must determine it to be,

when sense will not find it so. God's works are misexpounded when we go altogether by present sense, whether internal or external: many times we know not what God is about to do, as Christ told Peter: John 13:7, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.' That which the Lord is doing tendeth not to ruin and wrath, though through our ignorance and mistake we so interpret it. Alas! no wonder we are in the dark, when we so judge of his work, who is 'wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working;' who will not always satisfy our sense and curiosity, but chooseth such a way as will most suit his intent. But ever in all such cases faith must determine that God is just and faithful, and will cast all things for the best, though we see it not; we must assent by faith, when we cannot find it by sense internal or external: 'I know in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.'

Secondly, I am to show you, and to prove to you, that there is much of justice and faithfulness to be observed in all the afflictions which come upon us.

First, There is much of justice in all God's judgments. I prove it:—

1. From God's nature: Ps. 119:137, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments;' his work is as his being is, holy and righteous; all his providences carry a condecency and becomingness with his nature. We presume it of a righteous man that he will do righteous things; and shall not we believe so of the holy God? We cannot be infallibly persuaded of a righteous man, for a righteous man may leave his righteousness, because the creature is mutable; and the most righteous and innocent man hath mixed principles, and his rule is without him, and sometimes he may hit it, and sometimes swerve from it: but God is unchangeable, his will and nature is the supreme reason and measure of all things; his acts are accordingly,

he cannot err. A carpenter who hath a line in his hand may chop right or miss; but if we could suppose a carpenter whose hand was his rule, he would always hit right. We may be confident the judge of all the earth will do right; his righteousness and the righteousness of men differ infinitely more than a candle differeth from the sun: Zeph. 3:5, 'The righteous God in the midst of thee will do no iniquity.' God will not, yea, he cannot; it is contrary to his nature. Abraham might seek to wriggle out of danger by a shift, Noah might fall into drunkenness, Lot pollute himself with incest, Moses trip in his faith, David destroy his innocent servant Uriah, Jonah fall into fear and rash anger, the angels may depart from their rule, if the divine goodness should cease to support them for a moment; but it is impossible that God, who is holiness and righteousness itself, can err and fail in any of his actions.

2. God never afflicteth or bringeth on judgment without a cause: 'For this cause many are sick,' 1 Cor. 11:30; there is something done on the creature's part before punishment is inflicted. If we consider God as the Lord dispensing grace, he acts sovereignly, and according to his own will and pleasure: 'Even so, Father, because it pleaseth thee,' Mat. 11:27, for he may do with his own as he pleaseth; it is no wrong to show his grace to some, and pass by others. But if we consider God as a judge, he never punisheth without a foregoing cause on the creature's part. God, who is arbitrary in his gifts, is not arbitrary in his judgments: there is a rule of commerce between him and his creatures, stated and set forth, and allowed and appointed by him, and consented unto by us: the directive and counselling part is the rule of our obedience, and the sanction or comminatory part is the rule of his judicial process. In acts of grace, and in dispensing with the violations of his law, he sometimes maketh use of his prerogative, but not in punishing, there he keepeth to his law; and therefore it is that the saints do give him the honour of his justice: Dan. 9:7, 'O

Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face; for we have sinned, and done wickedly, and have rebelled in departing from thy precepts;' Neh. 9:33, 'Thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly:' all our trouble is the penalty of his broken law justly inflicted on us. In short, the breach is first on our part, there is some violation of his law or contempt of his grace; but God loveth us first, there he hath the precedency; he beginneth in all acts of grace, but the reason of his judicial dispensations is first with us. We are first in the offence, and provide fuel for his wrath before it break out upon us.

3. When there is cause given, God doth not presently take it, but giveth sinners time in his process against them, and doth not presently execute the sentence of his word till they are found incorrigible. He giveth them warning before he striketh; he wooeth and soliciteth by many kind messages to return to their duty, and speaketh to them sometimes in the rough, sometimes in the still voice: 'He bringeth his judgment to light every morning,' as the prophet speaketh, Zeph. 3:5; he doth so delight in mercy, and is so tender of the workmanship of his hands, especially his own people, that he never proceedeth to severity as long as there is some way unessayed to reclaim them, not yet made use of. As one that would open a door, and knows not the key; he tries key after key, one dispensation after another; he doth not take the sinner at first word, but followeth him with frequent warnings of his danger, with offers of advantage if he return; yea, at last he is loath to give them up to severe judgments, even then when he can scarce without imputation to his holiness forbear any longer: Hosea 11:8, 'How shall I give thee up? I am God, and not man.' Such expostulations and speeches are very frequent in the prophets; and all these speeches do abundantly justify God when he judgeth: he would fain hold off the extremity of

judgments deserved by them; the Lord maketh a stand, and would fain be prevented before he proceedeth to his strange work.

4. The judgments inflicted are always short of the cause, surely they never exceed the value of it: Ezra 9:13, 'Thou hast punished us less than we have deserved.' God doth not exact the whole debt of sinners which they owe to his justice. It was a heavy stroke that then lighted upon Jerusalem. Was their wound but a scratch, or affliction little? Doleful and sad ruin was brought upon that place, the city and the temple burnt to ashes, the people carried captive to a strange land; yet Thou hast punished us less than we have deserved.' They were in Babylon, they might have been in hell; our reward is always more than our desert, but our punishment is always less than our desert. We count it a favour if forfeiture of life be punished with banishment, or if a sentence of banishment be commuted into a fine, or the fine be mitigated and brought lower; and shall we think God dealeth rigorously with us? When he layeth on some heavy cross, he might have cast us into hell, and laid his hand upon us for ever. See Job 11:6, 'O know, therefore, that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.' We have low thoughts of sin, and therefore have grievous apprehensions of God's judgments. We do but sip of the cup, when God might make us drink of the dregs of it.

Secondly, I am to prove that the godly may discern much of faithfulness in their afflictions; this will appear to you by these considerations:—

1. In the covenant of grace God hath promised to bestow upon his people real and principal mercies; these are promised absolutely, other things conditionally. God doth not break his covenant if he doth not give us temporal happiness, because that is not absolutely promised, but only so far forth as it may be good for us; but eternal



life is promised without any such exception unto the heirs of promise. Eternal promises and threatenings, being of things absolutely good or evil, are therefore absolute and peremptory; the righteous shall not fail of the reward, nor the wicked escape the punishment; but temporal promises and threatenings being of things not simply good or evil, are reserved to be dispensed according to God's wisdom and good pleasure, in reference and subordination to eternal happiness. It is true it is said, 1 Tim. 4:8, that 'godliness hath the promise of this life, and that which is to come;' but with this reference, that the less gives place to the greater; if the promises of this life may hinder us in looking after the promises of the life to come, God may take the liberty of the cross, and withhold these things, and disappoint us of our worldly hope. A man lying under the guilt of sin may many times enjoy worldly comforts to the envy of God's children, and one of God's children may be greatly afflicted and distressed in the world, for in all these dispensations God looketh to his end, which is to make us eternally happy.

2. This being God's end, he is obliged in point of fidelity to use all the means that conduce thereunto, that he may attain his eternal purpose in bringing his holy ones to glory: Rom. 8:28, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' Good! what good? It may be temporal, so it falls out sometimes a man's temporal good is promoted by his temporal loss: Gen. 50:20, 'Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good;' they sold their brother a slave, but God meant him to be a great potentate in Egypt. It may be spiritual good: Ps. 119:71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.' But, to be sure, eternal good, to bring about his eternal purpose of making them everlastingly happy. And in this sense the apostle saith, 'All things are yours,' 1 Cor. 3:22. Ordinances, providences, life, death, all dispensed with a respect to their final happiness or eternal benefit; not only ordinances to work internal grace, but providences

as an external help and means; for God having set his end, he will prosecute it congruously, and as it may agree with man's nature, by external providences as well as internal grace. See Ps. 125:3, 'The rod of the wicked shall not always rest upon the back of the righteous.' God hath power enough to give them grace to bear it, though the rod had continued; and can keep his people from iniquity, though the rod be upon them; but he considereth the imbecility of man's nature, which is apt to tire under long afflictions, and therefore not only giveth more grace, but takes off the temptation. He could humble Paul without a thorn in the flesh, 2 Cor. 12:7, but he will use a congruous means.

3. Among these means, afflictions, yea, sharp afflictions, are some of those things which our need and profit requireth; they are needful to weaken and mortify sin: Isa. 27:9, 'By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged;' to increase and quicken grace: Heb. 12:10, 'But he chasteneth us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' Without this discipline we should forget God and ourselves; therefore, that we may return to God, he afflicts us: Hosea 5:15, 'In their afflictions they will seek me early;' and come to ourselves: Luke 15:17, the prodigal 'came to himself.' Afflictions are necessary for us upon the former suppositions, namely, that God hath engaged himself to perfect grace where it is begun, and to use all means which may conduce to our eternal welfare, that we may not miscarry and come short of our great hopes: 1 Cor. 11:32, 'When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.' The carnal reprobate world are left to a looser and larger discipline. Brambles are not pruned when vines are. New creatures require a more close inspection than others do. Self-confidence and spiritual security are apt to grow upon them; therefore, to mortify our self-confidence, to awaken us out of spiritual sleep, we need to be afflicted, and also to quicken and rouse

up a spirit of prayer. We grow cold and flat, and ask mercies for form's sake: Isa. 26:16, 'Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.' And that we may be quickened to a greater mindfulness of heavenly things. The best of us, when we get a carnal pillow under our heads, are apt to sleep secure. God will not let us alone to our ruin, but afflicts us that we may be refined from the dregs of the flesh, and that our gust and relish of heavenly things may be recovered, and that we may be quickened to a greater diligence in the heavenly life. Look, as earthly parents are not faithful to their children's souls when they live at large, and omit that correction which is necessary for them: Prov. 29:15, 'The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.' The mother is mentioned, because they are usually more fond and indulgent, and spare many times, and mar the child; but our heavenly Father will not be unfaithful, who is so wise that he will not be blinded by any passion, hath such a perfect love, and does so fixedly design our eternal welfare, that he rebuketh that he may reform, and reformeth that he may save.

4. God's faithfulness about the affliction is twofold—in bringing on the affliction, and guiding the affliction.

[1.] In bringing on the affliction, both as to the time and kind, when our need requireth, and such as may do the work: 1 Peter 1:6, 'Ye are in heaviness for a season, if need be.' When some distemper was apt to grow upon us, and we were straggling from our duty: Ps. 119:67, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray.' Some disappointment and check we meet with in a way of sin, which is a notable help in the spiritual life, where God giveth a heart to improve it.

[2.] As to guiding the affliction both to measure and continuance, that it may do us good and not harm: 1 Cor. 10:13, 'God is faithful,

who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able to bear, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.' Violent temptations are not permitted where the Lord seeth us weak and infirm; as Jacob drove as the little ones were able to bear. So when the temptation continued is like to do us hurt, either God will remove it—2 Thes. 3:3, 'Faithful is the Lord, who will establish and keep you, ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ, from the evil;' the persecutions of unreasonable men are there intended—or else support them under it: 2 Cor. 12:9, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.'

Use 1. To check and reprove divers evils which are apt to grow upon our spirits in our troubles.

1. Murmuring and repining thoughts against God's providence. Why should we murmur and complain, since we justly suffer what we suffer, and it is the Lord's condescension that he will make some good use of these sufferings to our eternal happiness, that we may be capable of everlasting consolation? His justice should stop murmurings: Lam. 3:39, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?' If he complain, he can complain of none but himself; that evil choice he hath made for his own soul, which it may be he would never have thought of but upon this occasion. His punishment here carrieth no proportion with his offence; it is punishment in the singular number, sins in the plural; one punishment for many acts of sin: and a living man, on this side hell, what is this to everlasting torments? Life cannot be without many blessings to accompany it; while living we may see an end of this misery, or have time to escape those eternal torments which are far worse. The form of the words showeth why we should thus expostulate with ourselves, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain?' Why do we complain? God hath not cut us off from the land of the living, nor cast us into hell; it is the punishment of sin, and is far less

than we have deserved. Again, the faithfulness of God checketh murmurings. God knoweth what way to take with us to bring us to glory; therefore trust yourselves in God's hands, and let him take his own methods: 'Commit your souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful creator,' 1 Peter 4:19. He is πιστὸς κτίστης; as he is a creator, he doth not love to destroy the work of his hands; as he is faithful in his covenant, he will take the best and safest course to bring you to heaven.

2. Let it check immoderate sorrow and uncomely dejection of spirit; he is just in the afflictions of his people, but yet so that he is also faithful; he is a father when he beateth and indulgeth, when he smiles and when he frowns. Afflictions do not make void our adoption, they rather increase our confidence of it, Heb. 12:5. Whatever we do upon other reasons, we should not suspect his love because of our afflictions. God's strokes do not make void his promises, nor doth he retract his gift of pardon when he chastiseth. Mere crosses and troubles are not an argument of God's displeasure, but acts of his faithfulness; so that we have reason to give thanks for his discipline, rather than question his love. In the book of Job it is made a mark of his love, as in those words which are so frequent, Job 7:17, 18, 'What is man that thou art mindful of him? that thou chastiseth him every morning, and triest him every moment?' We are not only beneath his anger, but unworthy of his care, as if a prince should take upon him to form the manners of a beggar's child; it is a condescension that the great God should deal with us, and suit his providences for our good.

3. This should check our fears and cares; his judgments are right and full of faithfulness; he will bear us through all our trials, and make an advantage of them, and perfect that grace which he hath begun, and finally bring us to eternal glory. The Lord's faithfulness in keeping

promises is often propounded as a strong pillar of the saints' confidence: 1 Cor. 1:9, 'Faithful is God, by whom ye are called;' 1 Thes. 5:24, 'Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.' He dispenseth all things with respect to our eternal welfare. But I am afraid of myself; I have provoked the Lord to leave me to myself; but the Lord will pardon weaknesses when they are confessed: 1 John 1:9, 'If we confess our sins, he is just and faithful to forgive them,' speaking to reconciled believers; and when we fall, the Lord hath ways and means to raise us up again, that we perish not; by checks of conscience: 2 Sam. 24:10, 'And David's heart smote him when he had numbered the people;' Ps. 119:59, 'I thought on my ways,' &c.; by the word, as Nathan roused up David, 'Thou art the man.' God, that foresaw all things, hath ordered them so that nothing shall cross his eternal purpose and promise made to us in Christ.

Use 2. Let us acknowledge God's justice and faithfulness in all things that befall us. For motives, consider—

1. It is much for the honour of God, Ps. 51:4, that, under the cross, we should have good thoughts of God, and clear him in all that he saith and doth, see love in his rebukes.

2. It is for our profit; it is the best way to obtain grace to bear afflictions, or to get deliverance out of them. When God hath humbled his people, exercised their grace, he will restore to them their wonted privileges; he waiteth for the creatures humbling, Lev. 26:41, 42.

For means:—

[1.] You must be one in covenant with God, for to them the dispensations of God come marked not only with justice, as to all,

but faithfulness: Ps. 25:10 'All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth to them that keep his covenant.'

[2.] You must examine yourselves; the Lord complains of the neglect of this, that when they were in affliction they would not consider: Jer. 8:6, 'No man said, What have I done?' If you would consider, you would see cause enough to justify God: Lam. 3:39, 40, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain? Let us search and try our ways, and turn to the Lord.'

[3.] You must observe providence, and your hearts must be awake and attend to it: Ps. 107:43, 'Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord;' Eccles. 7:14, 'In the day of adversity consider.'

[4.] You must be such as value not your happiness by the increase or decrease of worldly comforts, but by the increase or decrease of grace in your souls: 2 Cor. 4:16, 'For this cause we faint not, because, though our outward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day by day.' If you value yourselves by your outward condition, you will still be imbrangled; you should more highly esteem of and be more solicitous about the welfare of your souls in a time of affliction than of all things else in the world: and you will more easily submit and more wisely consider of his doing, and the better understand your interest. When the main care is about your souls, you will value other losses the less, as long as your jewel is in safe hands.

[5.] You must resign your souls to God entirely without exception, refer yourselves to his methods, and let him take his own way to bring you to everlasting glory. When you do with quietness of heart put yourselves into God's hands, as being persuaded of his love and faithfulness, you will be the sooner satisfied in God's providence, seeing he doth all things well. The apostle bids them, 1 Peter 4:19,

put your souls in Christ's hands, and hold on your duty with courage and confidence, cheerfully and constantly. You have no reason to doubt but Christ will take the custody and charge of the soul that is committed to him: 2 Tim. 1:12, 'I know whom I have believed, that he is able to keep that I have committed to him.' Venture your souls in this bottom; he hath power to keep it, he hath pawned his faithfulness in the promise.



## SERMON LXXXIV

**Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be  
for my comfort, according to thy word  
unto thy servant.—VER. 76.**

IN the foregoing verse he had acknowledged that God had afflicted him, and now he prayeth that God would comfort him. The same hand that woundeth must heal, and from whom we have our affliction we must have our comfort: Hosea 6:1, 'Come, let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.' Affliction is God's judicial act, a kind of putting the creature in prison; which being done by the supreme judge, who hath an absolute power to save and to destroy, to ruin or pardon, there is no breaking prison or getting out without his leave.

He doth there not only speak of affliction, but of the justice and faithfulness which God showed in it.

1. Justice. Those that humbly confess the justice of his strokes may with the more confidence implore his mercy. Judgment hath done its work when the creature is humble and penitent, There lieth an appeal then from the tribunal of his justice to the throne of his grace. Though our sins deserve affliction, yet there is comfort in the merciful nature of God and the promises of the gospel. David first acknowledgeth that he was justly afflicted, and then he flieth to mercy and beggeth comfort.

2. He observeth also a faithfulness in all God's dispensations; he doth not afflict his children to destroy them, but to prepare them for the

greater comfort. As one of his children and servants, David sueth out his privilege. God, that is just and true, will also be kind and merciful. To have judgment without mercy, and desolation without consolation, is the portion of the wicked: but, Lord, saith he, 'I am thy servant,' therefore 'I pray thee let thy merciful kindness be for my comfort.'

So that you see this request is fitly grafted upon the former acknowledgment. In it observe—

1. The original cause of all the good which we expect, thy merciful loving-kindness.
2. The effect now sued for, be for my comfort, or to comfort me.
3. The instrument or means of obtaining it, which is double:—

[1.] On God's part, the word, according to thy word.

[2.] On our part, prayer, let, I pray thee.

(1.) In the word there is the relief discovered and offered, and thereby we are encouraged and assured.

(2.) On our part there is prayer, in which we act faith and spiritual desire.

(3.) We have hope given in the word, and we sue it out by prayer.

(4.) The subject capacitated to receive this effect, from that cause, in this order, thy servant.

Doct. That the people of God have liberty, and much encouragement from God's merciful nature and promises, to ask comfort in their

afflictions.

This point will be best discussed by going over the parts and branches of the text as they have been laid forth to you.

First, The primary and principal cause of all comfort is the merciful kindness of God. We read in 2 Cor. 1:3, that he is 'the father of mercies;' and then it presently followeth, that he is 'the God of all comfort.' The remedy of all our evils lieth in the mercy of God, and his kindness and goodness is the fountain of all our blessedness. I shall inquire—

1. What his merciful kindness is.

2. What special encouragement this is to the people of God.

1. What his merciful kindness is. You see here is a compound word, which importeth both his pity and his bounty. Here is mercifulness and kindness mentioned. First, His mercifulness. Mercy hath its name from misery. Misericordia is nothing else but the laying of the misery of others to heart, with intention of affording them relief and succour. In God it noteth his readiness to do good to the miserable, notwithstanding sin. The motion cometh from within, from his own breast and bowels: for 'our God is pitiful and of tender mercy,' James 5:11; and the act of it is extended and reached out unto the creature in seasonable relief, for the throne of grace was erected for this purpose, Heb. 4:11. Two things there are in mercy—(1.) A propension and inclination to commiserate the afflicted; (2.) A ready relief and succour of them according to our power, affectus et effectus. (1.) There is a compassion or being affected with the misery of others. This properly cannot be in God, in whom as there is no passion, so strictly speaking there is no compassion. Yet something analogous there is, a taking notice of our misery, something like a pity arising in

his heart upon the sight of it, which the scripture frequently ascribeth to God, and we can best understand as we consider the divine perfections shining forth in the human nature of Christ: Exod. 2:24, he 'heard their groaning;' and Isa. 63:9, 'In all their afflictions he was afflicted;' Judges 10:16, 'His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel;' forms of speech taken from the manner of men, who use to be thus affected when they see a miserable object. God in his simple and perfect nature cannot be said either to joy or grieve, but he carrieth himself as one thus affected. Or these expressions were laid in aforehand to suit with the divine perfections as manifested in Christ, who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. (2.) Mercy noteth the actual exhibition of help and relief to the miserable. When his people cry to him, he runneth to the cry: Ps. 78:38, 'He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity and destroyed them not; yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.' Mark, there God's forgiving the iniquity was not inflicting the temporal punishment or destroying the sinner presently; the cause of all was not any good in the sinner, but pity in God, that moved him to spare them for the time. So he doth sometimes for those that cry to him but in a natural manner, as a beast maketh its moan when it is in pain. But much more will his compassion show itself to his people, when they bemoan themselves in a spiritual manner: Jer. 31:18, 20, 'I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself.' What then? 'My bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.' When Ephraim was bewailing his sins, God taketh notice of it, and returneth an answer full of fatherly affection, that he would surely show him mercy. God's compassion proceedeth from love as the cause, and produceth relief as the effect. Secondly, the next word is kindness; that noteth the bounty of God, or his free inclination to do good without our merit, and against our merit. The cause is not in us, but himself. We draw an ill picture of God in our minds, as always angry and ready to destroy. No; the Lord is kind, and that many

times to 'the unthankful and to the evil,' Luke 6:35. We should all enlarge our thoughts more about God's merciful nature, that we may love him more, that we may not keep off from him. As long as we think he delighteth in the creature's misery, or seeketh occasions of man's ruin and destruction, God is made hateful. No; you must conceive of him as one that is kind, that 'doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men,' Lam. 3:33, but is ready to do good upon all occasions. We need not fear any hurt from God, but what we willingly bring upon ourselves. He destroyeth not humble souls that lie at his feet, and would have mercy upon his own terms.

## 2. What encouragement this is to the people of God.

[1.] It is an encouragement, because the object of mercy is misery. Mercy is favour shown to a miserable person. Now, the more sense of our misery, especially of our true misery, which is sin, the greater hopes. So that the broken-hearted are more capable of his mercy than others are. God will 'revive the spirit of the contrite ones,' Isa. 57:15–17. He taketh care to comfort them and to look after them, whatever be neglected, Isa. 60:2. None are so apt to presume of mercy as the careless, nor none less capable of mercy, or more deserve judgment. While we make nothing of sin it is easy to believe mercy. In a time of peace sin is nothing, vanity and carnality nothing, a negligent course of profession nothing, vain talk, idle mis-spence of time, pleasing the flesh with all it craveth is nothing, and there needeth no such niceness and strictness—God is merciful; but when the conscience is awakened, and we see our actions with their due aggravations, especially at the hour of death, and when earthly comforts fail, then it is hard to believe God's mercy. Sin is a blacker thing than they did imagine, and they find it another manner of thing than ever they thought of; and the same unbelief that now weakens their faith about their duty, and what belongeth to their duty, doth

now weaken their faith about their comfort, and what belongeth to their comfort. Those that now question precepts will then question promises. Well, then, the careless and negligent are not capable objects of the tenders of mercy; but the sensible, and the contrite, and the serious, these are the fittest objects, though they think themselves farthest off from mercy. Those that have a deep sense of their own unworthiness most see a need of mercy, and most admire mercy, Gen. 32:10. They see that mercy doth all, that there is somewhat of the pity and kindness of God in all things vouchsafed. They apprehend they are always in some necessity, or in some dependence, and they are unworthy, and that it is at God's mercy to continue or take away any comfort they have. Health, liberty, strength, all is dipped in mercy, continued in mercy, restored at mercy.

[2.] It is an encouragement to us, because the scripture saith so much of this mercy in God. *Id agit tota scriptura, ut credamus in Deum*, saith Luther. It is natural to him: 1 Cor. 1:3, 'The father of mercies,' not *pater ultionum*, but *misericordiarum*; he is as just as he is merciful, but he delighteth in the exercise of one attribute more than the other—Micah 7:18, the other his 'strange work.' There is a fulness and plenty, abundant mercy, 1 Peter 1:3; and Ps. 51:1, 'According to the multitude of thy tender mercies.' Our wants are many, and so are our sins; only plentiful mercy can supply and overcome them. They are tender mercies, compared with those of a father and a mother. Of a father: Ps. 103:13, 'As a father pitieth his children, so doth the Lord pity those that fear him.' We need not much entreat a father to pity his child in misery. An earthly father may be ignorant of our misery, as Jacob in Joseph's case: an earthly father pitieth foolishly, but God wisely, when it is most for our benefit; an, earthly father's pity may go no further than affection, and cannot always help his children and relieve their misery. But God, as he is metaphorically said to have the

affection, so he hath an all-sufficient power to remove any evil present, or avert that which is imminent. With that of a mother: Isa. 49:15, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet I will not forget thee,' saith the Lord. In the general, passions in females are more vehement, especially in human creatures; the mother expresseth the greatest tenderness and largeness of love. God hath the wisdom of a father and bowels of a mother. Mark, it is not to an adopted child, but to her own son, her sucking child that hangeth on her breast, cannot subsist without the mother's care. Mothers are wont to be most chary and tenderly affected towards them, poor helpless infants and children, that cannot shift for themselves; nature hath impressed this disposition on them. Suppose some of them should be so unnatural as to forget their sucking babes, which is a case rare to be found, yet 'I will not forget you,' saith the Lord. They are durable compassions: 'His compassions fail not,' Lam. 3:22. They are continual mercies, supplying daily wants, pardoning daily failings, bestowing daily mercies. Oh, that the miserable and the wretched, those that find themselves so, could believe this and plead this, and cast themselves in the arms of this merciful Father! Surely the penitent are not more ready to ask than he to give: 'Therefore let us come boldly to the throne of grace,' Heb. 4:16. Let not our sins keep us from him; our misery rather than our worthiness is an object of his mercy.

[3.] His mercy is more to his people than to others. There is a general mercy and a special mercy. (1.) There is a general mercy by which God sustaineth and helpeth any creature that is in misery, especially man: so Christ calleth him merciful as he showeth himself 'kind to the unthankful and evil,' Luke 6:36. Had it not been for this mercy the world had been long since reduced into its ancient chaos, and the frame of nature dissolved. (2.) There is a special mercy which he

showeth to his people, pardoning their sins, sanctifying their hearts, accepting their persons. So 'of his mercy hath he saved us,' Titus 3:4, 5; 'Quickened us;' Eph. 2:4, 5, 'God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.' This showeth God hath more mercy for his people than for others. Now this is a great encouragement, he that took pity upon us in our lost estate, and did then pardon our sins freely, will he not take pity upon us now we are in a state of grace, and have our sins pardoned? Surely he will show mercy unto us still in forbearing the punishment due unto us, or in mitigating his corrections, or sweetening them with his love. What matter is it who hateth us, when the Almighty pitieth us, and is so tender over us?

Secondly, The satisfying effect, which is comfort. Here I shall show—

1. What is comfort.

2. That consolation is the gift and proper work of God, to be asked of him.

1. What is comfort. It is sometimes put for the object or thing comfortable. Sometimes for the disposition of the subject, or that sense and apprehension that we have of it.

[1.] The object or thing comfortable, and so comfort may note:—(1.) Deliverance and temporal blessings. These things are comfortable to the senses, and in a moderate proportion and with submission they may be asked of God. That comfort is put for deliverance many scriptures witness. Take these for a taste: Ps. 71:21, 'After deep and sore troubles thou shalt increase my greatness and comfort me on every side;' so Ps. 86:17, 'Show me a token for good, that they which hate me may see it and be ashamed; because thou Lord hast holpen



me and comforted me;' so Isa. 12:1, 'In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger was turned away, and thou comfortedst me.' In all these places comfort is put for temporal deliverance, which is an effect of God's mercy, and may be an object of the saints' prayers. It is lawful to deprecate afflictions. There are but few of the best of God's children that can hold out under long troubles without murmuring or fainting. (2.) Another object of comfort is the pardon of sins, or a sense of God's special love in Christ, wrought on our hearts. This is matter of comfort indeed. This is the principal effect of God's merciful kindness in this life, and the great consolation of the saints, as offering a remedy against our greatest evil, which is trouble that ariseth from guilt and sin. This obtained filleth them with joy and peace, Ps. 4:6, 7, 'Puts gladness into our hearts.' To feel God's love in the soul, Rom. 5:5, is the heaven upon earth which a believer enjoyeth, which allayeth the bitterness of all his troubles. Heaven above is nothing but comfort, and the comforts of the Spirit are heaven below. God keepeth not all for the life to come. (3.) Another object of comfort is our happy estate in heaven, which puts an end to all our miseries: Rev. 7:17, 'God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes;' Rev. 21:4, 'There shall be no more death nor sorrow, nor crying nor any pain;' Luke 16:19, 'In thy lifetime thou receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.' We have not our full comfort till we come to heaven. In the world there still is day and night, summer and winter; here is a mixture of mourning and joy, but there all comfort, Mat. 5:4. (4.) The highest and chiefest object of our comfort is the Lord himself: 1 Sam. 30:6, 'David comforted himself in the Lord his God.' Though all things else fail, this should satisfy us. Though we have little health, no friends, no outward supports to rejoice in, yet thou hast God, whose favour is life, and who is the fountain of happiness, and the centre of the soul's rest. The prophet, when reduced not only to some

straits but great exigencies: Hab. 3:18, 'Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.' The joy of sense is in the creature, the joy of faith is in God. Thus we may consider comfort objectively. All that I shall say further is this, that we should take heed what we make to be the object of our solid comfort, Luke 10:24. They are carnal men that wholly place their comfort in earthly things, in the pleasures, and honours, and profits of the world: Luke 6:24, 'Woe to you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation.' They have all here, and can look for no more, and if disappointed here, they are utterly miserable. There are consolations arising from good things exhibited, but more in good things promised. 'Everlasting consolations,' 2 Thes. 2:16.

[2.] Let us consider it subjectively. Comfort is the strengthening of the mind when it is apt to be weakened by doubts, fears, and sorrows. As by patience we are kept from murmuring, so by comfort we are kept from fainting. It is the strength, stay, and support of the heart against any grievance whereby it is likely to be overcome. There are three words by which that delightful sense of Gods favour as a stay and strengthening to the heart is expressed—comfort, peace, and joy. (1.) Comfort is that sense of his love by which the sorrows that arise from the sense of sin and the fears of God's justice are not altogether removed and taken away, yet so mitigated and allayed that the soul is not overwhelmed by them, but hope doth more prevail. This is the nature of comfort, that it doth not altogether remove the evil, but so alleviate and assuage it, that we are able to bear it with some alacrity and cheerfulness: and this is the common state of believers, answerable to the ordinary measure of faith which God giveth his children. Though they are assaulted with sorrows, doubts, and fears, yet they have that true and solid ground of comfort in the promises which begets some hope and expectation towards God; and when the conflict groweth grievous, God of his mercy allayeth the

storm by the working of his comforting Spirit. (2.) There is peace, which is another notion which implieth comfort, but withal a more full degree of it; for peace doth so settle and calm the conscience, that they are assaulted either with none or very light fears. It may be explained by external peace. External peace is that state of things which is not troubled with wars from abroad, or intestine tumults and confusions at home, for some long space of time. A truce is a shorter respite, but a peace is a long calm and quiet. So when we are not assaulted with doubts and troubles, but have much peace and quietness of spirit in believing: Rom. 15:13, 'Now the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.' (3.) As peace exceedeth consolation, so doth joy exceed peace, and beget a more notable sense of itself in the soul. In peace all things are quiet, so as we feel no anxious tossings of mind, no gripes and fears of an accusing conscience; but in joy, true joy, more, some lively motions of heart accompanied with a more lively pleasure and delight. In peace the soul is in such a condition as the body is when nothing paineth us: but in joy,—as when the corporeal senses are mightily moved with such things as delight and please them, as at a feast,—the soul is filled with perpetual suavities, so great many times as cannot be told: 1 Peter 1:8, 'Joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

Well, then, this is comfort, if you consider it with respect to the sense of God's love, or the hopes of glory; such a lightening and easing of the heart as showeth itself in alacrity in God's service, and courage in tribulations.

1. These comforts, though not absolutely necessary to salvation, yet conduce much to the well-being of a Christian, and therefore are not to be despised. It is as oil to the wheels, Job 15:11. If neglected and not sought after with earnest diligence, they are despised, which cannot be without great sin.

2. It follows after holiness, as heat doth fire. The oil of grace will breed the oil of gladness. There are certain spiritual pleasures which do attend a course of obedience. Holiness is our work, comfort our reward; holiness is God's due, comfort our profit and interest: Acts 9:31, 'Walked in the fear of God and comfort of the Holy Ghost.' Grace carrieth us out to honour God, love to him breedeth comfort. It is strange if it be not so; there is some unusual impediment.

3. Though our main comfort be in heaven, yet whilst we are here in the world we have some foregoing consolation, as an earnest and pledge of more to ensue, and as the solace of our pilgrimage, Ps. 119:54. Here is not only the offer, but the sealing of pardon and peace to the soul.

4. Comfort is more needful at some time than at others, and God dispenseth it suitably to our trials, necessities, and wants. In great afflictions and temptations there is a larger allowance, because they need greater comforts, 2 Cor. 1:5; a drop of honey is not enough to sweeten a hogshead of vinegar. The Lord reserveth the comforts of his Spirit for such a time. The more humble and frequent in prayer, grace is more exercised, drawn forth into the view of conscience.

2. Comfort is to be asked of God, for it is his proper gift. It is his name: 'The God of all comfort,' 2 Cor 1:3; and 2 Cor. 7:6, 'The God that comforteth those that are cast down.' It is well that our comforts are in the hand of God; we should have little of it if it were in the disposal of the creature.

Consider:—

1. That natural comforts are the gifts of God: 1 Tim. 1:17, 'He giveth us richly all things to enjoy,' and sets forth the bounds of our habitation, where and how much we shall have, and giveth and

taketh these things at his pleasure, raising up some from the dunghill, pulling down others from the throne of glory, 1 Sam. 2:7, 8. That prosperity may never be without a curb, nor adversity without a comfort, God will acquaint the world with such spectacles now and then: all things are at his dispose.

2. That moderate delight and contentment that we have in our earthly blessings is his allowance. The creature without God is like a deaf-nut; when we crack it, we find nothing, Eccles. 2:24, 25, and Eccles. 3:13. It is the gift of God, and it is one of the chiefest earthly mercies, that in this valley of tears, where we meet with so many causes of grief and sorrow, we take comfort in anything. Without this, a crown of gold will sit no easier than a crown of thorns upon the head of him that weareth it; yea, a palace becomes a prison, and every place a hell to us. It is not abundance of honour that makes a man happy, but comfort, Luke 12:15. If God send leanness into the soul, or a spark of his wrath into the conscience, all is as the white of an egg, unsavoury. A secret curse eateth out all the contentment of it. He that liveth in a cottage is happier than he that liveth in a palace, if he have comfort there.

3. For spiritual comfort, which ariseth either from the sense of his love, or the hope of glory, we cannot have one drop of it but from God. His Spirit is called 'the comforter.' All the world cannot give it if he doth not give it us: he hath an immediate and sovereign power over the hearts of men; if he frown, nothing can support us. When the sun is gone, all the candles in the world cannot make it day. We can procure our own sorrows quickly, but he only can comfort us. None but divine comforts are authentic.

Thirdly, The means of conveying and procuring this comfort.

1. The means of conveying it on God's part is his word. David pleadeth that where the remedy of his misery was discovered and offered. We read often in this psalm how David revived his comfort by the word; and Rom. 15:4, 'Comfort of the scriptures.' There is the matter of true spiritual comfort: 1 Cor. 14:31, 'That all may learn and all be comforted.' This follows from the former; God is the God of comfort, and we should not have the heart to come to him unless he had opened the way to him by his promise. The world cannot give it to us; philosophy cannot. The word of God can. And this comfort is both strong and full, for measure and matter. Matter; there the death of Christ is laid down as the foundation of comfort. If we consider God as holiness itself, and we nothing but a mass of sin and corruption, you will see there can be no reconciliation without satisfaction given. Mercy must see justice contented; one attribute must not destroy another. Justice hath no loss, it is fully satisfied in Christ, and that is the ground of our comfort, 2 Cor. 1:3. There are the promises of deliverance, protection, support, the liberties and privileges of Christians laid forth. These are the breasts of comfort, Isa. 66; suck of these and be satisfied. In short, our great comforts are, God's presence with us while we are in these houses of clay, our presence with God in his palace of glory: 1 Thes. 4:17, 18, 'We shall ever be with the Lord;' and 'Comfort one another with these words.'

2. The means on our part, receiving the sweet effects of God's mercy and word, and that is prayer. We cannot have it without dealing with God in a humble manner. Whatever God giveth he will have it sought out this way; Ezek. 36:37, 'I will yet be inquired after to do it for them;' so Isa. 29:10, 11. Now the reasons are these:—

[1.] Because in prayer we act faith and spiritual desire, both which are as the opening of the soul, Ps. 81:10, to raise our confidence, or draw forth the principles of trust.

[2.] We ask God's leave to apply in particular what is offered in the word in general: as in the next verse, 'Let thy tender mercies come unto me,' ver. 77. In everything we must ask God's leave though we have right; though in possession we ask leave, because we may be mistaken in our claim.

[3.] It is a fit way of easing the heart and disburthening ourselves, Phil. 4:6, 7. When we pray most, and most ardently, we are most happy and find greatest ease.

[4.] God will be owned as the author of comfort, whoever be the instrument, Isa. 57:19; in prayer we apply ourselves to him. The word is a sovereign plaster, but God's hand maketh it stick; many read the scriptures, but are as dead-hearted when done as when they began. The Spirit is the comforter; we are very apt to look to the next hand, to the comfort, but not to the comforter, or the root of all, which is loving-kindness in God.

Fourthly, The subject capable, 'thy servant.' Here we may ask the eunuch's question, 'Of whom speaketh the prophet this, of himself or of some other man?' Of himself questionless, under the denomination of God's servant. But then the question returneth, Is it a word of promise made to himself in particular, or God's servants in the general? Some say the former, 2 Sam. 12:13, the promises brought to him by Nathan. I incline to the latter, and it teacheth us these three truths:—(1.) That God's servants are only capable of the sweet effects of his mercy and the comfort of his promises. Who are God's servants? (1st.) Such as own his right, and are sensible of his interest in them: Acts 23:23, 'The God whose I am and whom I serve.' (2d.) Such as give up themselves to him, renouncing all other masters. Renounce we must, for we were once under another master, Rom. 6:17; Mat. 6:24; Rom. 6:13; 1 and Chron. 30:8. (3d.)

Accordingly frame themselves to do his work sincerely: Rom. 1:9, 'Serve with my spirit;' and Rom. 7:6, 'In newness of spirit,' so as will become those who are renewed by the Spirit: diligently, Acts 26:7, and universally, Luke 1:74, and wait upon him for grace to do so, Heb. 11:28. These are capable of comfort. The book of God speaketh no comfort to persons that live in sin, but to God's servants, such as do not live as if they were at their own dispose, but at God's beck: if he say, Go, they go. They give up themselves to be and do what God will have them to be and do. (2.) If we would have the benefit of the promise, we must thrust in ourselves, under one title or other, among those to whom the promise is made, if not as God's children, yet as God's servants. Then it is as sure as if our name were in the promise. (3.) All God's servants have common grounds of comfort: every one of God's servants may plead with God as David doth. The comforts of the word are the common portion of God's people; they that bring a larger measure of faith, carry away a larger measure of comfort.

Oh, then, let us lift up our eyes and hearts to God this day, and, in as broken-hearted a manner, seek this comfort as possibly we can!

.

## SERMON LXXXV

**Let thy tender mercies come unto me,  
that I may live: for thy law is my delight.—**



## VER. 77.

THE man of God had begged mercy before, now he beggeth mercy again. The doubling the request showeth that he had no light feeling of sin in the troubles that were upon him; and besides, the people of God think they can never have enough of mercy, nor beg enough of mercy; they again and again reinforce their suits, and still cry for mercy. After he had said, 'Let thy merciful loving-kindness be for my comfort,' he presently addeth, 'Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live.'

In the words we have two things:—

1. His request, let thy tender mercies come unto me.
2. A reason to back it, that I may live.

First, The request consists of three branches:—

1. The cause and fountain, let thy tender mercies.
2. The influence and outgoing of that cause, or the personal application of it to David, let them come unto me.
3. The end, that I may live.

1. The cause and fountain is the Lord's tender mercies: it is remarkable that in this and the former verse he doth not mention mercy without some additament; there it was merciful kindness, here tender mercy. Mercy in men implieth a commotion of the bowels at the sight of another's misery; so in God there is such a readiness to pity, as if he had the same working of bowels: Jer. 31:20, 'My bowels are troubled for him,' or sound for him. Now some are more apt to

feel this than others, according to the goodness of their nature, or their special interest in the party miserable. We expect from parents that their bowels should yearn more towards their own children than to strangers; so God hath the bowels of a father: Ps. 103:13, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.' There needeth not much ado to bring a father to pity his children in misery, if he hath anything fatherly in him.

2. The outgoing of this mercy is begged, 'Let it come unto me;' where, by a fiction of persons, mercy is said to come or find out its way to him.

3. The effect, 'That I may live.' Life is sometimes taken literally, and, in its first sense, for life natural, spiritual, or eternal, by a metonymy for joy, peace, comfort: now which of these senses shall we apply to this place? Some take it for life natural, that he might escape the death his enemies intended to him. Certainly in the former verse he speaketh as a man under deep troubles and afflictions, and in the following words he telleth us that the proud dealt perversely with him, and therefore he might have some apprehensions of dying in his troubles, which he beggeth God to prevent. Some think he beggeth God's mercy to preserve him in life spiritual, and Bellarmine understandeth it of life eternal. But I rather take it in the latter sense, for joy and comfort, which is the result of life, where it is vital and in its perfection. *Non est vivere sed valere vita.* 1 Thes. 3:8, 'We live, if ye stand fast in the truth.' A man that enjoyeth himself is said to live. But if we take it in this notion, a double sense may be started; for it may imply either a release from temporal sorrows, and so the sense will be, Have pity upon me, that I may once more see good and comfortable days in the world, for a life spent in sorrow is as no life. Or, he putteth life for some comfortable sense of God's mercy, or assurance of his love to him. Most interpreters, both ancient and

modern, go this way. Νέκρον ἑαυτὸν ἠγεῖται τῆς θείας ἔστερημένον εὐμενείας, saith Theodoret. He counted himself but as a dead man without the sense of God's favour and good-will to him, but it would be as a new life or resurrection from the dead if God would show him mercy, and cast a favourable aspect upon him. This sense suiteth well with the context, for David was for the present deprived of the tokens and effects of God's tender mercy; why else should he so earnestly beg for that to come to him which he had already; and it suiteth well with a gracious spirit such as David had.

The points are:—

1. That God's tender mercy is the fountain of his people's comfort and happiness.
2. That it is not enough to hear somewhat of the mercy of God, but we should by all means seek that it may come unto us.
3. That it is life to a believer to have a sense of God's mercy and love in Christ, and death to be without it.
4. Such as would taste or have a sense of God's mercy must delight in his law. This was David's plea.

The two last propositions I shall insist upon, the other being handled elsewhere, and so much consideration of them as is necessary for the opening and improving of this verse will occur in one or both of these points.

That it is life to a believer to have a sense of God's mercy and love in Christ, and death to be without it.

David was a dead man because he felt not God's mercy as formerly: he did eat, and drink, and sleep, and transact his business as others

did; but he counted this as no life, because he felt not the wonted sense of God's love. Gracious spirits cannot live without divine comforts, they take no joy in the world unless God favourably look upon them.

Let me illustrate this note with these observations:—

1. Observe, he seeketh all his comfort from mercy, and tender mercy; so in the former, so in the present verse. I shall show you the necessity and utility of so doing.

[1.] The necessity of it. The best of God's children have no other claim. For a publican to come and say, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner,' Luke 18:13, is no such wonder; but for a David to use the same plea, that should be noted. From first to last the children of God have no other claim; it is mere mercy that took us into a state of grace at first, and mere mercy that keepeth us in it, and furnisheth us with all the supplies that are necessary to keep it up in vigour and comfort, and mercy that giveth us the final consummation and accomplishment of it at last. Our first entrance into the state of grace is always ascribed to mere mercy. Nothing moved the Lord to bestow life upon dead and graceless sinners but his mere pity and tender compassion: 1 Peter 1:3, 'Of his abundant mercy he hath begotten us to a lively hope;' Eph. 2:4, 'God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he hath loved us, while we were yet dead in trespasses and sins, yet quickened us;' Titus 3:5, 'Of his mercy he hath saved us, by washing us in the laver of regeneration.' Mercy was, then, exercised not only without our desert, but against our desert: God was not moved to bestow his grace by any goodness which he did foresee or find in us, but merely by his own pity; misery offered the occasion, but mercy was the cause of all the good done unto us. After conversion, all our supports and supplies are given us

of his tender mercy: Gal. 6:16, 'As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them.' New creatures and the most accurate walkers are not so free from sin but they still stand in need of mercy. All their receipts come to them not in the way of merit, but undeserved mercy. Our peace and comfort, when we walk most according to rule, is the fruit of mercy. The elect are called 'Vessels of mercy,' Rom. 9:23, because, from first to last, they are filled up with mercy, and supplied by the free favour and love of God in Jesus Christ. Our final consummation is from mercy: the same mercy that lays the first stone in this building doth also finish the work: Jude 21, 'Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.' We take glory out of the hands of mercy, and it is mercy that sets the crown upon our heads, after we have done and suffered the will of God here upon earth. We can merit no more after grace than before.

[2.] The utility of it; this giveth boldness and more hopeful expectation; that will appear if we consider what mercy is. It is God's propension and inclination to do good to the sinful and miserable, so far as his wisdom seeth convenient. As mercy is a perfection in the divine nature, so God is necessarily merciful as well as just; but the exercise of it is, I confess, free and arbitrary: it is not necessarily exercised but according to his will and good pleasure, to some more, to some less, as his wisdom thinketh fit. Yet this advantage we have by it, that mercy rather seeketh a fit occasion to discover itself than a well qualified object, as justice doth; for it doth not consider what is due or deserved, but what is needed. Therefore, first, the needy and miserable have some hope, for misery as misery is the object of mercy; and therefore when our afflictions are pressing and sore, our miseries and straits are some kind of argument which we may plead to God: Ps. 79:8, 'Let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us, for we are brought very low;' they plead their miserable condition. Mercy relents towards a sinful people when they are a wasted people: he

heareth the moans of the beasts, and therefore certainly he will not shut up his bowels against the cries of his people; their very misery pleadeth for them. Secondly, the broken-hearted that have a sense of their misery have a greater advantage than others, and are more capable of God's mercy, because they are not only miserable, but miserable in their own feeling, especially if this feeling be deep and spiritual; they are sensible of the true misery, and they are more troubled about sin than temporal inconvenience: Mat. 9:13,' 'Go learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice.'

3. When we flee to his mercy, and seek it in the appointed way of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ: the Lord will not utterly destroy a sinner fleeing to his mercy; he hath engaged his word and oath, Heb. 6:18; and this comfort we may make use of partly when the sense of guilt sits heavy upon the soul; go humble yourselves before the merciful God, and sue out his favour and reconciliation with you, as David doth, Ps. 51:1, 'Have mercy upon me, according to thy loving-kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions;' you know not what a merciful God may do for his undeserving and ill-deserving people. And partly when God is upon his judicial process, and calleth a people to an account for their sins, he still retaineth his merciful nature: Hab. 3:2, 'In the midst of wrath he remembereth mercy;' his wrath and indignation doth not so far transport him as that he should forget his merciful nature, and deal with his afflicted people without all moderation. When God is justly angry for sin it is a special time wherein to plead for mercy.

Secondly, He beggeth that it may come to him. Let us see the meaning of the request, and then what may be observed upon it. Coming to him noteth a personal and effectual application.

1. A personal application, as in the 41st verse of this psalm, 'Let thy mercies come to me also, even thy salvation, according to thy word.' David would not be forgotten, or left out or lost in the throng of mankind, when mercy was distributing the blessing to them.

2. Effectual application, that noteth—(1.) The removing of obstacles and hindrances; (2.) The obtaining the fruits and effects of this mercy. First, The removing of obstacles. Till there be way made, the mercy of God cannot come at us, for the way is barricaded and shut up by our sins. As the Lord maketh a way for his anger, Ps. 78:50, by removing the hindrances, eating out the staff and the stay, taking away that which letteth, so the Lord maketh way for his mercy, or mercy maketh way for itself, when it removeth the obstruction; sin is the great hindrance of mercy. We ourselves raise the mists and the clouds which intercept the light of God's countenance; we build up the partition wall which separates between God and us, yet mercy finds the way. Secondly, The obtaining the fruits of mercy. The effects of God's tender mercies are common or saving. We read, Ps. 145:9, 'The Lord is good to all, his tender mercies are over all his works;' not a creature which God hath made but the Lord pitieth it and supplieth its wants. But there are spiritual effects of the Lord's tender mercy, his pardoning our sins, restoring us to his grace and favour, and repairing his image in us: Eph. 1:3, 'Who hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ;' such spiritual blessings as are a sure effect of God's favour, never given in anger. Riches may be given in anger, so may also temporal deliverance, but pardon of sin is never given in anger, nor the Spirit of the Lord Jesus to dwell in us. Of spiritual blessings, some are comfortable to us, others honourable to God; some fall in with our interest, others suit with God's end; as pardon is of the first sort, and the subjection of the creature to God of the latter. We are willing to be pardoned and freed from the curse of the law and the flames of hell, but to be

renewed to the image of God and quickened to the life of grace, and put into a capacity to serve our Creator and Redeemer, that we are not so earnest for; and yet these are the undoubted pledges of the special mercy of God to us, and absolutely necessary to the enjoyment of other relative benefits. We must suppose David to intend both in his prayer, 'Let thy mercy come unto me.' Once more, these spiritual benefits may be considered as to the effects themselves, and the sense that we have of our enjoyment of them. Our safety dependeth upon the saving effects and fruits of God's special mercy, and our peace, joy, and comfort upon the sense of them. Both are comprised in that petition, 'Let thy tender mercies come unto me.' This being stated as the full meaning of the words, let us observe:—

[1.] That it is not enough to hear of somewhat of God's saving mercies, but we should beg that it may come unto us, be effectually and sensibly communicated unto us, that we may have experience of them in our own souls; the hearsay will do us little good without experience; the hearsay is the first encouragement: 'We have heard the kings of Israel are merciful kings;' that moved them to make the address in a humble and submissive manner for their life and safety: 1 Kings 20:31, 'Let us, I pray thee, put on sackcloth upon our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go to the king of Israel.' We may reason at a better rate concerning the God of Israel. We have heard that the God of Israel is a merciful God, that he delights in mercy; but then, Let us try what he will do for us. Upon the participation of the saving effects and benefits of his mercy, our comfort and interest beginneth. (1.) We shall never have such admiring thoughts of mercy as when we have felt it ourselves; then we know the grace of God in truth, Col. 1:6. A man that hath read of honey, or heard of honey, may know the sweetness of it by guess and imagination, but a man that hath tasted of honey knoweth the sweetness of it in truth; so by



hearing or reading of the grace and mercy of God in Christ, we may guess that it is a sweet thing, but he that hath had an experimental proof of the sweet effects and fruit of it in his own heart, and all that is spoken of God's pardoning and comforting of sinners is verified in himself, this giveth him a more sensible demonstration of the worth and value of this privilege, then more admiring thoughts of mercy, when he can say, as Paul, 1 Tim. 1:13, ἠλεήθην, I was saved by mercy. (2.) We shall more love God: Phil. 1:9, 'I pray that your love may abound in all sense;' the spiritual gust maketh love abound. (3.) We cannot speak of it with that fulness, life, sense, and affection to others, nor so movingly invite others to share with us, as when the effects of his goodness are communicated to us: Ps. 34:8, 'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.' A report of a report is a dead cold thing, but a report from experience is lively and powerful. Well, then, let it come to me.

[2.] The sense or participation of God's saving mercies is to believers the life of their lives, the heaven they have upon earth, the joy and comfort of their souls, and the want of this is a kind of death to them; for so David expresseth himself, 'Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live.'

The reasons are taken partly from the object, and partly from the subject—from the thing itself, and from the disposition of a renewed heart.

1. From the thing itself, from the object; and there, first, the value of this privilege, compared with all that may be called life. Life is either natural, spiritual, or eternal.

[1.] Compare it with life natural, and there the Psalmist will tell you: Ps. 63:3, 'Thy loving-kindness is better than life;' life is not life without it; without the feeling of this love, or the hope of feeling it, it

is little worth. To have the light of the sun, which is the comfort of the senses, without the light of God's countenance, which is the comfort of the soul, is a sad and dark estate, especially to the children of God, that know they are made for another world, and for this only in their passage thither. Natural life only giveth us a capacity to enjoy the comforts of sense, which are base, dreggy, and corruptive; but the special favour of God lets us into such consolations as perfect the soul, and affect it with a greater pleasure than our natural faculties are capable of. Life natural is a frail, brittle thing, but these saving effects of God's mercy lay a foundation of eternal happiness. Life natural may grow a burden, but the love of God is never burdensome; the days may come in which there is no pleasure, Eccles. 12:1; Job 33:20, 'His life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty food;' in sickness and age, in troubles of conscience. Men do pretty well with their worldly happiness till God rebuke man for sin; then all the glory, profit, and pleasure of the creature doth us no good: Ps. 39:11, 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth.' Judas haltered himself when filled with the sense of God's wrath: Job chose strangling rather than life. At death, when all worldly things cease, and are of no more use to us, the sense of God's love will be of great use to us. All the world understand the worth and value of God's love when death cometh; then a child of God feeleth it. Oh, saith he, I would not for all the world but that I had made sure of the love of God before this hour! How terrible else would it have been to leave all and leap out into an unknown world! Jer. 17:9, 'The unjust man at his latter end shall be a fool;' and Job 27:8, 'What is the hope of the hypocrite, if he hath gained, when God cometh to take away his soul?'

[2.] Life spiritual: the soul hath no life but in communion with God, who is the fountain of this new life. Now the more sensible and close

this is, the more they live; the vitality of this life lieth in the sensible participation of the effects of his special grace and mercy; then we have it more abundantly, John 10:10; not only living, but lively.

[3.] For eternal life, a comfortable sense of God's mercy is the beginning and pledge of the true and heavenly life, Rom. 5:4–6. The shedding abroad the love of God in the heart of a believer maketh this his hope sure and certain, he needeth not be ashamed, for he hath earnest beforehand.

(1.) God's favour furnisheth us with a remedy against all evils and miseries; i.e., wants, troubles, sins. The want of other things may be supplied by the love of God, but the want of the love of God cannot be supplied with anything else; if poor in the world, yet we may be rich in faith, James 2:5; if afflicted, destitute, yet this loss may be made up by the presence of God in the soul, 2 Cor. 4:16. As our outward man decayeth, our inward man is renewed day by day. If they want the creature they have God; there is no want of a candle when they have the sun; if they want health, the soul may be in good plight, 3 John 2, as Gaius had a healthy soul in a sickly body. If they want liberty, they lie open to the visits of his grace; the Spirit of God is no stranger to them, nor can his company and comforts be shut out. Tertullian telleth the martyrs, You went out of the prison when you went into it, and were but sequestered from the world, that you might converse with God: the greatest prisoners are those that are at large, darkened with ignorance, chained with lusts, committed not by the proconsul, but God. If they want the favour of men, they have the favour of God: God smileth when the world frowneth; they may be banished, but every place is alike near to God and heaven. Some climates are nearer and some further off from the sun, but all alike near to the sun of righteousness. *Ubi pater ibi patria*, that is our country where God is. We are harassed, beaten, afflicted in sundry

manners, but the sting is gone; the rod that is dipped in guilt smarteth most, but a pardoned man may rejoice in tribulations, Rom. 5:1, 2. But now, on the contrary, suppose a man high in honour, wallowing in wealth, spending his time and wealth in ease and pleasure, but after all this God will bring him to judgment. The world is his friend, but God is his enemy and he is all his lifetime subject to bondage, Heb. 2:14; not always felt, but soon awakened; and during the time of his comfort and delight, he is dancing about the brink of hell, liable to an eternal curse; and there is but the slender thread of a frail life between him and execution, a few serious sober thoughts undo him.

(2.) Sin; that is the great evil, both as to the guilt of it and the wages of it, the guilt and obliquity of it. No creature can provide a plaster for this sore; to get our consciences settled and our natures healed, this is the special fruit of God's mercy in Christ; his business is to save us from sin, Mat. 1:21; Acts 3:26, 'God having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from your iniquity;' Rom. 11:26, 'There shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob;' have God's image repaired, and restored to his grace and favour. Those that have felt sin a burden, nothing will satisfy till the Lord looks graciously upon them.

(3.) The favour of the Lord is the fountain of all blessings. Get an interest in his special mercy, and then all things are yours. You have God for your God, who commandeth all things: 1 Cor. 3:22, 'Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all things are yours;' Mat. 6:33, 'First seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you;' Prov. 10:22, 'The blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.'

(4.) It sweetens every comfort; a piece of bread with the love of God is a plentiful feast. 'A little that a righteous man hath is better than the revenue of many wicked.' *Quid prodest regium alimentum si ad Gehennam pascat?*—what profiteth it to be fatted for slaughter?

## 2. Reasons from the subject, or disposition of the renewed heart.

[1.] They have once had an apprehension of their true misery by reason of sin and the curse. None prize the favour of God, but they have been burdened with the sense of sin and misery. We speak in vain to most men; it is only the sick will prize the physician, the condemned be earnest for a pardon.

[2.] They are renewed. Till a man be holy he cannot rejoice in spiritual things; the fool's heart is always in the house of mirth, Eccles. 7:4. For masks, and plays, and merry meetings, feasts and banquets, and vain company, and idle games and pastimes, these are the life and joy of their souls. A fool will make a foolish choice, as children prefer their rattles and toys before a solid benefit: Rom. 8:5, 'For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the spirit the things of the spirit;' the desire showeth what is delightful and comfortable, but now the renewed heart, it is their all to be in favour with God. They have not the spirit of the world, 1 Cor. 2:3; many have affections for anything but God.

Use 1. The use is—(1.) Reproof to those that care not for this sense of God's mercy. David could not think himself alive till he was reconciled to God. Profane men are not much troubled with this care; though God be angry they can seek their delight elsewhere; they can rejoice in the creature apart from God; so they may have outward things they are at ease, and can sing lullabies to their souls, as that wretch in the parable, Luke 12:19, 'Eat, drink, and be merry.' If they be in trouble, they seek to put away their troubles by carnal means.

Let these consider, first, God can make the stoutest-hearted sinner who standeth aloof from him to see he is undone without him. It is no hard thing to put a sinner in the stocks of conscience, so that one favourable look would be valued more than all the world. Secondly, It may be, when punishment hath opened their eyes, God may hide his face and withhold the blessing from them when they seek it with bitter tears: Prov. 1:28, 'They shall call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but shall not find me.' (2.) To shame the people of God that have such cold and careless thoughts about that which true believers count as dear as their lives.

1. This slightness cometh from carnal complacency, or inordinate delight in the creature, or letting out ourselves to worldly delights. Now this is vile ingratitude, when God's gifts, and those of the worsers sort, draw us from himself. Will you be of a Gadarene spirit, or as one of the vain fellows, as Michal told David scoffingly?

2. Consider how dangerous this is to our temporal and eternal felicity. Temporal felicity: The creature is blasted when our life is bound up with it; the world is eclipsed that the favour of God may be more prized, and the loss of the creature should more awaken us to seek after God. We most prize the evidences of God's favour and reconciliation with him when we are in trouble, and God taketh away our worldly comforts, that the consolations of his Spirit may not seem as small things. Many have smarted for carnal complacency. Eternal felicity: When any carnal thing is valued more than God, it puts our eternal comforts upon a hazard; it is a selling the birthright for a mess of pottage, Heb. 12:15. Well, then, let us be weaned from the world, for while we take too much delight in the creature God is the less esteemed.

Use 2. Instruction, to teach us how to carry ourselves with respect to this privilege, a sense of the love of God shed abroad in our hearts in the fruits and effects thereof.

1. Let us make it our chiefest care to get and preserve the fresh sense of God's love upon our hearts, grudging at no labour: 2 Peter 1:10, 'Give diligence to make your calling and election sure,' &c. No cost: Mat. 13:46, 'When he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it;' Phil. 3:8, 9, denying lusts and interests.

2. Not to hazard it on cheap terms. God forbid that I should sell my inheritance! Will you sell away Christ and heaven for such cheap rates, hazard your souls for carnal satisfaction?

3. Let us be sensible of the want of it as the greatest misery, Mat. 9:15.

4. Rejoice in it above all things, Ps. 4:6, 7. Be glad if this be promoted, though by sharp afflictions.

Doct. 2. All such as would have the comfortable effects and sense of God's mercy must delight in his law.

1. Delight in the law implieth obedience, for it is not a delight that ariseth from speculation, or the contemplation of the truth revealed therein. 'I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart,' Ps. 40:8; and Ps. 112:1, 'Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments;' not in the knowledge of their duty, but in the practice of it. It is in the law as the rule of duty, and all tendeth to practice. They that delight in the speculation grudge at the practice. One that is observant of God's will delighteth to believe and obey, as well as to know God's word.

2. A ready and cheerful obedience must be willingly and heartily undertaken; love to the work for the work's sake. A man is never truly converted to God till God hath his love, and his law hath his love; for the constitution of the heart is not seen in our opinions so much as in our affections, love, desire, and delight. Many men's judgment is for God; that is, conscience is for God, but their hearts are for other things; when obedience is practically and cheerfully undertaken, and the delight of our souls in them. Men have a little compulsory religiousness; it is most when frightened into it. Men do something, but had rather leave it undone, and do not choose rather to walk holily if they had their own choice. A man is slavish when fear of being damned doth only sway him; the godly love holiness as holiness, they are constant with God.

But why do they that have a comfortable sense of his mercy delight in his law?

1. These are only fit to ask mercy.
2. These are qualified to receive mercy.

1. These are only fit to ask mercy.

[1.] Because they are likely to ask it most feelingly. None prize the mercy of God, nor will ask it in such an earnest and broken-hearted manner, as those that delight in his law. These see their want of it, they are sensible of more defects than others are: Rom. 7:24, 'O wretched man that I am!' They mind their work, which others, that exercise themselves not unto godliness, mind not; they have greater light and greater discoveries, more love; much work driveth them oftener to the throne of grace. None rest in duties so much as they that have least cause: Mal. 1:13, 'What a weariness is it!'



[2.] These ask more regularly; therefore it is said, Ps. 37:4, 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desire of thy heart.' Why so unlimitedly? Because delight in the Lord retrencheth carnal desires and moderateth earthly desire; their hearts are not so set upon outward things as the hearts of other men are: John 15:7, 'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' Why doth God make so large an offer? He trusteth such as keep communion with Christ. There is a conformity between their wills and God's in the matter of their desire so far as we are renewed and hold communion with him; their unruly lusts will be subdued, and their unlawful desires for matter, manner, and end be laid aside, and they will acquiesce in the good pleasure of God, and the most excellent things. Therefore God maketh them this offer, Ask what ye will. Not that men are warranted to pray for what they will, or to expect an answer in whatsoever they desire, but as their delight in his law is prevalent, their wills are limited by his word and will, and the Spirit in them 'maketh intercession according to the will of God,' Rom. 8:26, 27.

[3.] These may with most confidence ask mercy; others are excluded: Prov. 28:9, 'He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, his prayer is an abomination to the Lord.' These are included: 1 John 3:22, 'And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.' If we refuse God speaking to us in infinite wisdom, as he does in the word, no wonder if God refuse us stammering foolishly in prayer, Jer. 9:21. Men that purpose to continue in their sins shall not be heard in other things, otherwise the grossest sinners may come to God to have their sins pardoned and removed, and expect to be accepted and heard through Christ; but the perpetual assistance and favour of God is not given to them. Such as would be heard and

accepted, and come with assurance of welcome and audience, ought to be devoted to him, to worship him, to call on him.

2. These are qualified to receive mercy, according to the tenor of that covenant in which mercy is dispensed and magnified in the covenant of grace or the covenant of God's mercy in Christ, Heb. 5:9, and 10:14. This being apt to be abused, let us explain how obedience is a condition of the covenant. A condition meriting and purchasing the blessings of the covenant it cannot be; for God giveth the ability to obey wholly and solely of his own grace: it is short of the rule, and infinitely inferior to the reward. A condition applicatory, whereby we apply ourselves to the covenant on our part, it is, and therefore necessary. It is a secondary condition, disposing us to communion with God in and by the covenant. At first we must be turned by repentance towards God, through faith in the Redeemer, before we receive remission of sins, Acts 20:18. Faith and repentance are conditions of pardon, and sincere obedience a condition of salvation. The first condition containeth a resolution of obedience for the future, though we have not actually so obeyed. The secondary condition, that we should make good our resolution. We must keep covenant as well as make covenant. Faith is an entering into covenant, for it is a consent to take Christ as lord and saviour; and constant and delightful obedience is a constant keeping covenant, Ps. 25:10, and 103:17, 18. The making covenant was necessary for our entrance, the keeping covenant for our continuance. Consent to take any for king, husband, master, draweth another condition after it, that we carry ourselves in these relations dutifully: besides promising there must be performing; he that is my sovereign must be obeyed. There must be conjugal fidelity to the husband, and faithful service to the chosen master; so in the covenant between us and God, us and Christ.

Object. But you will say. How, then, shall we take comfort in the new covenant, who are so many ways faulty?

Ans. We must consider—(1.) What it exacts; (2.) What it accepteth.

1. What it exacts. To quicken us to more earnest endeavours and humble confession of failings, it exacteth perfect obedience, admits of no imperfection either of parts or degrees.

2. It accepteth a perfection of parts, there being truth of godliness, and a single-hearted inclination to observe the whole will of God; then our defects and weaknesses are covered by Christ's perfect righteousness. The unregenerate lie under the rule of exaction, but being out of Christ, are denied the benefit of acceptation.

Use 1. To inform us that petitions of mercy and the plea for new obedience are very consistent: 'Let thy tender mercies come unto me;' and his argument is, 'For I delight in thy word.' Mercy is nevertheless free, though the creature mind his duty; for when we have done all we are but unprofitable servants, Luke 17:10; and grace helpeth us to do what we do: Luke 19:18, 'Thy pound,' not my industry; and 1 Cor. 15:10, 'By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain: but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.' It was grace to appoint such reasonable terms, to accept of them, though done in that sorry fashion which our frailty permitteth us to tender to God.

Use 2. To quicken us to a delightful course of obedience, if we would have the sense of mercy. The same spirit that urgeth us to obey, a sense of God's love, urgeth us also to delight in his law. The same spirit that urgeth us to sue out the promise urgeth also to obey the precept

1. Consider how God hath twisted his honour with our interest, and ordered both for his own glory. God's interest and honour is to be considered as well as our salvation. We must never look for such mercy and grace from God as shall discharge us from our duty and subjection to God, or give you liberty to dishonour and disobey him. No; 'Christ redeemed us to God,' Rev. 5, and Luke 1:74, 75. Salvation is our benefit, obedience is God's right and interest. Happiness man is not averse from, but he sticketh at the terms. Some part of this happiness suiteth well enough with our natural desires, as pardon and life; but we care not for his law and the obedience we owe by virtue of it. We are naturally more willing of what maketh for ourselves, for our comfort, than what maketh for the honour of God.

2. Consider, a great part of God's first mercy is expressed in healing our natures and preparing us for this delightful course of holiness, Heb. 10:16, 17; 1 Cor. 1:30; Titus 3:4, 5.

3. Consider, this comfortable sense of God's mercy should induce us to this by way of argument: 1 John 4:19, 'We love him because he first loved us;' 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 'For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again;' and Gal. 5:6, 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith, which worketh by love.' And then, by way of gratitude, we ought to bend all the powers of our souls to holiness and obedience, and lay out our care and labour upon it.

4. Consider, the more holiness and obedience any one hath, the more acceptable to God. A holy soul is an object capable of God's love; the holy God delighteth in holiness, as well as the merciful God pitieth

misery. The more holy we are, the more God loves us. Let us not make wounds for God to cure. As we increase in holiness we increase in favour with God. This is true of Christ, who never had any defect of holiness, but only was to increase in the exercise of it.

5. Consider how just it is with God to refuse our cries for mercy when we despised his precepts for duty. Besiege your hearts with these considerations, and press them daily upon you. We are marvellous apt to please ourselves with some loose apprehensions of mercy, without bending ourselves to our duty.

6. Consider how reasonable it is that, when mercy hath taken us, with all our faults, at our first entrance into covenant with God, we should afterwards study to please and make it our delight so to do.

7. Consider how impossible it is to cherish a sense of his mercy and love to us while we neglect duty. The soul hath two sentiments of religion which can never be defaced—a desire of happiness, and subjection to God—*ut anima sit subjecta Deo et pacata in se*. As we love our own comfort, so we will be troubled about our duty; the soul will not sit easy. Comfort follows holiness as light doth fire, and sin will cause trouble as the prick of a needle doth pain. The soul cannot be serious and mind things but it will be so. Indeed, at some times, by carelessness, our sense of the necessity of obedience is extinguished, and then a little serveth turn to keep the conscience quiet or stupid; but it will return again. Never leave till holiness and obedience be your delight as well as your care.

Use 3. To press us to be earnestly dealing with this merciful God for comfort. We need it now in a time of judgment, when delivered over to judgments, Hosea 11:8, as sometimes to sin, so to plagues; when God opens the floodgates, lets out judgments upon a people without restraint: 'I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end

shall be,' Deut. 32:20. So also the 30th verse, 'Their rock sold them, and the Lord hath shut them up.' Mercy can put a stop, but that will interpose no more. Again, when the people of God are much hated and maligned; now, 'We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair,' 2 Cor. 4:8.

1. If it be God's nature to be merciful and kind, why should we be discouraged? Mercy is free, favour is shown to a miserable person. Mercy can recall the punishments due to us, and mitigate corrections, and sweeten our comforts.

2. But, then, you must be content that mercy should issue out in its own way and order; first giving us principal mercies, then necessary; first sanctifying, and then comforting: 'Saving us by washing us in the laver of regeneration.'

3. Reckon your comfort more by a sense of God's care than by removing temporal trouble. Spiritual comfort is more excellent than bodily.

4. You must sue it out by prayer, wherein, first, it must be with brokenness of heart. Let true spiritual misery be discerned and complained of. Let us lay our sins and sores before his pity. Secondly, with faith, for here is the word mentioned. Why are we so disconsolate? is there no balm in Gilead? It is our usual fault, we pore too much upon our troubles. There is a God of comfort, who answereth his name every way, and will keep his word with his people. Let us come to him in all our wants. Thirdly, with resolution of more faithful obedience, for God's servants are only capable; renew your covenant of serving God.

5. The godly have common comforts. What will serve one's turn will serve another's also. They have all the same fundamental work of

grace in their hearts; they are all born of God, have his image stamped on them, have the same Redeemer; the same Spirit worketh in all, and the promises are made alike unto all, not upon personal considerations.

## SERMON LXXXVI

**Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.—VER. 78.**

IN these words you have—(1.) David's prayer; (2.) David's resolution.

First, David's prayer; and there take notice of—

1. The petition itself, let the proud be ashamed.
2. The reason, for they dealt perversely with me without a cause.

In the prayer he beggeth the repression of his enemies. There take notice of—

[1.] The notion by which they are described, the proud.

[2.] The event or effect of God's providence desired concerning them, let them be ashamed.

The notion is considerable. The wicked, especially the persecutors of God's people, are usually characterised by this term in this Psalm, 'the proud,' ver. 51, 69, 122; and will give us this note:—

Doct. That pride puts wicked men upon being troublesome and injurious to the people of God.

But why are the persecutors and the injurious called the proud?

Ans. 1. Because wicked men shake off the yoke of God, and will not be subject to their Maker, and therefore desist not from troubling his people: Exod. 5:2, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice, and let Israel go?' What was in his tongue is in all men's hearts; they contemn God and his laws. Every sin hath a degree of pride and depreciation of God included in it: 2 Sam. 12:9, 'Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?' There is a slighting of God's authority, and a lifting up our will against the will of God.

Ans. 2. Because they are drunk with worldly felicity, and never think of changes: Ps. 123:4, 'Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.' When men go on prosperously, they are apt wrongfully to trouble others, and then to shout at them in their misery, and to despise the person and cause of God's people, which is a sure effect of great arrogancy and pride. They think they may do what they please; they have no changes; therefore they fear not God, and put forth their hands against such as be at peace with them, Ps. 55:19, 20; whilst they go on prosperously and undisturbedly, they cannot abstain from violence and oppression. This is certainly pride, for it is a lifting up the heart above God and against God, and without God. And they do not consider his providence, who alternately lifts up and casts down, that adversity may not be without a cordial, nor prosperity without a curb and bridle. But when men sit fast, and are well at ease, they are apt to be insolent and scornful. Riches and worldly greatness make men insolent and despisers of others, and care not what burdens



they impose upon them; they are intrenched within a mass of wealth and power and greatness, and so think none can call them to an account. Solomon speaketh of two sorts of people: Prov. 18:10, 11, 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.' Every man is as his trust is; for, as the Psalmist speaketh of idols in general, 'They that trust in idols are like unto them,' so it is true of spiritual idols. If a man trust in vain things, his heart groweth vain, proud, and insolent; promiseth him an uninterrupted course of felicity, from poor, perishing things, that come and go at God's pleasure. If a man trust in God, then he is kept holy, humble, carried on with a noble and divine spirit, and findeth more safety than another that hath all the strength and power of the world to support and back him. The name of the Lord is a real refuge, but wealth and honour and worldly greatness is but an imaginary refuge. He that hath nothing but the name of the Lord to trust in, worldlings think he buildeth castles in the air; but the godly knoweth that worldlings indeed build castles in the air, while they look big, and think their greatness shall bear them out. Alas! wealth is but a wall and a strong tower in their own conceit; not really so; but this puffeth them up, and they are quite other men when they are at top than what they were when they were under.

Ans. 3. Because they affect a life of pomp and ease and carnal greatness, and so despise the affliction and meanness and simplicity of the people of God. The false church hath usually the advantage of worldly power and external glory, and the true church is known by the divine power, gifts, and graces, and the lustre of holiness: Ps. 45:13, 'The king's daughter is glorious within;' is found out by faith, love, patience, sobriety, heavenly-mindedness, humility, purity, and the like, rather than by a splendid appearance; and holiness becomes God's house, Ps. 93:5, rather than gold and silver and costly

furniture. The false church vaunts itself in costly temples, officers richly endowed with temporal revenues, and a pompous attendance; and so the simplicity of the gospel is corrupted and turned into a worldly domination: As, for instance, the church of Rome boasts of her grandeur and magnificence, and upbraids the Reformed with their abject condition. *Ministris eorum nihil vilius*, saith Campian. They can tell of the pompous inauguration of their popes, their stately train of cardinals, lordly prelates; whereas the poor ministers of the gospel live hardly and precariously. Whereas, indeed, the glory of the true church doth not make a fair show in the flesh, is not external, corporeal, and visible, but internal, incorporeal, and invisible, Cant. 1:5; and like its head, Jesus Christ, who, to appearance, was humble, poor, and afflicted; but in him were hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; yea, the fulness of the godhead dwelt bodily. External splendour pleaseth the flesh, and is not a sign of virtue so much as pride, Luke 16:19. What shall become of the primitive church for the first three hundred years, if outward greatness be a mark of it? The world is with them, but the faith with us; they have pure gold, but we pure doctrine (*Naz. Orat. Con. Aroc.*) So Hilary against Auxentius, *Unum moneo, cavete antichristum, male enim vos parictum amor cepit, male ecclesiam Dei in tectis artificiisque veneramini, male sub iis pacis nomen ingeritis: anne ambiguum est in iis antichristum cessurum? Montes mihi et sylvæ et lacus et carceres, et voragines sunt tutiores; in iis enim prophetæ aut manentes, aut demersi, Dei Spiritu prophetabant.* Well, because of their affectation of worldly greatness, they are called proud; and so it is taken, Mal. 3:15, 'Ye call the proud happy.' And because of this they hate and molest the people of God, because theirs is a contrary spirit. They hear Christ's voice: Mat. 11:29, 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly.' They hate them because they contemn that felicity which they affect, and so put a scorn on their way: 1 Peter 4:4, 'Think

it strange that you run not with them into the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.'

Ans. 4. They are called proud because of their insolent carriage towards the Lord's people, partly in their laws and injunctions, requiring to give them more honour, respect, and obedience than in conscience can be afforded them; as Haman would have Mordecai to devote himself to him after the manner of the Persians, Esther 3:5. The man, though a favourite, was an Amalekite, one that came of that stock whose remembrance God would have to be blotted out, Exod. 17:14; and possibly more worship and honour was required than was due to a man. God had forbidden to give divine honour to any but himself. Now, according to the custom of Persia, these honours did somewhat savour of divine worship—Vide Brisson, pp. 10–14, with the 18th. So Jeroboam would have his calves worshipped, 1 Kings 12:32; and yet all that complied with him therein are charged for walking so willingly after the commandment, Hosea 5:11. We dare not offend God to please men; the good Levites are commended, 2 Chron. 11:14. So it was pride in Nebuchadnezzar to command all men to bow before his image, Dan. 3:15, 16. God's prerogative must not be incroached upon; there is a superior sovereign. Partly in vexing, molesting, and oppressing them at their pleasure; the formal Christian hateth the spiritual, Gal. 4:29. Now this cometh from their pride: Ps. 10:2, 'The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor;' would not have their lazy course upbraided and disgraced by the seriousness and strictness of others: they malign what they cannot imitate. And it is carried on by their pride or abuse of power. God counteth it pride: Ps. 12:5, 'For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy; the Lord will arise to deliver him; and set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.' It is the pride of the oppressor which God taketh notice of, his puffing, scoffing, and mocking at the hopes of God's despised ones; he never dreameth of

any checks from any, but despiseth and contemneth all. And partly because of the insulting over their misery and low estate: Zeph. 2:10, 'This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of hosts.' But God taketh notice of it, and will call them to an account in due time: Prov. 3:34, 'He scorneth the scorers, but giveth grace unto the lowly;' Ps. 14:6, 'You have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge;' i.e., mocked at a man because he is resolved to trust in the Lord, laughed at those that made conscience of their duty, that consulted whether lawful or unlawful, not whether danger and profit, not whether safe or unsafe, but whether pleasing to God or not. They trust in the Lord that, in conscience of their duty, venture upon hazards, expecting their security from heaven; these thoughts seemed foolish to worldly wisdom; you shamed his counsel, scoff at it: Isa. 51:7, 8, 'Fear ye not the reproach of men, nor their revilings: for the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool.' Those that make reckoning of the ways of God need not be discouraged with their spiteful vaunts.

Use. Let us take heed of pride. The Lord, that hated the pride of Moab, doth also hate the pride of Jacob, Amos 6:8.

1. Take heed of wittingly and willingly opposing any command of God: Ps. 119:21: 'Thou hast rebuked the proud, that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments: Neh. 9:16, 'But our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to his commandments;' so ver. 29. These proclaim a war with the Lord of hosts, especially when not reclaimed by grievous judgments: Isa. 26:19, 'I will break the pride of your power.' And this is that we should lay to heart at this day: Jer. 13:17, 'But if ye will not hear, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride.' When a people will not be brought to any serious consideration of God's judgments, nor

abate their haughty minds, he would bewail their foolish arrogancy, and the miseries ensuing thereupon. This standing out against God is the greatest pride.

2. Take heed of murmuring against his providence. Entertaining crosses with anger and blessings with disdain are sure notes of unmortified pride; when God's dispensations still displease, and the heart swelleth against his sovereignty.

[1.] To entertain crosses with anger: 2 Kings 6:33, 'This evil is from the Lord: why should I wait any longer upon the Lord?' Words of desperate distrust and murmuring.

[2.] Blessings with disdain: Mal. 1:2, 'I hath loved you, saith the Lord; and they said, Wherein hast thou loved us?' as if God owed them more than others, and were a kind of debtor to them: Hab. 2:4, 'Behold, his soul, which is lifted up, is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.' The lofty and unsound are distinguished from the just, who can tarry God's leisure; those men's souls are lifted up who cannot acquiesce in their lot and portion assigned by God, but censure his way of proceeding, and are loath he should have the disposing of them at his pleasure.

3. Take heed of despising any of Christ's little ones, and scorning and mocking at those that fear the Lord: Ps. 119:51, 'The proud have had me greatly in derision.' To make a mock of others upon any account is a sign of pride, though they be meaner in gifts, though differing in judgment, though walking in a lower dispensation; but especially to scorn at them because more godly: 2 Tim. 3:3, ἀφιλάγαθοι, 'Despisers of those that are good.' This is to reflect upon God himself, whose image in his saints is made a byword, and a strict obedience to his will matter of scorn and derision. If a slave should mock a child because he is like his father, would this be well taken? So the jealous

God will not long endure this horrible indignity, that his image should be scorned in his children: Isa. 63:9, 'In all reproaches he is reproached.' But they will say, It is not their holiness, but their demure hypocrisy and affected preciseness, which they reproach and scorn. But God seeth the heart: it is as if a leper did upbraid others with pimples. The infirmities of the godly do not justify your contempt of godliness; and because of their faults, you must not scorn at their holiness and expect indemnity.

4. Take heed of moral pride, which consists in a lofty conceit of ourselves, joined with a contempt of others. This was the Pharisees' sin: Luke 18:9, 'He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.' And it is notably personated in the Pharisee and publican who went up to pray, and is daily seen in them who are speaking of their own things, boasting of their own excellences, elevating their own, but extenuating the gifts of others. Most men are too great and too good in their own esteem. Self-love representeth ourselves to ourselves in a feigned shape and likeness, much more wise, and holy, and just, than we are; it maketh us loathe other men's sins rather than our own, to extenuate other men's gifts and graces and cry up our own; but this should not be: Phil. 2:3 'Let each esteem another better than themselves.' Humility is content to sit in the meanest place: Eph. 3:8, 'Who am the least of all the saints;' 1 Tim. 1:15, 'Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' We know our own weakness better than others, and they may have secret excellences which we see not. This moral pride discovereth itself in three things:—

[1.] In disdain of inferiors, or contempt of those who are of meaner gifts or rank and place in the world. Every member hath its use in the body, the toe as well as the head, neither can one say to another, 'I have no need of thee,' 1 Cor. 12:21. All Christians have their peculiar

gifts, by which they are rendered acceptable and useful to the body, as every country hath its proper commodities for the maintaining of trade and commerce between all parts of the world; or as to the beauty and use of the universe, there is need of hills and valleys; so all ranks of men contribute to the beauty, use, and service of the whole. The strong should not despise the weak, nor the weak prescribe to the strong. Now, it is impossible to keep all in their due order and proportion unless every one consider their own weakness and want, and the usefulness of others; as, among Christians, some are useful to preserve order, others to keep afoot the life and power of godliness, some to revive the pristine purity, others the old peaceable spirit. God hath so counterbalanced all parties that they may be mutually helpful, but not that we despise and contemn any other, and seek to destroy and subvert another, and so make way for great mischiefs. Every one hath enough to humble him, and enough to render him useful to human society. Therefore we must not set at nought our brother, Rom. 14:10. God hath made him something which thou art not, and given him an ability to do something thou canst not do, or wouldst not submit unto. Contempt is the fruit of pride; there are none but deserve some respect: scorn is the bane of human society.

[2.] It betrayeth itself in contention with equals: 'Wrath and contention cometh by pride,' Prov. 13:10. Every one seeks to be eminent, and would excel, not in graces and gifts—that is ἀγαθήρις, a holy emulation—but in rank and place. We set too high a price upon ourselves, and when others will not come up to our price we are troubled. We ascribe too much to ourselves; and when we meet not with that respect and honour which we affect, we fall into contention, and break out into strifes, supposing ourselves neglected. We see often what a makebait this is in the world, if others do not accommodate themselves to our sense, if they approve not all things

we say, if their opinion differeth a little, or, it may be, nothing from ours. Men pertinaciously obstinate in their preconceptions will not change opinion upon apparent evidence; but humble men are always peaceable, they can better give and take those respects which are done to one another than others can. The apostle saith, Eph. 5:21, 'submit yourselves to one another in the fear of God.' There is a service of love which every one oweth to another for their mutual good and advantage, and is called submission, though it be to equals, because our proud and lofty spirits look upon it as below us. There are none living whom God alloweth to live only to themselves. Now, that there may be an equality, we are to stoop and condescend to one another; others are to live to us, and we to them: 1 Peter 5:5, 'Be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.' This mutual subjection to another in the duties of love can never be obtained till we learn to moderate our esteem of ourselves, and heighten our esteem of others; we can neither advise nor instruct, nor esteem one another, nor maintain peace in our relations, and perform all Christian offices to each other, till this spirit prevail with us.

[3.] By undutifulness to superiors, or those that are preferred in honour before ourselves. Proud men would be admired of all, well thought of and spoken of by all, and preferred above all; and if it be not so, they are discontented, and a secret enmity and malignity invadeth their spirits and settleth itself there; it is an apparent fruit of natural corruption: James 4:5, 'The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy.' Men cannot endure either the real or reputed excellency of others; the proud creature would shine alone. Therefore we are secretly nibbling at the credit of others, blasting their reputation, and desire by all means to lessen them, or that they should be lessened; and where this disposition prevaieth into any degree of strength and tyranny, it groweth outrageous: Prov. 27:4,



'Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?' For when we are grieved at the prosperity and excellency of others, we seek to undermine them by all the means we can devise; as when the brothers of Joseph sought to put him out of the way; and when Saul envied David, he was still plotting his destruction. So when the Pharisees envied Christ, 'If we let him alone, all men will run after him.' This brought them to crucify the Lord of glory. Anger venteth itself in sudden flashes, and wrath in some present act of violence, but envy is injurious and treacherous. Anger and wrath suppose some offence, but envy is troubled at the goodness and excellency of others. Anger and wrath are assuaged by degrees, and when the raging billows and tempest ceaseth, there is a calm; but this groweth by time, and is exasperated more and more the longer those whom we envy are in good condition. Now this affection reigned in us in our natural estate, Titus 3:3, and remaineth in some degree in the best.

5. Another expression of pride is impatience of admonitions and reproofs; that is the cause of the wicked's hatred of the godly, because their lives are a real reproof: John 6:7, 'The world hateth me, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil;' Heb. 11:7. But surely it argueth a proud spirit when men cannot endure friendly counsel, and will not have their privy sores touched, but they grow fierce and outrageous, especially when they excel others in rank and power: as when the prophet reprov'd Amaziah, 2 Chron. 25:16, 'Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear, why shouldest thou be smitten?' so 2 Chron. 18:23, 'He smote him on the cheek, and said, When went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?' So the Pharisees hated Christ because of his free reproofs: John 9:40, 'Are we blind also?' They cannot endure to hear of their faults, especially from one in an inferior condition, and think every reproof to be a reproach, though never so wisely and compassionately managed, and

that it is beneath their rank to stoop to it; though Job despised not the cause of his maid-servants, Job 31:13, if they had anything to say against him; and David stopped upon Abigail's motion, 1 Sam. 25:26.

6. Take heed of building too securely upon earthly enjoyments, as if your estate were so firm and secure that it could not be altered, because you are high and great in wealth, power, honour, and esteem. Confidence in our outward estate is a sure note of pride: Ps. 10:4–6, 'The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies. he puffeth at them. He hath said in heart, I shall not be moved; I shall not be in adversity.' There the Psalmist chargeth pride on the wicked, and such a pride as ariseth from confidence in outward prosperity; and mentioneth a double effect, not only slighting their adversaries, but God himself. It is no matter for any terms of peace or moderation towards their adversaries, his ways are always grievous; therefore are they violent, fierce and high, and severe towards them. Do not need the protection of God; therefore cold, flat, negligent in prayer; yea, scorn to implore God by prayer for any blessing. They are so high in place and power, that they are able to oppress their underlings, and so think they can bring to pass what they would have to be done in despite of God. Now somewhat of this may be found in the people of God: Ps. 30:6, 'In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.' They drink in some of this poison, are apt to rest and sleep on a carnal pillow. By this you may see that none of us have perfectly put off this sin. Plato saith a man doth put it off, as *τελευταῖον χιτῶνα*, it groweth out of the conquest of other sins. But if we would not be proud—

[1.] Let us pray often, for in prayer we profess our subjection and dependence. Where prayers are fervent, earnest, frequent, it argueth

great humility; where rare, cold, uufrequent, little humility; where none, no humility. Seeking to God, who is so excellent, mindeth us of our own baseness; seeking his daily relief and succour mindeth us of the changeableness of all worldly things, and the several vicissitudes of this life, Ps. 10:4. A man serious in prayer, living in a constant dependence upon God, must needs be a humble man.

[2.] Let us be contented with a little, and not seek great things for ourselves; for interest is the great makebait. I am sure a worldly portion is the usual fuel of pride. A worm may grow in manna, but usually it is some worldly excellency which giveth us such great advantages here below which puffeth us up. If riches increase by the fair allowance of God's providence, we are not to grow proud of them: 1 Tim. 6:17, 'Charge them that are rich in the world, that they be not high-minded.' Moses saith, Deut. 8:12–14, 'Take heed when thou hast eaten, and art full, and thy gold and silver is multiplied, lest thy heart be lifted up.' Our hearts are mighty apt to be lifted up by a full estate.

[3.] If we excel in gifts and graces, double caution is necessary; this is a real excellency, 2 Cor. 12:7. Pride maketh us not only unthankful to God, but perverse to men: Prov. 21:24, 'Proud and haughty scorner is his name who dealeth in proud wrath.' Men conceited of their gifts make their own fancy and conceit their rule; and if anything be done that pleaseth not them, they rend and tear all, and trample upon the unquestionable interest of Jesus Christ to wreak their spleen.

It is a question whether real grace may make a men proud. Gifts, to be sure, may: 'Knowledge puffeth up;' yea, grace, through corruption. They need caution that have the great presence of God with them as to success when eminently employed in God's service. Credit by

worldly eminency and esteem falleth in with their services, and secretly insinuates high thoughts of their own excellences.

[4.] Consider how much pride hath cost us. They that are proud and burdensome to other people, God will pull down their pride: Isa. 13:11, 'And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.' It is spoken of the Chaldeans, who in bravery and force offered violence to others. God loveth to pull down the pride and insolency of roysterers, that have been formidable and burdensome to other people. The Lord of hosts hath purposed to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt the honourable of the earth. What hath God been doing, not in former, but latter times?

[5.] Consider that Christianity was sent into the world not to set up a kingdom of power, but patience. Mat. 18:4, 'Whosoever, therefore, shall be humble as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven;' Luke 1:51–53, 'He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart; he hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree; he hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.'

[6.] Consider who made us differ: 1 Cor. 4:7, 'For who made thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou hast not received? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?' Who would be proud of a borrowed garment? he becometh the more in debt. Nothing is ours but sin, all other things are the free gift of God. Shall the wall boast itself because the sun shines upon it? or the pen arrogate the praise of fair writing? The

more we have received from God the more we are obliged to acknowledge his goodness, and confess our own unworthiness.

Secondly, The event, or effect of God's providence desired, together with the reason of it. That which he desired was that they might 'be ashamed;' the reason, because they have 'dealt perversely without a cause.' Let us explain both.

1. The event of God's providence prayed for, that they may be ashamed; that is, that they may not prosper and succeed in their attempts; for men are ashamed when they are disappointed, and all their endeavours for the extirpation of God's people are vain and fruitless, and those things which they have subtly devised have not that effect which they propounded unto themselves: Ps. 70:3, 'Let them be turned back for a reward of their shame, which say, Aha!'

2. The reason urged, 'For they dealt perversely with me without a cause.' The Septuagint hath it *ἀδίκως*, unjustly. Ainsworth readeth, With falsehood they have depraved me. It implieth two things—(1.) That they pretended a cause; (2.) David avoucheth his innocency to God; and so, without any guilt of his, they accused, defamed, condemned his actions, as is usual in like cases. Elsewhere he complaineth, Ps. 56:5, 'They every day wrest my words, and their thoughts are against me for evil.' They condemned him for wicked, perverted his sayings and doings. Men pretend causes of their oppression, heresy, schism, rebellion; but mere malice and perverseness of spirit incline them to seek the destruction of the people of God.

Doct. That when the proud are troublesome and injurious to God's people, they may boldly commend their cause to God.

The reasons:—

1. The effects of their pride are grievous to be borne. Now, it is well when any grief findeth a spiritual vent, when it puts the godly upon praying: Phil. 4:6, 'In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God;' Jer. 20:12, 'O Lord of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them; for unto thee have I opened my cause.' We may exhibit our bill of complaint at God's tribunal, carry the fact thither.

2. The Lord may be appealed unto upon a double account. Partly as he is an enemy to the proud, and as a friend to the humble: James 4:6, 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble;' and Ps. 138:6, 'Though the Lord be high, yet he hath a respect to the lowly, and the proud he knoweth afar off.' Partly as he is the portion of the afflicted and the oppressed: Ps. 140:12, 'I know the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.' When Satan stirreth up his instruments to hate whom the Lord loveth, the Lord will stir up his power to protect and defend them. So Ps. 10:14, 'Thou hast seen it, for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself to thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.' When they have laid forth their desires, poured forth their heart before the Lord, they quiet themselves. It is God's office, practice, nature, to relieve poor helpless creatures that commit themselves to his custody.

3. Innocency giveth confidence in prayer, when we are molested and troubled without a cause. The testimony of conscience giveth boldness towards God and men, 2 Cor. 1:12; and Heb. 13:18, 'Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.' If God's children would carry it more holily and meekly, they might cut off occasion from them that desire occasion, and in their addresses to God experience more humble confidence.

But is not this a revengeful prayer? Ans. No.

First, Because directly they pray for their own deliverance, that they may more freely serve God by consequence. Indeed, by God's showing mercy to his people, the pride of wicked ones is suppressed, Ps. 119:134.

Secondly, As it concerneth his enemies, he expreseth it in mild terms, 'That they may be ashamed;' that is, disappointed, their counsels, hopes, machinations, and endeavours. And therefore it is not against the persons of his enemies, but their plots and enterprises; and shame and disappointment may do them good. They think to bring in the total suppression of God's people; that would harden them in their sins. Therefore God's people desire he would not let their innocency be trampled upon, but they disappointed, that the proud may be ashamed in the failing of their attempts.

Thirdly, The prayers of the faithful for the overthrow of the wicked are a kind of prophecies; so that in praying, David doth in effect foretell that such as dealt perversely should be ashamed; as a good cause will not always be oppressed: Isa. 66:5, 'But he shall appear to your joy, but they shall be ashamed;' they met with despiteful usage at the hand of their brethren, for their loyalty and fidelity to God.

Fourthly, Saints have a liberty to imprecate vengeance, but such as must be used sparingly and with great caution: Ps. 71:13, 'Let them be confounded and consumed who are adversaries to my soul.' Malicious enemies may be expressly prayed against.

## **SERMON LXXXVII**

**But I will meditate in thy precepts. Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.—  
VER. 78, 79.**

WE now come to David's resolution, but I will meditate in thy precepts. The word precepts is not taken strictly, but largely, for the whole word of God.

Doct. It is a blessed thing when the molestations we meet with in the world do excite us to a more diligent study of the word of God, and a greater mindfulness of spiritual and heavenly things.

1. I shall show what advantages we have by God's word and precepts, for the staying and bettering of our hearts.
2. How this cometh by deep and serious meditation.
3. How afflictions and troubles in the flesh do quicken us to it.

First, In the word of God there are notable comforts and supports, as also clear directions how to carry ourselves in every condition. I shall show what good thoughts do become as a ground of comfort and support and direction.

1. That God hath a fatherly care over us. Be once persuaded of that, and trouble will not be so grievous and hard to be borne. This our Saviour opposeth to worldly cares and fears: Mat. 6:32, 'Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of these things;' and Luke 12:32, 'Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you a kingdom.' There are two notions, and they are both Christian, which are the great support of the heart under any trouble



—adoption and particular providence. The heirs of promise are cared for in their nonage; and, by the way, once be persuaded of this, and it will allay our distrustful cares. Carking and shifting is a reproach to your heavenly Father, as if your child should beg or filch. God knoweth our wants, is able to relieve them, willing to supply us; this God is my Father.

2. That the humble soul which casts itself into the arms of God's providence shall either have a full and final deliverance or present support: Isa. 40:31, 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.' To wait on the Lord is with patience and tranquillity of spirit to expect the performance of the promises. Now these shall have what they wait for, or a supply of strength enabling them to bear up or hold out when they seem to be clean spent: Ps. 123:2, 'Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their master, and the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until he have mercy upon us;' it was in a time when they were filled with the contempt of the proud. Let us be patiently submissive to God's dispensations, there is hope of help.

3. That God doth wonderfully disappoint the designs of wicked men: Ps. 37:12, 13, 'The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him; for he seeth that his day is coming.' Haman's plot was destroyed, so was the conspiracy of them that would have killed Paul: 'There is no wisdom, nor counsel, nor understanding against the Lord,' Prov. 21:30. What is God now doing in heaven but defending his own kingdom? Ps. 2. Wherefore doth Christ sit at his right hand, but to promote the affairs of his church, and to blast the devices of the wicked? Mat. 16:18, 'The gates of hell shall never prevail against it.'

4. That the proud are near a fall: Prov. 16:5, 'Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, they shall not go unpunished.' Sometimes they seem to be supported by such combined interests, so woven in the laws and constitutions of a nation; but who can keep up him whom God will pull down? Pride is a sure note and forerunner of destruction, Prov. 16:18; Prov. 15:25, 'The Lord will destroy the house of the proud; but he will establish the border of the widow.' Weak and oppressed innocence standeth upon surer terms than the proud, though they excel in wealth and opulency.

5. That God will never leave us wholly destitute, and to difficulties insupportable: Heb. 13:5, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;' and 1 Cor. 10:13, 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able to bear; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.' To the eye of sense we are lost and gone and have no helper, but God is never wholly gone. Hagar set herself over against the lad, would not go too far from him. God seems to throw us away, but he keeps himself within sight, he will not totally or finally forsake us.

6. That God's usual way is by contraries. The gospel way to save is to lose, John 16:25; Mat. 16:25, 'He that will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it.' Joseph was made a slave that he may be made governor of Egypt; his brethren sell him that they may worship him; and he is cast into prison that he may be preferred at court. Thus God by shame bringeth to honour, by misery to happiness, by sorrow to comfort, and by death to life, to teach us to hope against hope, Rom. 4:18, and to trust in him though he kill us, Job 13:15; for death is ours, as well as other things. If calamities shorten our lives, they hasten our glory. Persecution is the nearest way to heaven in the eye of faith, and the

sword of the enemy is but the key to open the prison doors and let out the soul, which hath long desired to be with Christ.

7. That it is better to suffer than to sin. In suffering, the offence is done to us; in sinning, it is done to God. The evil of suffering is but for a moment; the evil of sin for ever. In suffering we lose the favour of men; in sinning we hazard the favour of God. Suffering bringeth inconvenience upon the body, but sinning upon the soul. The sinful estate is far worse than the afflicted, Heb. 12:28; the evil of sufferings for the present, the evil of sin for afterwards.

8. That holiness, faith, meekness, and patience are better treasures than any the world can take from us. Certainly a Christian is to reckon himself by the inward man; if he have a healthy soul, he may the better dispense with a sickly body, 3 John 2. If the inward man be renewed, 2 Cor. 4:16, if sore troubles discover reality of grace. Sound and saving faith discovered to the soul is better worth than the world's best gold, 1 Peter 1:9. If carnal sense were not quickest and greatest, we would judge so, and not look to the sharpness of the affliction, but to the improvement of it. If the bitter water be made sweet; if you be more godly, wise, and religious, it is enough: Heb. 12:11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.' If the loss of worldly comforts make us apply ourselves to heavenly consolations; if, being disburdened of worldly incumbrances, we go on in our way of serving God with more liberty and delight, and, when our dangers are greatest, we draw near to God, and adhere to him most closely, and being persuaded of his love, vigilancy, and power, with these and such kind of thoughts will a man be stocked who is with seriousness and delight conversant in the scriptures, and so will go on undisturbed in the course of his obedience.

Secondly, These things must be improved by meditation; so saith David, 'I will meditate on thy precepts.'

1. Sleepy reason is unuseful to us, and truths lie hid in the heart without any efficacy or power till improved by deep, serious, and pressing thoughts. Non-attendancy is the bane of the world: Mat. 13:19, 'When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.' Those invited to the wedding, Mat. 22:5, made light of it. Men will not suffer their minds so long to dwell upon holy things as to procure a good esteem of them; then in 'seeing they see not, and in hearing hear not;' as when you tell a man of a business whose mind is taken up about other things. A sudden carrying a candle through a room giveth us not so full a survey of the object as when you stand a while beholding it. A steady contemplation is a great advantage. Attending is the cause of believing, when we grow serious: Acts 16:14, 'Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things spoken by Paul;' Acts 17:11, 'And these were more noble than they of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind.' If people would often return to consider, they would not be hardened in sin: Ps. 4:4, 'Commune with your own heart upon your bed;' Hag. 1:5, 'Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways.' God's complaint was, they would not consider his ways, Job 34:27; Isa. 1:3, 'My people doth not consider.' Running thoughts never work upon us, nor leave any durable impression, like the glance of a sunbeam on a wave. When the soul is besieged by a constant battery of truths, it yieldeth; but a mind scattered upon impertinent vanities groweth not up to any considerable strength of faith, or joy, or comfort, or holiness.

2. God will not be served by the by and at hap-hazard. David taketh a resolution to study his duty. The more deliberate our resolutions are the better: Ps. 119:59, 'I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.' We shall never stumble upon a good course by chance: Isa. 56:4, 'And choose the things that please me;' not take them upon some sudden motion, but after mature and serious deliberation.

3. To divert the mind from other things. Afflictions and troubles stir up a multitude of thoughts in us: Ps. 94:19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts.' Sometimes self-oppressing thoughts, carking thoughts, envious thoughts, and repining at God's providence; the object of our trouble is ever before us. Now, there is no way to get rid of these but by exercising them upon better things. Troubles make us concerned about matters of weight; they employ our minds usefully, which before were scattered to impertinent vanities: Ps. 39:3, 'My heart was hot within me; whilst I was musing the fire burned.' That our minds may not be a prey to inordinate passions; we pore upon the trouble, and the heart is heated like an oven stopped up; and therefore keep the mind well employed.

4. Frequent meditation keepeth our principles in view and memory. We are apt to forget in our sorrows: Heb. 12:5, 'And ye have forgotten the consolation.' It is not ready at hand to support us in the time of trouble. A seasonable remembrance of truths is a great relief to the soul; it is the Spirit's office.

Thirdly, That afflictions and molestations have a great tendency and subserviency to promote and advance these holy thoughts where they are sanctified and work the right way.

1. They make us understand the word more fully and clearly than before. *Vexatio dat intellectum; qui tribulantur, saith Luther, sacras*

litteras melius intelligunt; securi et fortunati eas legunt, sicut Ovidii carmen. A full third part of the scriptures are lost to the secure and fortunate.

2. As they clear the sight, so they purge the taste, and give us a spiritual relish. Carnal comforts cloy the spiritual appetite; when they are removed from us, then we taste heavenly things: Ps. 94:19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.'

3. They quicken the heart to our duty, and so make us more awe-ful and watchful: Ps. 94:12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law;' Ps. 119:167, 'My soul hath kept thy testimonies, and I love them exceedingly.' If God write his law upon our hearts by his stripes on our backs, it is a blessed effect. Our happiness is to be measured by our great end, which is conformity to God and enjoyment of God; and therefore it doth not consist in outward comforts, riches, honour, health, civil liberty, and comfortable protection, but acceptance with God, and enjoyment of God. Now, as afflictions increase grace and holiness, we are the more approved of God, and enjoy more of God.

Use. Let all our troubles drive us to the word of God; there we shall find—

1. Grounds of comfort and support.

2. Hopes of deliverance.

3. Quickenings to duty, which being concocted by serious thoughts, and blessed to us by the Spirit of God, will enable us to ride out the storm cheerfully, and allay our cares and fears, and then we shall put

ourselves into the way wherein God hath engaged his protection, and so shall not be afraid of what man can do unto us.

I now come to the 79th verse, let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies. When troubled by the wicked, he prayeth for the help and comfort of the godly. There is an elegant allusion between the two words, יָבוֹשׁ, Let the proud be ashamed; and יִשׁוּבוּ, Let the godly be turned to me; that is, let them desert the society of these proud men, and join to me.

In these words God's people are described by a double character—(1.) 'Those that fear thee;' (2.) 'Those that have known thy testimonies.' David's petition concerning those, that they may turn to him. I shall deliver the importance of these words in certain propositions.

1. Observe the godly are described by two properties—the fear or worship of God, and the knowledge of his word. Those are godly who fear to offend God, and have the sound knowledge of his will; those are fittest for God's use in the general, and for David's use in the particular condition in which he was. For God's use: Fear and knowledge do make up a godly man. Knowledge without fear breedeth presumption, and fear without knowledge breedeth superstition and blind zeal, as a blind horse may be full of mettle, but is ever and anon stumbling. Knowledge must direct fear, and fear must season knowledge, then it is a happy mixture and composition. *Deum cognoscere et colere*—to know God, and worship him, is the whole duty of man, saith Lactantius. When we know God's testimonies so as to regard, love, and believe them, and dare not dispense with our duty to him for all the world, this is a good frame; our knowledge and fear of God must be according to his word. And these were fittest for David's case; fit comforters and strengtheners of the godly in persecution. There are many whom we cannot exclude

from all fear of God, who yet know not his testimonies, run into error, darken and blemish a good cause; but those that know and fear understand their duty, and are loath to violate it; with these should our souls close. Well, then, David doth in effect say, Those whom thou hast joined to thyself, let them join to me; they will acknowledge the equity of that cause which God owneth, and will converse with him whom thou disdainest not to take into favour; because they reverence thy providence, and are taught out of thy testimonies; and so, weighing the cause, as well as regarding the event, will be sooner won to the truth when God showeth mercy to his people; other godly ones will be allured to join themselves to those whom they find to be so dear to God.

2. Friendship and fellowship with such godly ones is a great blessing. Partly as it conduceth to mutual spiritual strength: Rom. 1:12, 'That I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me.' It is a comfort to see our Father's children wherever we come, and to behold their faith, zeal, self-denial, mortification; the godly are a strength to one another in evil times: Mal. 3:16, 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another.' There are many advantages attend the communion of saints; their very sight and presence is a confirmation to us. Many times that temptation befalleth us which befell Elias; we think we are left alone, 1 Kings 19:10, that godliness is gone out of the world. To have company is an encouragement; but we have not only company, but help. Every one hath his peculiar gift to help others, 1 Cor. 12. One hath quickness of parts, but not so solid a judgment; another is solid, but not of so ready, present, and good utterance: one is zealous, but ungrounded; another well-principled, but timorous: 1 Cor. 12:21, 'The eye (the knowing man) cannot say to the hand (the active man in God's cause), I have no need of thee.' All have their use, by mutual gifts and graces, to profit one another, as the curtains of the tabernacle were



coupled to one another by loops, Exod. 26:3, or as a body fitly joined and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, Eph. 4:16. Every Christian hath need of another's help. And partly as it conduceth more to public safety and honour: Phil. 1:27, 28, 'Only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries, which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.' When the members are cut off, the body is less powerful: Acts 4:33, 'And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus,' when they were met with one heart. And the apostle prayeth, Rom. 15:5, 6, 'Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Jesus Christ; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;' as if God could not be glorified by them where there is not this amen. Well, then, if David did so earnestly desire the company of God's children, so should we.

3. Though it be so great a blessing, yet often it falleth out that there are great discords and estrangements between those that fear God and know his testimonies; godly men may be strange one to another. David complaineth, Ps. 69:8, 'I am become a stranger to my brethren, and an alien to my mother's children;' and Ps. 38:11, 'My lovers and friends stand aloof from my sore;' they stood afar off then when wicked men had wounded him. Now this may come to pass—

[1.] Through carnal fear, as the godly may be deterred by the fear of the proud; therefore he desireth they may recover their courage. An afflicted condition, as it might increase the violence of the proud, so it might diminish the affections of the godly. Affliction is harsh to

flesh and blood, and good men in their sharpest conflicts may be deserted, not only of those who make fair profession, but are really godly, and stand in the gap alone. Christ himself hath paved the way; he was left alone; so Paul complaineth, 2 Tim. 4:16, 'At my first answer no man stood with me, but all did forsake me: I pray God it be not laid to their charge.' The godly may forsake our fellowship, though they wish well to us when we are persecuted, as the rest of the herd forsake the wounded deer; they may shrink from us and our afflictions. It will be a great mercy if owned in our troubles. Paul took notice of Onesiphorus's not being ashamed of his chain, when some turned away, 2 Tim. 1:15, 16.

[2.] They may be alienated by prejudice. Persons truly godly may be deceived by the proud. His enemies had depraved his cause; as in the former verse, his enemies represented him as a strange person: so they might be seduced by their slanders, and so engage against him, till they were disabused and reduced, as now he beggeth God in mercy to do for him. The equity of my cause being known, let them join themselves to me; as Job to his friends: Job 6:29, 'Return, I pray you, let it not be iniquity; yea, return again, my righteousness is in it;' that is, in this matter. Every good man would desire this; but David was the head of the party, and chief of the godly's sight. Often it falleth out that the godly may take distaste and offence at us.

[3.] There may be some offence given by us. Chrysostom and Theodoret think it relateth to David's sin after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and plotted the murder of Uriah. Theodoret thinks that he was withdrawn or separated from the communion of the church, according to his foul act; and therefore prayeth for a redintegration, and that they might return to intimacy with him again, and he gathereth it from Symmachus's translation, who doth not read it, Let them turn unto me, but Let them converse with me as

freely as before. Thus the disciples were offended with Paul, till God hardened their hearts towards him, Acts 9:13. Saul was ashamed to see any of those whom he had persecuted; Ananias was afraid, as the lamb to come near the wolf, till God prepared both by an internal vision; so ver. 21–27.

[4.] From difference in judgment about lesser things. We should, Phil. 3:15, 16, 'Be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things.' There should be a union in heart, way, and scope, Rom. 14, but often it doth fall out that passion, because of lesser differences, may occasion an unkindness between very brethren: Acts 15:37–39, 'And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other; and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus.' That paroxysm between Paul and Barnabas.

[5.] From the providence of God permitting it for wise reasons. Job owneth God in it: Job 19:13, 14, 'He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me. My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me.' So doth Heman: Ps. 88:8, 'Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination to them.' Partly to humble us and try us, for our depending too much upon man, and making us ourselves again with our party. A winnowing storm may be sent to this purpose. We think our faith and resolution strong, now God will try how we can stand alone. And partly to drive us to God: 'With thee the fatherless find mercy,' Hosea 14:3; Ps. 60:11,

'Give us help from trouble; for vain is the help of man;' Ps. 12:1, 'Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; the faithful fail from among the children of men.' We shall not have too much comfort by any creature, to turn us to believe in God alone. We are prone to look to the creature, and to have our hearts drawn away from God. And partly to conform us to Jesus Christ: John 16:32, 'Behold the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone;' Mat. 26:56, 'But all this was done that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.' This is part of the bitter cup.

4. When this falleth out, we should use all due means to recover those that have deserted us, and draw them unto us again; the favour is worth diligence. A man would not be cast out of the hearts of God's people. The apostle saith, Heb. 12:14, 'Follow peace with all men,' διώκετε εἰρήνην, not only embrace it when it is offered to us, and fairly droppeth into our mouths, but pursue it with earnestness; we must pursue it as a man pursueth something running from him to take it. It is explained, Ps. 34:14, 'Seek peace, and pursue it.' If the issue answer not our first attempt, we must seek it again; not giving up the cause for desperate, lest despair quench our endeavours.

5. One great means to recover a good understanding among God's people is prayer. David goeth to God about it, 'Lord, let them turn to me.' The Lord governeth hearts and interests, both are in his hands, and useth this alienation or reconciliation either for judgment or mercy. God, when he pleaseth, can divert the comfort of godly friends, and when he pleaseth he can bring them back again to us. The feet of God's children are directed by God himself: if they come to us it is a blessing of God; if not, it is for a correction. He made Jacob and Laban meet peaceably, Gen. 31, and in the next chapter Jacob and Esau.

Use. The use is direction to us in these times, when there are such distances and alienation of hearts and affections between the people of God.

1. Let us not be troubled at it over-much. Godly men were estranged from David, either being misled by delusions and false reports, or loath to come to him because of his troubles and low condition. And partly because it is no strange thing for a good man to be forsaken of his friends; so Job, chap. 6:15–17, 'My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away, which are blackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid: what time they wax warm, they vanish; when it is hot, they are consumed out of the way;' so David: Ps. 31:11, 'I was a reproach among all mine enemies, and a fear to mine acquaintance;' yea, so Christ himself. I know the temptation is very great. Man is ζῶον πολιτικόν, a sociable creature. To go alone in our duty is very hard; but we ought not to look on ourselves to be alone while God is with us, John 16:32. Christ is a pattern of all dispensations as well as trials: Heb. 13:5, 'I will not leave thee nor forsake thee.' He is so far from forsaking, that he will not leave us.

2. Let us recommend the case to God: Zeph. 3:9, 'That they may call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent;' Rom. 15:6, 7, 'That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God: wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.' Non sunt in la litigandi, sed orandi tempora. Beg a coalition of all those that fear God, that, laying aside prejudice, they may turn one to another. The spirit of concord is God's gift. Christ prayeth, John 17:21, 22, 'That they may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe thou hast sent me: and the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one as we are one.'

3. Let us carry it so that the children of God may have no occasion to turn from us. Scandalous sins are roots of bitterness: Heb. 12:15, 'Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.' Encourage the godly to pray for you: Heb. 13:18, 'Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience in all things, willing to live honestly.' To love you. Good men are not unworthy of our prayers, and incapable of the benefit of them; the more you excel in grace the more they will delight in you: Ps. 16:3, 'But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.'

## SERMON LXXXVIII

**Let my heart be sound in thy statutes,  
that I be not ashamed.—VER. 80.**

IN this verse we have—(1.) A petition, let my heart be sound in thy statutes; (2.) An argument from the fruit and effect of granting it, that I be not ashamed; that is, then I shall not, otherwise I certainly shall, be ashamed. He would avoid that inconveniency that was so grievous to him in the eyes of wicked men.

First, In the petition I shall take notice—

1. Of the person praying, David.
2. His qualification, intimated in the word my heart.
3. The person prayed unto, intimated in the word thy.

Secondly, Here is the benefit asked, a sound heart; in which you have

—

1. The nature of it.

2. The value of it.

Doct. That sincerity and soundness in a holy course is a great blessing, and earnestly to be sought of God in prayer.

First, This will appear if we consider the benefit asked, the nature and value of it.

First, The nature of it, what is a sound heart? It noteth reality and solidity in grace. The Septuagint hath it, Let my heart be without spot and blemish; what is here, Let my heart be sound. It implieth the reality of grace, opposed to the bare form of godliness, or the fair shows of hypocrites, and the sudden and vanishing motions of temporaries.

1. I shall briefly show what it is not, by way of opposition.

[1.] It is opposed to the form of godliness: 2 Tim. 3:4, 'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.' Their religion is only in show and outside, as apples, that may be fair to see to in the skin, but rotten at the core; so their hearts are not sound within. When we are sound within as well as beautiful without, this is the sound heart; when not only in show and appearance we are for God, but in deed and truth. Solinus telleth us that the apples of Sodom are to sight very beautiful and fair, but the compass of the rind doth only contain a sooty matter, which flitters into dust as soon as touched. This is a fit emblem of a hypocrite, or a heart not sound with God. Or, as the priests under the law, they were to look whether the sacrifices were sound at heart, otherwise they were to be rejected, Lev. 22:22, 23. So David here begs a sound heart in God's statutes, lest it should be rejected of God. The world thinketh, if there be a little external

conformity to the law of God, it is enough. Oh, no! There must be a sound heart; no other principle of obedience pleaseth God.

[2.] This sound heart is opposed to the sudden pangs and hasty motions of temporaries. The graces of temporaries are for matter true, but slightly rooted, and therefore are not sound. There wanteth two things in the graces of temporaries—(1.) A deep and firm radication; (2.) A habitual predominancy over all lusts.

(1.) A deep and firm radication. Temporaries are really affected with the word of God, and the offers of Christ and life by him; but the tincture is but slight, and soon worn off; they have the streams of grace, but not the fountain; a draught, but not the spring: John 4:14, 'The water that I shall give him shall be a well of water springing up to everlasting life.' A dash of rain or a pond may be dried up, but a fountain ever keepeth flowing. They have something to do with Christ; he giveth them a visit, but not that constant communion; he doth not 'dwell in their hearts by faith,' Eph. 3:17, nor take up his abode there; it is but a slight tincture, not a deep and permanent dye of holiness, or a constant habitual inclination to that which is holy, just, and good. There is not the remaining seed, 1 John 3:9. There is a great deal of difference between sudden motions stirred up in us by the Spirit, and the remaining seed; that is, a constant disposition of heart to please God.

(2.) A habitual predominancy over all lusts. Temporaries still, with those kind graces which they have, retain their interest in the world, and their inclinations to the pleasures, honours, and profits thereof, unbroken and unsubdued; as Simon Magus cherisheth the same corruptions under his new faith that he did under his old sorceries, Acts 8; still he did desire to be thought some great one among the people. You must not think that he altogether dissembled, but he had



some sense upon him, for he believed, and beheld the miracles, and wondered; but the same inclinations remained with him. Evermore some temporal interest or worldly advantage is laid closer to the heart, and hath a deeper rooting therein than the word of promise; and this in time prevaieth over the interest of God. And therefore, whatever good affections we have, till we get a command over our base and carnal delights, our hearts can never be sound with God.

2. Positively. What the sound heart is not, or to what it is opposed, we have seen. You may from hence easily gather what it is; it is such a receiving of the word into the heart that it is rooted there, and diffuseth its influence for the seasoning of every affection, and beareth a universal sovereignty over us. Sometimes it is described by its radication, and sometimes by its sovereign prevailing efficacy.

[1.] Sometimes it is described by its radication, and so it is called *λόγος ἔμφυτος*, 'The engrafted word, that is able to save our souls,' James 1:21. The root of the matter is within; it is not tied on, but engrafted: so in that promise of God, Heb. 8:10, 'I will put my law into their minds, and write it upon their hearts.' There is something written: I will write my law; and there are tables, and they are the hearts and minds of men; that is, the understanding and the will, or the rational appetite; and this with God's own finger: I will write upon their hearts and minds. There where is the spring and original of all moral operations, of all thoughts, affections, and inward motions, there is the law of God written; in those parts of the soul where the directive counsel and the imperial commanding power of all human actions lieth, there doth God write his laws, and engrave them in lively and legible characters. And what is the effect of this, but that a man becometh a law to himself? He carrieth his rule about with him, and as ready and as willing a mind to obey it. So Ps. 37:31, 'The law of God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.' The truth

is rooted in him, and his heart is suited and inclined to it. He knoweth and loveth what is commanded of God, and hateth what is forbidden of him: thus a man becometh a bible to himself. Indeed this planting and engrafting the law upon our hearts, it sometimes made our work, because we use the means. God doth not write his law upon our hearts by enthusiasm, rapture, and inspiration, as he wrote in the hearts of the apostles and prophets, but maketh use of our reason, reading, hearing, meditation, conference, and prayer. It is made our work, because we work under God: Ps. 119:11, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee;' and Prov. 6:21, 22, 'Bind his commandments upon thy heart; tie them upon thy neck.' When we look for the deep implanting of the word in our hearts, this is the sound heart here described.

[2.] The efficacy of this word so radicated, and the power and dominion it hath over the soul to subdue it to the will of God, and that is when the heart is transformed into the nature of God: Rom. 6:11, 'Ye have obeyed from the heart the form of sound doctrine that was delivered unto you.' When the form of the word is delivered to him, he delivereth up himself to be moulded and assimilated to the nature of it; as that which is cast into the fire is changed into the colour, heat, and properties of fire. Thus where the word is incorporated and rooted in us, the heart is assimilated to the object seen and discerned therein; the image of God is stamped and impressed upon us: 2 Peter 1:4, 'Having these great and precious promises, that we might be partakers of the divine nature;' and 2 Cor. 3:18, 'We are changed into his image' (or likeness) 'from glory to glory, by the Spirit of our God.' Well, then, you see what the sound heart is.

But yet more distinctly, if you would have me unfold what this sound heart is, there is required these four things:—

1. An enlightened understanding; that is the directive part of the soul; and it is sound when it is kept free from the leaven and contagion of error: Prov. 15:21, 'A man of understanding walketh uprightly.' A sound mind is a good help to a sound heart. Light breedeth an awe of God, and mindeth us of our duty upon all occasions: 1 Chron. 28:9, 'And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind.' First, know him, and then serve him. He can never shoot right that taketh his aim contrary. The understanding doth direct all the inferior powers of the soul; if that be infected with error, the affections must necessarily move out of order. A blind horse may be full of mettle, but is ever and anon apt to stumble; and therefore, 'Without knowledge the heart is not good,' Prov. 19:2.

2. There is required an awakened conscience; that warneth us of our duty, and riseth up in dislike of sin upon all occasions: Prov. 6:22, 'When thou goest it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest it shall keep thee; when thou walkest it shall talk with thee;' to have a constant monitor in our bosoms to put us in mind of God; when our reins preach to us in the night season, Ps. 16:7. There is a secret spy in our bosoms, that observes all that we do, and think, and speak, a domestical divine that is always preaching to us; his heart is his bible. Such an awakened conscience is a bridle before sin, to keep us from doing things contrary to God; and a whip after sin. If we keep it tender, so it will do. Indeed it is easily offended, but it is not easily pleased; as the eye, the least dust soon offends it, but it is not so easily got out again. Till men have benumbed their consciences, and brought a brawn and deadness upon their hearts, their conscience, according to its light, will warn them of their danger, and mind them of their duty. It is a great mercy to have a speaking, stirring conscience, otherwise it is stupid and senseless.

3. There is required a rightly disposed will, or a steadfast purpose to walk with God in all conditions, and to do what is good and acceptable in his sight: Acts 11:23, 'He exhorted them with full purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord.' Many have light inclinations or wavering resolutions, but their hearts are not fixedly, habitually bent to please God. Therein chiefly lieth this sound heart, that doth inseparably cleave to God in all things: 1 Chron. 22:19, 'Now set your hearts to seek the Lord God of your fathers.' This is the obediencial bent, when the heart is set and fixed. So David speaketh of it: Ps. 119:112, 'I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always to the end.' When the heart is poised this way, not compelled by outward force, but inclined; and this always, not by fits and starts. Many have good motions, and temporise a little, but their righteousness is like the morning dew. Many approve what is good, and condemn themselves for not doing of it, but their hearts are not inclined; nay, further, they can wish it were better with them, but the heart is not swayed and overpowered by grace. Here is the ground of a cheerful, uniform, and constant obedience, when we do not force ourselves now and then to good actions, but the heart hath a habitual tendency that way.

4. There is required that the affections be purged and quickened; these are the vigorous motions of the will, and therefore this must be heedfully regarded: purged they must be from that carnality and fleshliness that cleaveth to them. This is called in scripture the circumcision of the heart, Deut. 30:6: 'The Lord thy God shall circumcise thy heart, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, that thou mayest live.' It was figured in the cutting of the foreskin, or the circumcision of the flesh, which, because it was an action done with pain, sometimes noteth the humbling of the heart and soul-affliction, Lev. 26:41; but because it was done not only with pain, but the foreskin was cut off, so it noteth the purging the

heart from that fleshliness and carnality that cleaveth to us: Acts 15:9, 'Purifying their hearts by faith.' Sin is wrought out more and more by the blood of Christ applied to the conscience. And sometimes this is expressed in scripture by ploughing up the fallow ground, Jer. 4:4. There are perverse inclinations, like briars and thorns, that grow in us, and the strength of vile affections; now unless these be abated and broken we shall soon be transported by them. It is an allusion to ground broken up for tillage: till the ground be ploughed, and the noisome weeds destroyed, the good seed will not grow. Secondly, the affections must be quickened, acted, and set awork by the love of God: Gal. 5:6, 'Prepared ready to serve the Lord,' Eph. 2:20. Amor meus est pondus meum—love and delight in God's ways go together.

Thus much of the nature of the sound heart.

Secondly, Let me now come to show you the value and worth of this privilege. It is a great blessing; that will appear by two things:—

1. The respect that God hath to it.

2. The evil it freeth us from, 'That I be not ashamed.'

1. The respect that God hath to it. This is the thing that God delights in and looks after: 1 Chron. 29:17, 'I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness.' He can discern integrity, and preferreth it before all manner of service and pomp in worship that is yielded to him. Now this delight of God is not only in the thing itself, in the uprightness, but in the persons of the upright, upon account of their uprightness: so Prov. 11:20, 'The upright is his delight.' That person that is upright for the main, though otherwise he hath many failings, is of great esteem with God. But can the holy God delight in any of the sinful sons of Adam? Before the fall God

rejoiced in us, as in the work of his hands. But since sin marred us and defiled us, how can God take pleasure in us? The love of goodwill may fall upon sinful unworthy creatures, but the love of complacency cannot fall upon these. A fit object the sinner is not, and exactly perfect none can be; there is therefore a middle person, the upright and sincere man; and this delight of God passeth from the person to his actions: 'The prayer of the upright is his delight,' Prov. 15:8. Alas! our prayers are, as our persons, poor slender things at the best; yet a little findeth acceptance with God; it is welcome for the person's sake, who is accepted in Christ. Now, how will God manifest this delight? In his providence: 2 Chron. 16:9, 'The eyes of the Lord run to and fro, that he may show himself strong in the behalf of those whose hearts are upright with him.' He looks up and down in the world to find out such persons to do them good, that he may employ all his power and grace for them: so God shows it in his word. God's work is to assure them of a blessing: Micah 2:7, 'Do not my words do good to them that walk uprightly?' There he comforts, and strengthens, and revives their hearts. He doth not only speak good, but doth good to them that walk uprightly. Nay, that is not all, but by his Spirit and internal grace he doth more encourage them, and renew strength upon them in their way to heaven: Prov. 10:29, 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright.' The more they walk with God, the more easy and sweet they find it so to do. So that if all these promises will encourage us, we had need to look after this sound heart. What honour and esteem soever others purchase with men, these obtain favour with the Lord, and are more regarded in all his dispensations.

2. Let us come to the evil it freeth us from; in the argument of the text, 'That I may not be ashamed.' They whose hearts are not sound with God, one time or other they shall be put to shame; but others shall be kept from this effect, which is so grievous to nature. Let me

open this. A man may be ashamed either before God or men, ourselves or others.

[1.] Before God, either in our addresses to him at the throne of grace, or when summoned to appear at the last day before the tribunal of his justice.

(1.) If you understand it of our present approach to him, we cannot come into his presence with confidence if we have not a sound heart: 1 John 3:21, 'If our hearts condemn us not, then have we boldness towards God.' We lose that holy familiarity and cheerfulness, when we are unbosoming ourselves to our heavenly Father, when our hearts are not sound. An unsound heart, through the consciousness of its own guilt, groweth shy of God, and stands aloof from him, and hath no pleasure in his company. But when we sincerely set ourselves to keep a good conscience in all things, we have this liberty towards God; though our failings humble us, yet they do not weaken our confidence of our Father's mercy. St Paul thought himself a fit object of others' prayers on this account: Heb. 13:18, 'Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, willing in all things to live honestly.' That is his argument to prove that he was not altogether unworthy of their prayers, nor incapable of the benefit of their petitions. There are some whom no prayers or intercession can help or profit, some that have no encouragement to pray for themselves, or give others an encouragement to pray for them. But Paul was none of these. Why? Because the reason of his request is modestly expressed. He doth not say, I have, but 'I trust I have, a good conscience;' and he doth not justify himself in all things, but appeals to the bent of his will, 'Willing in all things to live honestly.' He was willing so to do, that is, to direct his life according to the will of God in all things; his heart was willingly disposed and predominantly bent unto righteousness, and he knew it to be so. Such may, without

blushing, come into God's presence, and have encouragement to pray for themselves, and encourage others to pray for them.

(2.) When we are summoned to appear before the tribunal of his justice. Many now with a bold impudence will obtrude themselves upon the worship of God, because they see him not, and have not a due sense of his majesty; but the time will come when the most impudent and outbraving sinners will be astonished, even then, when 'the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open and made manifest, and hidden things brought to light,' 1 Cor. 4:5. And every one is to receive his judgment from God, according to what he hath done, either good or evil. Conscience now, like a clock when the weights are down, is silent, and makes no noise; but then it shall speak, and tell men their own, and then they will be ashamed; unsound hearts will not be able to stand in the judgment. When God sets any judicial judgment afoot in the world now, it reviveth men's guilty fears: Isa. 33:14, 'The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrite: who among us shall dwell with devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' In some terrible judgments that are a foregoing pledge of judgment to come, men of an unsound heart are soon possessed with fears and frights, as the unsound parts of the body are pinched most in searching weather. When God's wrath is once kindled, none so terrified and amazed as they. Much more at the great day, when there is no allaying of their fear, and they must undergo the final judgment of the most impartial God. Who will be able to hold up the head, and to say, 'Then shall I not be ashamed'? They that unfeignedly give up themselves to do the whole will of God: Ps. 119:6, 'Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect to all thy commandments.' A man that desires to do the whole will of God will not be confounded and amazed with terror before the judge of all the earth. The philosopher defines shame to be a fear of a just reproof. Who more just than the judge of all the earth?



and when is there a greater reproof in the conviction of sinners than at the last judgment?

[2.] Before men a man may be ashamed; and so before ourselves and others.

(1.) Ourselves. It was a saying of Pythagoras, Reverence thyself. Be ashamed of thyself. God hath a spy and deputy within us, and taketh notice of our conformity and inconformity to his will, and after sin committed, lasheth the soul with the sense of its own guilt and folly, as the body is lashed with stripes: Rom. 6:21, 'What fruit have ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?'. There is an emphasis in the particle now; that is, now after grace received, or now after the commitment of sin. Take either sense. Sin enticeth us before we fall into it, but afterwards it flasheth terror in the face of the sinner, and filleth his soul with horror and shame; or now, after grace received, a Christian cannot look back upon his past life without shame and blushing. Tertullian hath a saying, that a man's heart reproacheth him when he doth evil. As soon as our first parents had sinned, they were ashamed of it, and sought fig-leaves to cover it; they seek to hide with the leaves what the fruit had uncovered. Well, then, there is an eye and an ear that seeth and heareth our secret sins, and lasheth the soul for them till we grow into a sturdy impudence. But now the upright man, that sets his heart to serve the Lord and do his will, hath comfort and peace in himself: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'This is our rejoicing, that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world.' He can look his conscience in the face without fear and amazement. He hath sorrow for his failings, but can look upon himself as sound before God for the main.

(2.) Before others; and so our shame may be occasioned by our scandals or our punishment: it is hard to say which is intended here.

(1st.) By scandals. When the heart is not sound with God, disorders break out before men, and many that make a fair show for a while afterwards shipwreck themselves and all their credit; for God will at length uncase the hypocrite, Prov. 26:26; God will pull off his disguise one time or other, and that which is counterfeit cannot long be hidden; there will a time of dissection come, when that which is hidden shall be made manifest. The apostle telleth us that 'that which is lame is soon turned out of the way,' Heb. 12:13. Men of an unsound heart have some temptations or other to carry them quite off from God, and then, as old Eli, they fall back, and break the neck of their profession, whereby they dishonour God and shame themselves. As Christ telleth us of the builders, that the house fell, and great was the fall of it; so these, by some shameful and scandalous fall, discover themselves to the world.

(2d.) There is a shame before others by their punishment and disappointment of their hopes. God's punishment, in the language of scripture, is a putting to shame: Ezek. 36:7, 'When the heathens that are about you shall bear their shame.' So Jer. 13:26, 'I will discover thy skirts that thy shame may appear.' So when God visits his people for scandalous and enormous offences: Ps. 44:9, 'Thou hast cast us off, and put us to shame.' The reason of that expression is this: A man in misery is a laughing-stock to others, and exposed to contempt and ignominy. Especially is this a shame to God's people, when they seem to be disappointed in the hope of protection and assistance which they expected from God; then God puts them to shame, makes them to be a despised people. And this is their portion whose hearts are not sound and upright with God; they are rejected of the Lord, and grow despicable. Well, then, the point is made good by what hath already been said; but now the other circumstance.

Secondly, Here is the qualification of the person asking, David.

1. David was a holy, good man, Acts 13:22. He goes and begs 'Let my heart be sound.' The hearts of the best men are so perverted with natural corruption, which is not fully abolished in any, that they have need to pray for a sound heart: Eph. 4:22, 'Put off the old man with his deceitful lusts.' The old man is not so put off but there will be many warpings and deceitful workings still, and therefore David prays thus. The more upright any man is, the more sensible of his weakness, and the more suspicious of his own heart's deceitfulness. The best have lodged sin, vanity, and pleasures, and the world in their hearts, which are the closets that should be kept entirely for the Lord. They find their purposes towards that which is good very weak, their resolutions variable, their inclinations to evil very strong: Prov. 20:9, 'Who can say, My heart is clean?' And therefore they go to God, if there be any degree of insincerity, any spared sin, any remainings of lust not striven against and not bewailed, that he would discover it, and mortify it, that they may be more steadfast, being sensible of their fickleness and turning aside in the several conditions they pass through.

2. This was the request of David, who was so much in the knowledge and study of God's law, and had so often said, 'Teach me thy statutes,' now 'Make me sound in thy statutes.' Sound knowledge of the statutes of God, and a sound purpose of heart to follow them, must be joined together. Affection without knowledge is not good, much less knowledge without affection and practice. All our knowledge will but increase our punishment, Luke 12:48, and take away all pretences of excuse. First a heart enlightened, and then a heart bent: David often prays for both in this psalm; so must we pray, that as we have greater knowledge than others, so we may have better affections than others, and our hearts more upright. 'If ye know these things, happy are you if you do them,' John 13:17. God's scope in giving the law, was not to make trial of men's wits, who

could most sharply conceive; nor of their memories, who could most faithfully retain; nor of their eloquence, who could most neatly discourse; but of their hearts, who could most obediently submit to his statutes. Stars were not made for sight only, but influence. So man was not created to know only, but to walk according to his knowledge. God's precepts are best learned when most circumspectly practised.

3. This was the request of David, a man afflicted, opposed, and persecuted. Compare the text with the 78th verse, 'Let the proud be ashamed; for they have dealt perversely with me.' 'Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.' Above all things we should study to be sincere in our carriage and defence of a good cause. An unsound heart will not bear out, but fall off to its own shame: James 1:8, The apostle telleth us, that 'a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' Between God's supplies and carnal shifts he goeth backward and forward, or this way and that, as occasion requireth. We need truth of grace, that we may be able to endure all weathers; and when we are put to trial we should be the more earnest with God for soundness of heart.

Thirdly, Here is the person of whom it is asked—of God: 'Make my heart sound in thy statutes.' Uprightness is the gift of God, and the work of his Spirit: Ps. 51:10, 'Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me.' We are like a pewter vessel, battered by the fall; and till we be cast anew we cannot be right with God. God worketh it in us at first, and still keepeth us and guideth us by his Spirit, or else we shall soon turn aside to our old bent and bias again. God beginneth the work of holiness, and maintaineth it against remaining corruption and outward temptations; he still keepeth afoot a constant purpose, and steady endeavour in the heart, to walk so as may please God. Men of themselves have a kind of humour

towards good for a fit; but to go on sincerely to the end needeth grace from above.

Use. To press us to look after this firm established spirit. Now to this purpose—

1. Heartily resign yourselves to be directed and guided by God in all things whatsoever: Ezra 7:10, 'He prepared his heart to seek the Lord.' To do it needeth such a fixed purpose.

2. Let us offer ourselves to God's trial. Ps. 139:23, 24, 'Search me, O Lord, and try me, know my heart and know my thoughts, see if there be any way of wickedness in me.' We must not only rest upon the testimony of our own consciences, but desire our hearts may be searched by God over and over. Besides, there are many ill humours mixed with our best affections, which we see not, and a secret approbation and indulgence we give to them. We are apt ever to deal favourably with ourselves; and therefore desire God to pry into your most retired and reserved thoughts.

3. Let us walk still as in God's eye: Ps. 119:168, 'I kept thy precepts and thy testimonies, for all my ways are before thee.' Whatever praise we have with men, we must see that our hearts be right with God, who is witness, approver, and judge, and searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins, and will not be put off with shadows; God's all-seeing eye is a special means to make a man upright.

4. Observe how often we step awry, Jer. 17:9, in those actions we perform. How careless are we of the spiritual part; we regard the outside of the duty, but slightly pass over that affection that should accompany it. In resistance of our corruption, we rather deal with the fruit of it, that it break not out to our disgrace, than the root of it that secretly lurketh in our hearts. There is a great deal of guile of spirit in

the best, and therefore we had need to 'make straight steps to our feet,' Heb. 12:13. There is some defect in matter, manner, or aim. We are many times set awork by others, yet expect wages of God.

5. Let us be often and earnestly dealing with God for this sincere heart; it is called 'godly sincerity,' 2 Cor. 1:12. Why? Because it comes from God, and carries the soul to God again. 'The new man is created in righteousness and true holiness, after the image of God,' Eph. 4:24, and hath a tendency in it to draw us to God again.

## **SERMON LXXXIX**

### **My soul fainteth for thy salvation; but I hope in thy word.—VER. 81.**

THIS verse is wholly narrative, and consists of two branches:—

1. The first clause showeth how he stood affected to God's salvation, my soul fainteth for thy salvation.
2. His support till that affection was satisfied, but I hope in thy word.

Before we can make any further progress in explaining and applying this scripture, we must first see what is this salvation which is here spoken of. Salvation in scripture hath divers acceptations; it is put—

1. For that temporal deliverance which God giveth, or hath promised to give, to his people. So it is taken Exod. 14:13, 'Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord that he will show you to-day;' that is, the wonderful deliverance which he will work for you. So Lam. 3:26, 'It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord;' meaning by salvation, their recovery out of captivity. It was their duty to wait for this deliverance; and though it were long first, yet, having a promise, they were to keep up their hope.

2. For the exhibition of Christ in the flesh: Ps. 98:2, 3, 'The Lord hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and truth to the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.' Clearly that psalm containeth a prediction of the setting up of Christ's kingdom, and a bringing of the Gentile world into subjection to it; which was first to be offered to the people of the Jews, and from thence to be carried on throughout all the regions of the world. So old Simeon expresseth himself, Luke 2:29, 30, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;' meaning thereby Christ actually exhibited or born in the flesh, which was the beginning of the kingdom of the Messiah.

3. For the benefits which we have by Christ on this side heaven; as the pardon of sin, and the renovation of our natures; these are called salvation, as Mat. 1:21, 'He shall save his people from their sins;' and Titus 3:5, 'He hath saved us by washing in the laver of regeneration;' and in the Old Testament, Ps. 51:12, 'Restore unto us the joy of thy salvation;' that is, the joy which we have because God hath freed us from our sins.

4. For everlasting life: Heb. 5:9, 'He is become the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him;' and 1 Peter 1:9, 'Receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls;' meaning thereby our final reward.

The text is applicable to all these. But (1.) Most simply we must expound it of salvation in the first sense, because the drift of the man of God in this octonary is to show how he was affected; since God heard him not at the first cry, or as soon as he prayed for deliverance: though he prayed for deliverance, yet the help promised and hoped for was delayed so long, till he was ready to faint, and had fainted altogether, but that the promise revived and kept up his hopes. (2.) If these words be supposed to be spoken by the church, and in her name, they fitly represent the longings of the Old Testament fathers after Christ's coming in the flesh. For as David expresseth himself here, so doth old Jacob: Gen. 49:18, 'I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.' That speech cometh in there by way of interruption, for as he was blessing his children, he turneth to the Lord, desiring his salvation by Christ, of which Samson, belonging to the tribe of Dan (the tribe which he was then blessing), was a special type. So it is said of Abraham, John 8:56, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.' Abraham knowing him to be the true Messiah, did earnestly desire to see that day, and to his great contentment got a sight of it by faith; it was a sweet and blessed sight to him. So Luke 10:24, 'Many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them;' that is, David, a king, and other prophets longed for this day. So Heb. 11:13, 'Having seen the promises afar off, they were persuaded of them, and embraced them.' Oh! they hugged the promises, saying, These will one day yield a saviour to the world. So it is said of all the serious believers of the Old Testament, Luke 2:25, that 'they waited for the



consolation of Israel;' that is, for the redemption of the world by the blood of Christ, and the pouring out of the Holy Ghost, upon which followed the calling of the Gentiles and the setting up of the kingdom of God in the world. These things the saints longed for, waited for; and because the Lord suspended the exhibition of them till the fulness of time, and did not presently satisfy their desires, they might be said to faint; but the promise kept up their faith in waiting and confidence. I cannot wholly exclude this sense, because the salvation promised at the coming of the Messiah was the greatest, and common to all the faithful. They had many discouragements in expecting it from the wickedness and calamities of that people from whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ was to descend. But though they were ready to faint, they did not give over the hope of that salvation, having God's word for it, and the remembrance of it kept afoot by the sacrifices and types of the law. (3.) Since Christ hath appeared in the flesh, and hath wrought salvation for us, we must wait, and long, and look for that part of salvation which is yet to be performed; as the deliverance of the church from divers troubles, the freedom of particular believers from their doubts and fears, and finally our eternal salvation, which shall be completed at Christ's second coming. All that have the first-fruits of the Spirit are groaning for this and hoping for this, Rom. 8:23–25. We are to desire heaven, yet patiently to stay God's time, for here is fainting and hoping, or, as the apostle saith, hastening to and yet waiting for the coming of the Lord, 2 Peter 3:12. One is the effect of desire, the other of hope; desire hastening, and hope waiting.

These things being cleared, let us first apply the words to temporal deliverance. Observe—

Doct. 1. The afflictions of God's people may be long and grievous before any comfort and deliverance cometh. For the affliction

continued so long upon David that his soul even fainted.

There are three agents in the afflictions of the saints—(1.) God; (2.) Satan; (3.) Wicked men.

1. God hath many wise reasons why he doth not give audience, or a gracious answer at the first call.

[1.] Because he will try our faith, to see if we can depend upon him when it cometh to an extremity. Thus by silence and rebukes Christ tried the woman of Canaan, that her faith might appear the more gloriously: Mat. 15:28, 'Then Jesus answered, and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith.' And by extremities he still trieth his children: our graces are never exercised to the life, till we are near the point of death; that is faith which can then depend upon God: Job 13:15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;' and Ps. 23:4, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' Many of his children are reduced to great straits; there may be no meal in the barrel nor oil in the cruse before God helpeth them. There may be many mouths to eat little food: John 6:5, 6, when there was a great deal of company, and little provision, Christ asketh one of his disciples, 'Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? and this he said to prove him, for he himself knew what he would do.' So many a poor believer is put to it. Children increase, trading groweth dead, supplies fail, what shall they do? They pray, and God giveth no answer. This he doth to prove them. It is a strong faith which can hold out in such straits and difficulties.

[2.] To awaken our importunity: Luke 18:1, 'And he spake a parable to them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint:' compared with Luke 11:8, with the parable ensuing. So again an instance in the woman of Canaan, she turneth discouragements into

arguments. When Christ said, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs,' she said, 'Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table,' Mat. 15:26, 27. So the blind men, Mat. 20:31, the more they were rebuked, cried the more. Rather than his people shall neglect prayer, or grow formal in it, God will cast them into great afflictions; as Christ suffereth the storm to continue till the ship was almost overwhelmed, that his disciples might awaken him, Mat. 8:25.

[3.] To make us sensible of our weakness; as Paul, 2 Cor. 1:9, 'But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead. We are much given to self-confidence, therefore God will break it, and ere he hath done with us, make us trust in him alone. There is a twofold strength—natural and spiritual.

(1.) Natural; which ariseth from that courage that is in man as he is a reasonable creature. This will hold out till all probabilities be spent: Prov. 18:14, 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?' Till a man be struck at the heart, his reason will support him.

(2.) Spiritual; faith, hope, patience. These may be spent when the affliction is deep and pressing, and God's help is long delayed. Faith is the strength of the soul; as faith decayeth or is tired, the soul faints. Faith may be damped, and give up our case for gone, Ps. 116:11; Ps. 31:22, they throw up all, and think it is in vain to wait any longer. Thus will God discover our weakness to ourselves; the weakness of our reason, the weakness of our faith. I remember Solomon saith, Prov. 24:10, 'If thou faintest in adversity, thy strength is small.' Grievous or long afflictions discover our strength or weakness. Some are of a poor spirit, give up at first assault, before

their strength faileth them; before the probabilities which sense and reason offereth are spent. They are lazy, and love their ease. Some are negligent, do no make use of the helps of faith; but when evils continue long and sit close, the strongest faith is seen to be too weak; God by this will humble us.

[4.] God doth this for his own glory, and that his work may be the more remarkable and conspicuous: John 11:6, 7, 'Jesus loved Lazarus, and when he heard that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.' Little love in that, you will say; a man would hasten to his dying friend. Christ may dearly love his own, and yet delay to help them even in their extremity, till the fit time come wherein the mercy may be the more conspicuous. It is said, Eccles. 3:11, 'God hath made everything beautiful in his time.' Before its time, God's work seemeth harsh and rough; as a statue when it is first hewn out, but in its time it is a curious piece of workmanship. God in his own time and way knoweth best how to comfort his people.

2. It is the devil's design to tire and weary out the people of God, and therefore stirreth up all his malice against us: Luke 22:31, 32, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.' The devil, if he might have the shaking of us, and liberty to do his worst, he would drive us from the faith of Christ, and all hopes by him.

3. Men are unreasonable in their oppositions, and will not relent nor abate anything of their rigour: Zech. 1:15, 'I was a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.' They are still adding to the church's trouble, and would destroy those whom God would only

correct and purge, as the slave layeth on unmercifully. Till God restrain it, their wrath never ceaseth. Well, then—

Use 1. Let it not seem strange to us that godly men, in their afflictions, though they fly to God and implore his mercy, are not presently delivered, nor always at the first instance. God hath many discoveries to make, much work to do. Would you have faith rewarded before it be tried? or the beautiful frame and link of causes disturbed for your sakes? Faith is not tried to purpose till the thing we believe is not

seen, nor have any probability that ever we shall see it; yea, till we see nothing but the contrary, and hope against hope; we must stay till the mercy be ready for us, and we ready for it; a hungry stomach would have the meat ere it be roasted; our times are always present with us, when God's time is not come.

Use 2. Let us prepare for grievous and tedious sufferings. We would turn over our hard lesson before we have sufficiently learned it; we love the ease of the flesh, would have no cross, or a very short one. Things will not be so soon or so suddenly effected as we imagine. We make greater provision for a long voyage. We should be strengthened to long-suffering, Col. 1:11, as for all sort of crosses, so for long and tedious crosses.

Use 3. If your affliction be long, observe your carriage under it. Doth faith and hope keep you alive still? Heb 6:12, 'Be not slothful, but followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises.' Do you keep up your prayerful affections? Rom. 12:12, 'Continue instant in prayer.' We pray as men out of heart, for fashion's sake, and with little life, rather satisfying our consciences than expressing our hope and confidence. A damp on the spirit of prayer is an ill presage. Can you love God though you be not feasted

with self-comforts and present benefits? Isa. 26:8, 'Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee,' &c. Our affections are bribed when desired comforts are presently obtained; God will see if we purely love him.

Use 4. For a close to this point. Our sufferings are like to be long; I speak not as determining, but to awaken a spirit of prayer that they may be shortened. When Christ made as if he would go further, they constrained him to tarry, Luke 24:28, 29. These are sad symptoms of it.

1. When reformation is rejected, and corruptions are settling again upon their own base: Hosea 7:1, 'When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered,' &c.; Ezek. 24:13, 'In thy filthiness is lewdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee.' This crime is not only chargeable on them who opposed the Reformation, but on those who, by multiplied scandals, dishonoured the cause of God. Instance in the Papists in Queen Mary's time, who got in by fraud and violence, not by miscarriage of the Protestants. Then it was sharp and short, ours is like to be tedious and long.

2. When our deliverance is likely to prove a mischief and a misery, when we are not prepared to receive it. God will not give us things for our hurt. And we may fear as much from our brethren, our mutual bickerings, as from enemies; when God promises restoration he promiseth unity: Zeph. 3:9, 'For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent;' Zech. 14:9, 'And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.' The dog is let loose when the sheep scatter.

3. When there is a damp upon the spirit of prayer, and men give over seeking to God for deliverance as a hopeless thing. God is near when the spirit of prayer is revived: Ezek. 36:37, 'Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them: I will increase them with men like a flock;' and Jer. 29:12, 13, 'Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you: and ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart;' Dan. 9:19, 20; and Ps. 10:17, 'Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.' Et passim alibi.

4, When God is upon his judicial process, and there is not any course taken to reconcile ourselves to him. God hath been judging his people, judging the nation wherein they live. Judgment began at the house of God. What notable humiliation and reformation hath it produced there? There is God's whole work to be done upon Mount Sion, Isa. 10:12. What fruit of all those terrible judgments? Incurribleness showeth our stripes will be many, our judgments long.

5. When dispensations tend to the removing of the candlestick, or look very like it: Rev. 2:5, 'Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.' That is done either by destroying judgments, taking away the subject-matter of the church, or by their own apostasy and spiritual fornication, or sad errors and confusions; ill treatment of God's people, opposing his interests by his enemies, and the sinful miscarriages and apostasies of professing friends, will help to wear out an unthankful, murmuring generation.

Doct. 2. When salvation is delayed, or deliverance long a-coming, the soul fainteth.

I shall show—(1.) The nature of this fainting; (2.) The causes of fainting; (3.) The kinds of fainting; (4.) The considerations which may preserve us from fainting.

1. For the nature of this fainting. Here we must inquire what is meant by the fainting of the soul. Fainting is proper to the body, but here it is ascribed to the soul, as also in many other places. The apostle saith, Heb. 12:3, 'Lest ye be weary, and faint in your minds;' where two words are used, weariness and fainting, both taken from the body. Weariness is a lesser, fainting a higher degree of deficiency. In weariness, the body requireth some rest or refreshment, when the active power is weakened, and the vital spirits and principles of motion are dulled; but in fainting, the vital power is contracted, and retireth, and leaveth the outward parts lifeless and senseless. When a man is wearied, his strength is abated; when he fainteth, he is quite spent. These things, by a metaphor, are applied to the soul or mind. A man is weary when the fortitude of his mind, his moral or spiritual strength, is broken or begins to abate, when his soul sits uneasy under sufferings; but when he sinketh under the burden of grievous, tedious, or long affliction, then he is said to faint; when all the reasons and grounds of his comfort are quite spent, and he can hold out no longer.

2. The causes of fainting. The fainting of the body may arise either from labour, sickness and travel, or else from hunger and thirst. So the fainting of the soul is either, first, from the tediousness of present pressures; or, secondly, from a fervent and strong desire.

[1.] From the tediousness of present sorrows and pressures; as Jer. 8:18, 'When I would comfort myself against my sorrow, my heart



fainteth within me.' And why? Because of the length of their afflictions, ver. 20, 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.' Sorrow doth so invade their spirits, that they are by no means able to ease themselves: expectations of this side, and that side, are cut off; they long look for help and relief, but none appeareth. So Lam. 1:22, 'My sighs are many, and my heart is faint.' They are overwhelmed with grief, and cannot bear up with any courage.

[2.] It may be caused by a fervent and strong desire: Ps. 84:2, 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of God.' Vehement desires cause a languor. So it is taken here: It is long, O Lord, that I have waited and attended with great desire for deliverance from thee. Those who vehemently desire anything are apt to faint Where love is hot, desire cannot be cold. The benefit of the church, liberty to serve God, do strongly move the saints; yea, the Spirit of God increaseth the vehemency of these motions; 'For he maketh intercession for the saints with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered,' Rom. 8:20. He concurrereth to the vehemency of the desire; but the fainting is from ourselves, from our weakness. The soul is so earnestly fixed in the expectation of God's salvation that it can no longer keep any equal tenour; so that this fainting is one of the love-errors of the children of God, like a disease which is incident only to the best tempers.

3. The kinds of fainting. (1.) There is a fainting which causeth great trouble and dejection of spirit. (2.) There is a fainting which causeth apostasy and defection from God and the cause of religion.

[1.] There is a fainting which causeth dejection and trouble; this is spoken of Heb. 12:5, 'My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, neither faint when thou art rebuked of him.' There are the two extremes, slighting and fainting. Now this is a fault in the children of

God, to be much perplexed in their troubles; but yet this may be incident to them, religion heightening their sense of evils, and their vehement desires of the comforts of God's presence increasing their trouble.

[2.] There is a fainting which causeth defection and falling off from God, out of cowardice and carnal fear, and casting off the profession of Christianity when they find it troublesome; they grow weary, incline to apostasy: this is not incident to the children of God: Rev. 2:3, 'Thou hast borne, and hast patience, and hast laboured, and hast not fainted,' not given over the cause of God. There is a fainting which is a slacking or remitting somewhat in our spiritual course, when men begin a little to relent, and to give way to coldness and lukewarmness, and do not keep up their former zeal and fervency or diligence in heavenly things. This may befall sometimes the servants of God, abate somewhat of their former forwardness, Eph. 3:13, when either they suffer themselves, or those who are primarily instrumental in the work of the gospel are cast into a suffering condition. And there is a fainting which makes totally and finally to abandon the ways of God: Gal. 6:9, 'He shall reap in due time, if he faint not.' There it is not taken for some remissness, which may befall the best of God's servants, but a total defection.

#### 4. The considerations which may preserve us from fainting.

[1.] It argueth that you are lazy, love the ease of the flesh, have small strength, if you faint upon every appearance of difficulty and trouble: Prov. 24:10, 'If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.' Sinners are not discouraged with every inconvenience occasioned by their sin, but can deny themselves for their lusts' sake; and shall we be soon discouraged in God's service?

[2.] Others that have borne far heavier burthens, do not sink under them. The Lord Christ: Heb. 12:3, 'For consider him, who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied, and faint in your minds.' Nay, many of his precious servants: Heb. 12:4, 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.' If against sin, are we only to praise their courage, never show our own? or do we think to go to heaven without conflicts, when it doth cost them so dear?

[3.] We have given counsel to others: Job 4:5, 'But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.' It is an easier matter to instruct others than to carry it well ourselves. The well will give counsel to the sick, and those that stand on land direct those that are apt to sink in deep waters. But should not we remember these things ourselves?

[4.] God promises to moderate the afflictions of his people, and to sweeten the bitterness of them, to take off the oppressing weight of their troubles, lest their souls faint: Isa. 57:16, 'For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.' The consideration of man's infirmity and weakness, unable to hold out, causeth the Lord to stay his hand; he will not utterly dishearten and discourage his people that wait for him. A good man will not overburden his beast.

[5.] When reason is tired, faith should supply its place, and we should hope against hope, Rom. 4:18; for faith can fetch one contrary out of another, and get water out of the rock, as well as out of the fountain. When probable means miscarry, then it is a time for God to work; and faith should bear us out when sense and reason cannot.

[6.] Give vent to the ardour of your desires in prayer: Luke 18:1, 'He spake a parable to them, to this end, that men ought always to pray,

and not to faint;' and Jonah 2:7, 'When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.' Keep up the suit, it will come to a hearing one day; though it be long ere God ariseth to the judgment, yet then make sure work of it.

[7.] By waiting upon God we learn to wait more: Isa. 40:31, 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.' Eternal blessings eyed and prepared for will support a fainting soul in the worst evil.: 2 Cor. 4:16, 'For this cause we faint not; though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' The greatest troubles cannot make void our hope, if our spiritual state increase and our eternal hopes thrive.

Doct. 3. Though the soul be in a fainting condition, yet it will accept of nothing but God's salvation, 'Thy salvation;' Ps. 94:18, 'When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up;' and ver. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.' Men may seek to get out of their troubles from wicked men two ways—either by carnal compliance, or by the use of indirect means.

[1.] By carnal compliance, when men violate and prostitute their consciences for their peace's sake. It is said of some, Heb. 11:35, that 'They accepted not deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.' They might upon certain conditions have been freed from those cruel pains and tortures, but those conditions were contrary to the law of God. We have God's deliverance upon better terms than man's, and it is better in itself.

[2.] By using indirect means to get off the trouble; this is making too much haste: Isa. 28:16, 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' Ravishing the blessing, rather than waiting for the issues of God's

providence. Those that do so, God will reckon them with the workers of iniquity: Ps. 125:5, 'As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.' They that shift for themselves lose the benefit of God's protection. These are dealt with as open enemies. Now the reasons of the point are these:—

1. Because they are satisfied in God's providential government. God never puts power in the hands of wicked men but for his own holy ends. Therefore, while God continueth them, they are observing what God will do by them: 2 Sam. 16:11, 'Let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him.' God hath work for them to do, to mortify our wantonness, to break our stubborn humours.

2. Because God's salvation will come in the best time and in the best way: Ps. 62:1, 'Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him Cometh my salvation;' Isa. 30:18, 'God is a God of judgment: blessed are they that wait for him.' God doth all things with wisdom, and in the best manner.

Use. How afflicted soever we be, let us not seek to be delivered in a way not allowed by God, nor take any sinister courses, nor use any base shifts to rid ourselves out of danger. This is to distrust God, and to entangle ourselves the more, and to miscarry in a long voyage, after we are about to enter into the port. See the story of Saul's sacrificing, in 1 Sam. 13, from the 8th verse to the 15th. If he had tarried a little longer all had been well. Before the day was quite over, Saul would sacrifice, and then Samuel cometh and telleth him God had rent the kingdom from him for his distrust and disobedience. So many will forestall the blessing.

Doct. 4. Hope keepeth us alive in the midst of faintings: 'My soul fainteth; but I hope.'

1. Observe here, that though the faith of God's children seems to faint, yet it doth not die nor wholly fail. Some seem greedily to catch at promises at first, but their ardour is soon spent; and when it is a troublesome business to wait upon God, they give it over. This is the faith and hope of temporaries, but the good ground 'bringeth forth fruit with patience,' Luke 8:15. God's children tarry his leisure; and though now and then they are ready to faint, yet they recover. Their faith, hope, and patience seemeth to be almost spent, yet it is not utterly put out; as David here was not broken with long and tedious difficulties; though he saw no end of his miseries, yet he would still depend upon God. There is an abiding seed, 1 John 3:8. Their state is secured by God's covenant, that there shall be no total rupture nor utter deficiency. Perseverance is a condition of the new covenant, not only required, but given, as all conditions of the new covenant are. There is *donum perseverantiæ*, not only a power to persevere, but perseverance itself.

2. That which keepeth our faith from dying, and sustaineth the soul of the faithful, and keepeth life in them, is the resuscitation of our hopes. What doth hope to the supporting of a fainting soul?

[1.] It draweth off the mind from things present to things future; and diversion is one way to cure trouble. While we pore only on our grievous troubles, they prove a temptation to us; but hope lifts up the head, and looketh above these things. That poring on the affliction and trouble causes fainting; see Lam. 3:18–20; but remembering God's mercies and promises reviveth us. The remembering the great depth of affliction and extremity overwhelmeth us: I have them in mind continually, and so am dejected; but when I begin to call to mind God's infinite mercies, I conceive some hope of recovery. That which was remembered is in ver. 22–26.

[2.] Hope representeth the excellency and certainty of these future things, and so causeth earnestness and patience.

(1.) The excellency. It is a question among divines what is the difference between faith and hope, because they are much of a like nature. One difference is, faith looks to the truth of the promise, hope to the goodness of the thing promised; for faith respects the person giving his fidelity, and hope the person receiving the benefit, and exciteth them to look for it. It is something worth the looking and waiting for, and such as will recompense present troubles, 2 Cor. 5:17, 18.

(2.) The certainty; for though it mainly comforts itself with the goodness of the thing promised, yet it causeth patience in waiting, because of the sureness. It seeth things that cannot be seen and perceived by sense: Rom. 8:25, 'If we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.' It is good, and it will not fail; therefore we may and must tarry God's leisure.

(3.) The most noble and principal object of hope is the great promise of eternal salvation. This must in chief be hoped for; partly because temporal salvation is not so surely promised, but under sundry cautions and reservations; as if it be for our good, if God's glory will permit it, and the beauty of his work, and the many things God hath to do before the deliverance be brought about; especially if it be a common salvation, wherein others are concerned as well as we; as if their hearts be prepared, &c. Partly because Christians are to be at a point of greater indifferency about outward things than the believers of the Old Testament, now life and immortality is brought to light, 2 Tim. 1:10. They were trained up by sensible things both in their worship and promises. The cross is one of our conditions: Mat. 16:24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take

up his cross, and follow me.' We must look for afflictions, and those not ordinary afflictions, but the loss of all, or else we do not count the charges aright; we must refer all to God's will. Christ may let some slip through at a cheaper and easier rate, but all must resolve on it. Partly because this is propounded as the great comfort, Luke 12:32, 'Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom;' and accordingly used by the saints. David in his disappointments: Ps. 39:7, 'And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.' He meaneth the hope of immortality, opposite to that vain show and false appearance which is in worldly things. This was that Job comforted himself with, that ancient believer: Job 19:26, 'Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God;' and the Maccabees, Heb. 11:35, 'They were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.' Partly because that which God hath promised in the world to come is only satisfactory, and able to quiet a man's mind, and make him patiently wait upon God in all his troubles. Here is enough to countervail all difficulties, to support us under them, to recompense us for them; it is not long ere it will come to hand, it cannot enough be desired; it may be hoped for by the righteous in their greatest extremities: Prov. 14:32, 'The righteous hath hope in his death.'

Use. For instruction. When your souls are apt to faint, let hope look out for better times or better things.

1. For better times. God will not always chide: Ps. 103:9, 'He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever.' Nor shall the rod of the wicked always rest on the back of the righteous, Ps. 125:3. Therefore rouse up yourselves, and say, as David, Ps. 42:5, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him,' &c. Let us not always pore on our grievous miseries. Observe the season, when apt to be



corrupted with ease and prosperity, and to carry it negligently to God, and proudly and oppressingly to men. There may come a change. So when apt to faint, seek out arguments of encouragement, and hope that God will be good to us: Ps. 56:3, 'At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.' That is our business at such a time, to strengthen our dependence, for still we must oppose the prevailing corruption.

2. Better things. That is the true Christian spirit that mainly looks after the world to come; that hope is freest from snares. An earthly hope maketh men carnal, often enticeth them to use ill means to get it accomplished. Desires and hopes of temporal happiness, that the world may smile upon us, doth not breed so good a spirit. This hope goeth upon surer grounds, meeteth with fewer disappointments.

Well, then, hope for these things. We shall hear of few in whom the former part of the text is verified, if understood of eternal salvation, 'My soul fainteth for thy salvation.' This temper is very rare, and few have such a spirit as Paul had: Phil. 1:23, 'I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ,' &c. But all Christians should hope for eternal life, and prepare for it, and make this the great cordial and solace of their souls. God's people do too much please themselves with thoughts of temporal happiness; this is no good spirit. The appetite of temporal honour, wealth and peace, is natural to us; we should be at a greater indifferency about these things, so as not to be very solicitous about them.

Doct. 5. This hope is bred or nourished in us by the word of God.

1. Because that is the law of commerce between us and God. In the promissory part it showeth what salvation and deliverance we may expect from him; and in the mandatory part, upon what terms, and who are the persons qualified to receive this deliverance: and without

heeding of these things, hope is a groundless presumption, as if we expect things not promised, or not in the way wherein they are promised. We must have an eye both on the promises and the precepts—the one to encourage us, the other to direct us. It showeth our hope is of the right constitution; Ps. 119:166, 'I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments;' Ps. 147:11, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy;' and Ps. 33:18, 'Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy;' as a man that consulteth with his charter and conveyance is more assured of his right and title. The scripture is cast into the nature of a covenant or mutual indenture drawn up between us and God. There we find God hath deeply and strongly engaged himself to us, and we to him. This we have to show under his hand.

2. We should give such credit to the word of God as to believe it, when to sense there is no likelihood of the performance of it; for what is impossible to appearance, is not impossible to God, and the certainty of the promises doth not depend upon the probabilities of sense, but upon the all-sufficiency of God. *Firmia dicta tanti existimantur, quantus est ipse qui diceret.* If God promise anything, who is almighty and who is faithful, it will be accomplished, and we may rest upon it in the greatest extremities, perplexities, and seeming impossibilities. We must not confine God within the bounds of created power.

3. God's word should be as good as deed, for his word and the beck of his will doth all things: 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' Micah 2:7. Not say good, but do good; when it is said, it may be accounted done, the performance is so certain.

4. The best holdfast we can have upon God is by his word. Whatever his dispensations be, though he withhold comfort and deliverance from us, yet it will do well in time. Therefore, whether he smileth or frowneth, his word should be our support. His dispensations vary, but his word is firm.

Use. Let the promises of God strengthen and revive our hearts.

If God hath said anything, his people should believe him. His word is a word of truth, Heb. 11:11. Sarah's faith was built upon this; 'she judged him faithful who had promised.' His word is a word of power, for he is a God of all power and might: Heb. 11:17–19. So Abraham's faith: 'By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.' His power, as is his being, is infinite. Therefore, having his word, this should give us rest and contentment of soul, though there be no appearance of performance; the promise is yea and amen, and continueth in one invariable tenour. Let not faith die.

## SERMON XC

### **Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me.—VER. 82.**

IN this verse the man of God expresseth—(1.) His earnest expectation of the comfort of the promises; (2.) His longing desire after it; as hope is wont to vent itself by serious thoughts, intermixed with strong desires of the blessing promised. His earnest expectation is expressed in the first clause, mine eyes fail for thy word. His longing and strong desire in the following words, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?

His earnest hope and expectation is first to be considered; and here his hope is described—

1. By the effect, his looking after the accomplishment of the promise; as, Judges 5:28, when Sisera's mother expected him, 'She looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot to long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?' and Rom. 8:19, 'The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth,' &c.—ἀποταραδοκία τῆς κτίσεως, the lifting up or stretching out of the head, as we use to do when we look for anything, to see if we can spy it coming.

2. By the incident weakness, because of the delay of help, 'Mine eyes fail for thy word.' He had looked and looked long, till he was weary of looking; what he said before of the soul, here he speaketh of his eyes. There the object was salvation, here the word.

Observe, first, that hope keepeth the eye of the soul so fixed upon the promise, that it is ever looking for deliverance and salvation.

Hezekiah useth almost the same manner of speech, Isa. 38:14, 'Mine eyes fail with looking upward,' that is, to God for ease and relief; as when we expect anybody's coming, we send our eyes towards the place from whence he cometh. Reasons:—

1. The children of God make more of a promise than others do, and that upon a double account—partly because they value the blessing promised, partly because they are satisfied by the assurance given by God's word; so that whereas others pass by these things with a careless eye, their souls are lifted up to the constant and earnest expectation of the blessing promised. It is said of the hireling, that he must have his wages before the sun go down, Deut. 24:15, 'Because he is poor, and hath set his hart upon it;' or, as it is in the Hebrew, 'lifted up his soul to it,' leaning thereby both his desire and hope. He esteemeth his wage for it is the solace of his labours, and the maintenance of his life, and he assuredly expecteth it, upon the promise and covenant of him who setteth him awork. So it is with the children of God; they esteem the blessings promised, and God's word giveth them good assurance that they do not wait upon him in vain: 1 Tim. 4:10, 'Therefore we both labour, and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the saviour of all men, especially of those that believe.' They know God is good to all, much more to his covenant servants. They value his salvation, and venture their all upon his salvation and the truth of his word; and therefore lift up their souls to him in the midst of their pressures and difficulties.

2. It is some satisfaction to enjoy the blessing in idea and contemplation, before we have it indeed. Hope causeth a kind of anticipation and pre-union of our souls with the blessedness expected: as heirs live upon their lands before they have them. And that is the reason why joy is made to be the fruit of hope, though it be proper to fruition and enjoyment: Rom. 12:12, 'Rejoicing in hope of

the glory of God.' It refresheth them in their pilgrimage, and affecteth them in some measure as if it were in hand. So Rom. 15:13, 'The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.' Whole believing, waiting, hoping, while conflicting with difficulties, they carry themselves as if they had already obtained the thing promised; for by eying the promise they are cheered and revived. Hope giveth a foretaste, especially when the comforting Spirit addeth his impression thereunto.

3. The opening of the eye of faith argueth a closing of the eye of sense, which giveth a double benefit—(1.) That we are not withdrawn by vain objects; (2.) Not discouraged with contrary appearances.

[1.] That we are not withdrawn by vain objects. Nothing doth quench zeal and holiness and joy in the Lord, nor cast water upon that sacred fire which should be kindled and kept ever burning in our bosoms, so much as keeping the eye of sense always open to behold the lustre and beauty of worldly vanities. Alas! then hope of heaven and salvation from God is a cold heartless thing; we think of it carelessly, desire and press after it very weakly. But now, when the eye of sense is shut, and the eye of faith kept always open, then hope advanceth itself with life and vigour, and present things seem less, and things to come greater and more glorious in our eyes: 1 Peter 1:13, 'Be sober, and hope to the end,' &c. Sobriety is the moderation of our affections in the pursuit and use of earthly things. The delights of the present life burden the soul, glue it to the earth, and to base and inferior objects; but when our souls are kept in the fresh, lively, and serious expectation of better things, all the things of the world appear more contemptible. It is not for eagles to catch flies, not for the heirs of promise to be captivated by the delights of sense; is that every day our hope is more certain and powerful, our pursuit more earnest.

The mind is not darkened with the fumes of lust, nor diverted from those noble objects.

[2.] The eye of sense being shut, we are not discouraged with contrary appearances, nor with fears and troubles and the trials of the present life, because hope seeth sunshine behind the back of the storm. We have a notable emblem of the eye of faith and the eye of sense in the prophet and the prophet's man: 2 Kings 4:15–17, 'When the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city, both with horses and chariots: and his servant said to him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about' Elisha's man is affrighted with the dreadful appearance of enemies encompassing them round about, and is at his wit's end. 'What shall we do?' But his master Elisha had the eye of faith, and could see great preparations which God had sent for their defence, which the servant could not see; therefore encourageth him, and in a prophetic vision showeth not only more horses and chariots, but chariots of fire, which were no other than the angels of God come together in the manner of a host, to rescue the prophet of God. What was represented to him in a prophetic vision is always evident to faith and to the eyes of a believing soul; they see God and his holy angels set for their deliverance. When God openeth the eyes of the mind, they can see the glory and power of the other world; and then, 'though troubled on every side, yet not distressed; though perplexed, yet not in despair; though persecuted, yet not forsaken; though cast down, yet not destroyed,' 2 Cor. 4:8, 9, though wrestling with difficulties, yea, brought to some extremities, yet this invisible assistance supporteth them; and though they have

little human means, yet God carrieth them on to their expected end and issue.

Use 1. To reprove us for poring so much upon present things, and neglecting those to come, especially the great recompense of reward. Alas! men have either none, or cold thoughts of that blessed estate which is offered in the promises. Our thoughts fly up and down like dust in the wind; they may sometimes light upon good things, but they vanish, and abide not. We may have some cold ineffectual glances upon heaven and heavenly things, which fly away, and never leave the soul better. This argueth hope is very weak, if there be any at all; for hope is always longing and looking out for the blessing, sending spies into the land of promise, to bring it tidings thence; it will discover itself not by glances and wishes; for the worst men may have some of these in their good mood and sober thoughts; but by frequent, deep, and ponderous meditations: you do not eye the mark, Phil. 3:14, nor mind your scope and great end, 2 Cor. 4:18. Certainly that which must be intended in every righteous action, either formally or virtually—that is, by some noted explicit thought, or by the unobserved act of some potent habit—should be oftener thought of and longed for; you do not live by faith else. For what is living by faith, but withdrawing the mind from present things to things to come, looking beyond and above the world to eternity? 2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:11. You are not acquainted with the influence of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, for he openeth the eyes of the mind. Why? That you may look above the mists and clouds of the lower world to those good things which we are to enjoy in heaven, Eph. 1:17, 18, and 1 Cor. 2:12. Alas! we are taken up with trifles and childish toys, have our thoughts little exercised about these nobler objects. Therefore is it that our diligence is so little; for if they were oftener minded, they would be more diligently sought after: Phil. 3:14, 'I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'



Therefore is our patience so little; for the bitterness of the cross would, be more sweetened if our minds and meditations were oftener set about heaven and heavenly things, Rom. 8:18. Therefore are our conversations so worldly, Phil. 3:19, our desires and longings so cold and weak, so little mind to get home, Phil. 1:23, πολλῶ μᾶλλον κρείσσον.

Use 2. To press us to eye the promised blessedness more than we do. The promise is our warrant, and the thing promised is the comfort, solace, and support of our souls. The promise must be laid up in the heart with a firm strong assent, and the thing promised ever kept in view. I shall give you the qualifications of this expectation.

1. It must be a serious and earnest expectation: Phil. 1:20, 'According to my earnest expectation, that in nothing I shall be ashamed.' Earnest expectation is that which exciteth the heart to be ever looking and longing for the things promised. Our eyes are always looking to heaven; which is the seat and solace of our happiness. David describeth his earnestness notably: Ps. 130:5, 6, 'I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning.' The priests, that officiated in their turns, never missed the performance of their daily offices there. So David was still awakening his desires, continuing his daily attendance on God, and renewing his longings and hopes.

2. It is a lively expectation: 1 Peter 1:3, 'Begotten again unto a lively hope.' It is called lively from the effect, such as will put life into us in our damps of spirit and greatest discouragements, quickeneth us to hasten home apace, being animated by some cheerful foretastes of what we expect.

3. It is a constant and unconquerable expectation, not broken with present difficulties, but sustaineth the soul, till our full and final deliverance cometh in hand: Ps. 123:2, 'As the eyes of servants look unto the hands of their masters, and the eyes of a maiden unto the hands of her mistress; so our eyes wait on the Lord our God, until he have mercy on us.' They never give over waiting and looking till God show mercy: 1 Peter 1:13, 'Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;' and Heb. 6:11, 'And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end.'

4. It is a sure and certain hope, as being built on God's truth and faithfulness: it is compared to 'an anchor sure and steadfast,' Heb. 6:18. Why? Because of God's word and oath. God is the supreme verity, who can neither deceive or be deceived; therefore we should rest satisfied with his promise. To a promise, that it be certain and firm, three things are required,—that it be made seriously and heartily, with a purpose to perform it; that he that promiseth continue in this purpose, without change of mind; that it be in the power of him that promised to perform what is promised. Now of all these things there can be no doubt, if we believe the scriptures to be the word of God.

[1.] Certainly God meaneth as he speaketh when he promiseth to give eternal life to the faithful servants and disciples of Jesus Christ. There is no question but that he is so minded, when he who is truth itself hath told the world of this; for what needed God to court the creature, or tell them of a happiness which he never meant to bestow upon them? If an honest man hath promised anything in his power, we look he should be as good as his word. Yea, we have his oath, which is πέρασ ἀντιλογίας, and μεγίστη παρὰ ἀνθρώποις πίστις. He

sent his Son with a commission from heaven to assure us; he is, 'Amen, the faithful witness,' Rev. 3:14. He wrought miracles to confirm his message, died, rose again, and revived: 1 Peter 1:21, 'Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.' This message afterwards was confirmed by all kinds of signs and wonders, wrought by them who went abroad in his name to assure the world of this. Not to believe God is serious, is to make him a liar.

[2.] That God doth continue his purpose, there can be no doubt in them who consider his unchangeable nature; he may change his dispensation, but not his purposed will: James 1:17, 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;' Mal. 3:6, 'I am the Lord, I change not; therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed.'

[3.] That he is able to perform it, since he can do what he will: Rom. 4:21, 'And being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was also able to perform.' So Phil. 3:21, 'According to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself.' The most difficult thing in our hope is the raising of our bodies after being eaten by worms and turned to dust. It is a thing incredible, and to flesh and blood wholly impossible; but nothing is impossible to God. It is within the reach and compass of divine omnipotency. Well, then, the thing is sure in itself; let us labour and suffer reproach, wait with patience, renounce the desires and delights of the flesh, and with patience continue in well-doing, and then we may lift up our souls to it. Our reward is sure.

The second point is from the incident weakness, because of the delay of help: 'Mine eyes fail for thy word.' He had his eyes fixed upon the

promise till they were quite wearied.

Doct. 2. Though his people wait for him, yet God may so long delay and suspend the performance of the promises till they count it a hopeless business.

First, Suspend. The reasons are these:—

1. Not because he is unwilling to give, but because he will have us better prepared to receive: Ps. 10:17, 'Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.' We understand it usually of preparing the heart for prayer, to ask the mercy; but it is also meant of preparing the heart to receive the mercy: 2 Chron. 20:33, 'The high places were not taken away, because the people had not yet prepared their heart to the God of their fathers;' they were not fit to have a thorough reformation accomplished in their days. The baker watcheth when the oven is hot, and then puts in the bread. At another time it went on roundly, for God had prepared the people, 2 Chron. 29:36. When we are in a posture, mercy will not be long a-coming. Heaven, the great mercy, is not given us till prepared; as heaven is prepared for us, so we for it: Rom. 9:23, 'That he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory;' and Col. 1:12, 'Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.' So other mercies; our unpreparedness lieth as a block in the way, and hindereth the free passage of God's mercy to us, till he send his work before him, &c.: Isa. 40:10, 'Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.'

2. To awaken fervency of prayer, and that the blessing may be the more earnestly sought after and highly valued. A thing easily come by doth not stir up such a desire after it. Τὸ ἔτοιμον εἰς ἐξουσίαν

ἀργὸν εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν. We despise easy-gotten favours, but that which is long and earnestly sought is dearer to us. Therefore the Lord, to commend his favours to us, and to set a price upon them, will have us pray much and long; 1 Sam. 1:27, 'For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me the petition which I asked of him.'

3. God doth it to prove and exercise our faith. Many of his servants have gone to the grave and his promises not yet accomplished, and yet have gone to the grave in hope: Heb. 11:13, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises' (that is, things promised), 'but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them.' Then is faith tried when we can wait for the fulfilling of the promises: when we have no present enjoyment, and know not when we shall have, yea, likely never to see it in our days. The patriarchs lived and died believers; delay and non-enjoyment did not break their hearts, nor could death itself extinguish their faith. Death might bereave them of their friends, and their temporal estate, and all their earthly comforts, but of faith it could not.

4. That patience may have its perfect work. It is marvellous patience that can yet wait for the word, when it will yield us the expected comfort, though our eyes fail in waiting. Then is the greatest discovery of its perfection, when difficulties are many, hope long delayed. It hath but a part of its work before, to still the mind under lesser or shorter evils. The perfection of a thing is never discovered till it be put to a full trial. Patience is seen in waiting as well as suffering. To bear a little while is but the imperfect work of patience, some lesser degree of it; as to know a letter or two in the book is but an imperfect kind of reading; but to bear much and long, that is the perfect work. To lift up some heavy thing from the ground argueth some strength; but to carry it for an hour, or all day, is a more perfect thing.

5. God delayeth the accomplishment of his promises, because many times the frame of his providence requireth it. All God's works have their appointed hour and time, and God will not disturb the order of causes, or work sooner or later; but as the beautiful frame of his providence doth permit: John 2:4, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.' Our time wherein we would have him work, and his time wherein he will work, are often very different: for he will not manifest his help when it will please us best, but when his glory in working may be best seen: John 7:6, 'My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready.'

Secondly, The other branch is, that God may delay so long till they be disheartened, and give it over as a hopeless business. David saith his eyes failed for the word. When a man is disappointed of the things he looketh for, then his eyes are said to fail. So the captive Jews complained, Lam. 4:17, 'As for us, our eyes have yet failed for our vain help: in our watching, we have waited for a nation that could not save us.'

1. God may delay so long, till his enemies was high and proud, as if above the reach of all evil, and God had forgotten them, or approved their ways: Ps. 50:21, 'I keep silence, and thou thoughtest I was altogether like thyself.' So long till all their fears are over: Job 21:9, 'Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them.' And their oppressions are multiplied: Ps. 10:5, 6, 'His ways are always grievous, for he hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved.'

2. God may delay so long, till a land be wasted by sundry successive common judgments that light upon good and bad, Jer. 12:4. After the complaint of the prosperity of the wicked, the prophet subjoineth, 'How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of the field wither?'

When they relent not, the land may fare the worse for them; and the godly, among the rest, suffer in these general calamities. God may plague the nation with dearth and famine, plague and pestilence, war and sword, fire and burning; and all this while no ceasing of their iniquities or oppressions.

3. God may delay so long till his people be strangely perplexed, and know not what to make of his providence. They wonder how his justice can endure it: Jer. 12:1, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments; wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?' Hab. 1:12, 13, 'Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine holy one? We shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment, and O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and boldest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?' They cannot reconcile his attributes and providences. We that are short-sighted, and short-spirited creatures, see not God's reasons; yea, God may delay so long, till their hearts faint, and their eyes fail, as in these two verses; till their faith and patience be quite spent, and they have left looking for it: Luke 18:8, 'Shall he find faith on the earth?' God loveth to show his people their infirmity, and to weaken all their courage, before he will do anything for them.

4. God may delay so long in some cases, that there is no hope that God will do anything for them in this life; but all reasons for patience are only taken from the general judgment: James 5:7, 8, 'Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord; and stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.' They are put off till then, till the general harvest and restitution of all things; and in the

mean time they must be content to sow in tears, that they may reap the fruit of their labours and sufferings at that time, and have their cause judged at his tribunal. He useth the similitude of an husbandman: 'Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.' In some cases there may be no hope of our release till then, as the husbandman hath no profit by his seed until the harvest.

Secondly, I shall speak of this failing of the eyes.

1. Certainly the failing of the eyes is a fault, because it argueth the limiting of God, which is a great sin: Ps. 78:41, 'They limited the holy one of Israel.' They limit God to times, means, instruments, present likelihood, and when these fail, their hearts fail. God cannot endure that his people, who ought wholly to depend upon him, and submit to him, should prescribe to him how or when he should help, as if they had a power of God, or could set bounds to his wisdom, mercy, omnipotency: all which are, as if he could do no more than what they conceive probable, or should act when they conceive fitting; and if he doth not then, that he never will, or can do it. They prescribe to his wisdom, control his power, question his love and truth.

2. As it is a fault, so it is a punishment. Though David here saith, 'Mine eyes fail with waiting,' for that salvation and mercy which thou hast promised in the word, yet it is the usual judgment of the wicked, one of the curses of the law. It is said, Deut. 28:32, 'Thy sons and daughters shall be given to another people, and thine eyes shall fail, in looking and longing for them all the day long.' They should look and long for some help, for the rescuing of their children, even till their eyes did fail in waiting, but all in vain: so Job 11:20, 'The eyes of the wicked shall fail them, they shall not escape, but their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost.' They may look for good, but never



get the sight of it. Again, Deut. 28:65, 'The Lord shall give thee trembling of heart and failing of eyes.' But though failing of eyes be a curse of the law, yet Christ became a curse for us. It is said in his name, Ps. 69:3 (for that psalm belongeth to Christ), 'Mine eyes fail in waiting for my God.' And so it is altered to us; it is a correction to humble us, and fit us for better things.

3. Though it be a sin and punishment, yet the fault is not in God's delay, but in the weakness and faintness of our hope. There was a fault in our first resolution for faith and patience. The children of God usually set to themselves a shorter period than the Lord doth. And so God is not slack, but we are hasty: 2 Peter 3:9, 'The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.' And there is a weakness in the exercise of our faith and patience. They that look long for good, and the succour of his promises, the delay is troublesome to them. 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick,' Prov. 13:12. Hope belongeth to love; and the affections of pursuit and love maketh absence tedious when afflicted in the interim; but faith and dependence upon God should keep us waiting, and patience should enable us to tarry his leisure: Jonah 2:4, 'I said, I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again toward the holy temple.' There is our fault, that we give over hope and calling upon God, and depending on him, and holding fast on his covenant and promise, which we should not do. When God seemeth to turn his back on the saints, yet they will not forsake him.

4. The hopes of God's children fail them long, though not for ever. He many times bringeth his children to a low ebb, and doth for a long time withhold his aid, yet he doth not altogether forsake them: Isa. 54:7, 8, 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for

a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy redeemer.'

Use. Well, then, let us not be over-troubled at the delay of the promised and expected blessings.

1. We are hasty for mercy, slow to duty: Ps. 102:2, 'When I call, answer me speedily.' We cry, How long? But how justly may God cry, How long? We complain of the delay of the promise; God may more justly complain of the delay of our obedience. How long do we make God stay and wait till our leisure come? Jer. 4:14, 'O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?' and Jer. 13:27, 'O Jerusalem, wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?' To-day, now is the time we set God for mercy, to-morrow for duty. God must tarry our sinful leisure, and we will not tarry his holy leisure. God is our sovereign, we are debtors to him. Ours is a debt, his a free gift. If God had been as quick with you as you with him, where had you been?

2. It argueth weakness; a short walk is a long journey to the weak and sickly. It is the impatience of our flesh and the weakness of our faith. We would make short work for faith and patience, but God seeth then our graces would not be found to any praise and honour. God is the best judge of opportunities, therefore all must be left to his will and pleasure. Faith will not count it long; for to the eye of faith things future and afar off are as present: Heb. 11:1, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' It is said, Isa. 28:16, 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' Sense and carnal confidence must have present satisfaction, but faith contents itself with promises. Love will not count it long; for seven years to Jacob seemed as a few days, Gen. 29:20. Sufferings for Christ would not be

so tedious, where love prevaieth. Patience would not count it long. Cannot we tarry for him a little while? Heb. 10:37, 'Yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry,' ἔτι γὰρ μικρὸν ὅσον ὅσον. We love our own ease, and therefore the cross groweth irksome and tedious.

3. God is a God of judgment: Isa. 30:18, 'And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him.' Mercy will not come one jot too soon nor one jot too late; in the fittest time for God to give and us to receive: Heb. 4:16, εὐκαιρὸν βοήθειαν, 'In the time of need.' We think we stay for God, but he stayeth for us. If we were ripe for mercy, God is always ready, for he is a present help: Ps. 46:1, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.'

I come now to the second clause, his longing desire after it, saying, When wilt thou comfort me? that is, David was ever and anon repeating and saying, 'Lord, when?' The Hebrews express their wishes by way of question: Oh, that thou wouldest comfort me!

Doct. 3. When our hope and help is delayed, we may complain to God for want of comfort.

1. What is the comfort which David intendeth? In the general, consolation is opposed to grief and mourning. Sin hath woven calamities into our lives, and filled us with griefs, troubles, and sorrows, so that we need comfort. Comfort is either eternal, spiritual, or temporal.

[1.] Eternal: 2 Thes. 2:16, 'Everlasting consolation and good hope through grace;' Luke 16:25, 'Remember that thou in thy lifetime

receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.'

[2.] Spiritual, which is of two sorts:—

(1.) Comfort against the trouble of sin; in which respect the Holy Ghost is called the Comforter. In this respect the Holy Ghost biddeth them comfort the penitent incestuous person, 2 Cor. 2:7.

(2.) Against affliction: so God is said to 'comfort those that are cast down,' 2 Cor. 7:6; and Ps. 94:19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul;' 2 Cor. 1:3, 4, 'Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.'

[3.] Temporal; so God is said to comfort those whom he freeth from afflictions: Ps. 71:21, after deep and sore troubles, 'Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.' So the Lord comforteth his people, not by word only, but also by deed; not only by speaking comfort to them, but also by relieving them, and refreshing them, and freeing them from their troubles. So Isa. 52:9, 'Sing, ye waste places, for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.' Though God's people lay low for a time, yet his blessing can exalt them beyond all expectation, and bring about such happiness as may make them forget their sorrows and miseries. This is intended here: Lord, when wilt thou give that deliverance which I pray for, and wait for at thy hands? Let it not seem strange that temporal deliverance should be owned as a comfort to God's people. Partly because they are acts of God's providence and dispensations of his grace, sought not in a way of faith and prayer: Zech. 1:17, 'The Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and

shall yet choose Jerusalem.' Partly because by these he seemeth to own them, and confirm them in the privilege of his peculiar care, and that they have an interest in his favour; which by sad afflictions seemed to be annulled and made void. But hereby God giveth proof of his favour to them: Ps. 86:17, 'Show me a token for good, that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed; because thou, Lord, hast holpen me, and comforted me;' that in their affliction godliness may not suffer, nor wicked men be hardened in their insolency. Partly as hereby promises are made good, and so faith confirmed: Isa. 57:18, 'I will heal him, and restore comforts to him, and to his mourners.' Partly as they are helps and encouragements to love and praise God, and to live in a thankful course of holiness, when not stopped or diverted by fear of enemies: Isa. 12:1, 'In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.' We may serve God more cheerfully then. Partly because as they have seen his wisdom and justice in their troubles, so now his power and grace and truth in their deliverance. They are more comfortable, because there is much of God discovered in them, Ps. 115:1. Lastly, because they are comfortable to the natural life. They are not so divested of all human respects. Yet therein the saints moderate themselves; they do not count these things their highest consolation. So it is said of the wicked, Luke 6:24, 'Woe unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation;' and Luke 16:25, 'Thou receivedst thy good things.' Yet a sense they have, otherwise how can we be humbled under crosses, or give thanks for blessings?

2. We may complain of the delay of comfort. God's children have done so: Ps. 6:3, 'But thou, O Lord, how long?' Ps. 13:1, 'How long wilt thou forget me, Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?' so ver. 2, 'How long shall mine enemies triumph over me?' Ps. 94:3, 4, 'Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the

wicked triumph? How long shall they utter, and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?' Reasons:—

[1.] Partly because prayer giveth ease; it is a vent to strong affections.

[2.] It reviveth the work of faith, hope, and patience.

[3.] Though God knoweth when to bestow blessings, yet he will not blame the desires of his children after them.

Use. Well, then, let us seek comfort, and complain not of God, but to God. Complaints of God give a vent to murmurings; but complaints to God, to faith, hope, and patience.

1. Refer the kind of comfort to God, whether he will give temporal deliverance, a comfortable sense of his love, or hopes of glory, a clearer right and title to eternal rest.

2. Yea, refer the thing itself. Comfort is necessary, because a great part of our temptations lie in troubles as well as allurements. Sense of pain may discompose us, as well as pleasure entice us. The world is a persecuting as well as a tempting world. The flesh troubleth as well as enticeth. The devil is a disquieting as well as an ensnaring devil. But yet comfort, though necessary, is not so necessary as holiness. Therefore, though comfort is not to be despised, yet sincere love to God is to be preferred; and though it be not dispensed so certainly, so constantly, and in so high a degree in this world, we must be contented. The Spirit's comforting work is oftener interrupted than the work of holiness; so much as is necessary to our employment for God in the world we shall have.

3. Comfort is raised in us by the Spirit of God: Acts 9:31, 'Then had the churches rest, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the

Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.' For means we have his word, his promises, and also his providence. His word: Rom. 15:4, 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.' His promises: Ps. 119:50, 'This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me;' Heb. 6:17, 18, 'Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.' And also his providence, protection, and defence: Ps. 23:4, 'Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' The rod and staff are spoken of as instruments of defence.

4. Consider how ready God is to comfort his people: Isa. 40:1, 2, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.' When time serveth, God sendeth these messages.

## **SERMON XCI**

**For I am become like a bottle in the  
smoke: yet do I not forget thy precepts.—  
VER. 83.**

HERE is rendered a reason why he doth so earnestly beg for comfort and deliverance. The reason is taken from his necessity, he was scarce able to bear any longer delay of comfort. Not only his faith and hope was spent, but his body was even spent through the trouble that

was upon him. He had told us, in the 81st verse, 'My soul fainteth for thy salvation;' in the 82d verse, 'Mine eyes fail for thy word;' and now, 'I am become like a bottle in the smoke,' &c.

Observe here—(1.) His condition represented; (2.) His resolution maintained. Or—

First, The heat of tribulation, I am become like a bottle in the smoke.

Secondly, His constant perseverance in his duty, Yet do I not forget thy precepts.

1. His condition is represented by the similitude of a bottle in the smoke, alluding therein to a bottle of skin, such as the Jews used; as in Spain their wine is put into borachos, or bags made of hog-skins, ἄσκῳ ἐν αἰγείῳ in Homer; in a vessel or bottle of goat-skin. And Christ's similitude of old bottles and new bottles relateth thereunto, Mat. 9:17; for he meaneth it of skin-bottles or bladders, if such a bottle be hung up in the smoke, and by that means becometh black, parched, and dry. The man of God thought this a fit emblem of his condition. The Septuagint reads ἐν πάχνῃ, 'in the frost.' Kitor signifieth any fume or vapour, whether of smoke or mist; as Ps. 148:8, 'Fire and hail, snow and vapour.' The word for vapour is the same with this which is here rendered smoke. Here it signifieth smoke rather than vapour or mist.

2. His resolution, 'Yet do I not forget thy precepts.' I do not forget; that is, I do not decline from or neglect my duty; as Heb. 13:16, 'To distribute and communicate forget not,' that is, neglect it not. As on God's part, when he will not perform what belongeth to him, being hindered by our disobedience, he threateneth to forget his people, Jer. 23:39, that is, will not deliver them; so we forget God's precepts when we do not fulfil, or neglect, our duty. Now, forget God's



precepts he might either as his comfort or his rule; both ways must the word be improved and remembered by us; yet because the notion of precepts is here used, I understand the latter. Often is this passage repeated in this psalm; as ver. 51, 'The proud have had me greatly in derision, yet have I not declined from thy law.' Though scorned and made a mockage by those that were at ease, and lived in pomp and splendour, yet his zeal was not abated. Ver. 61, 'The bands of the wicked have robbed me; yet have I not forgotten thy law.' Though plundered by the violence of soldiers; so ver. 109, 'My soul is continually in my hand; yet do I not forget thy law;' that is, though he was in danger of death continually. We have it again, ver. 141, 'I am small and despised; yet do I not forget thy law;' though contemned and slighted as a useless creature, and one that might be well spared in the world. So in the text, 'I am become like a bottle in the smoke,' though wrinkled and shrivelled with age and sorrow. Thus in all temptations David's love to God and his ways was not abated.

Doct. That though our trials be never so sharp and tedious, yet this must not lessen our respect to God or his word.

In handling this point I shall show you three things:—

1. That God may exercise his children with sharp and tedious afflictions.
2. That these afflictions are apt to draw us into manifold sins and errors of practice.
3. That yet this should not be; a gracious heart should withstand the shock of temptations.

For the first, David is an instance, whose sad complaint we have had continued for three verses together. I shall only now open the

similitude in the text, whereby he representeth his condition.

1. A bottle in the smoke is dry and wrinkled and shrunk up; so he was worn out and dried up with sorrow and long suspense of expectation. This noteth the decay of his bodily strength. So also elsewhere: Ps. 102:3, 'My days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burnt as an hearth.' And he saith, Ps. 32:4, 'Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.' His chief sap, oil, was spent, humidum radicale. As a leathern sack, long hung up in a smoking chimney, so was he dried up, and shrivelled and wrinkled by long-continued troubles and adversity. We are told, Prov. 17:22, that a 'merry heart doth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones.' A cheerful heart helpeth well to recover health lost, but a sad one breedeth diseases, as we see grief is often the cause of death. Now so it may often be with God's children. God may so follow them with afflictions that sorrow may waste their natural strength, and they may have such hard and long trials as to make them go into wrinkles, and what by temporal sorrows, troubles of conscience or sickness, the infirmities of age may be hastened upon them.

2. A bottle in the smoke is blacked and smutched, whereby is meant that his beauty was wasted as well as his strength; and as he was withered, so he was black with extreme misery: Job 30:30, 'My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burnt with heat.' So Lam. 5:10, 'Our skin was black as an oven, because of the terrible famine.' So Lam. 4:8, 'Their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones, it is withered, it is become like a stick.' So here 'like a bottle in the smoke.' And you must consider that this was spoken of David, that ruddy youth, of whom it was said, 1 Sam. 16:12, 'Now he was ruddy, of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to.' But great sorrows had made an

alteration, and afflictions do quickly cause the beauty of the body to fade: Ps. 39:11, 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth.' God's rod may leave sad marks and prints upon the body, which do not only waste our strength, but deface our beauty. Observe here the difference between the beauty and strength of the body and of the soul. The beauty of the soul groweth fairer by afflictions, whereas that of the body is blasted. David was a bottle shrivelled and shrunk up, yet the holy frame of his soul was not altered; his beauty was gone, but not his grace. Outward beauty is but skin-deep; turn it inside out, it is but blood and rawness. It fadeth by sickness, age, troubles of conscience, and great and manifold afflictions. Once more; in the sight of God a man is never the more uncomely, though he be as a skin-bottle in the smoke, if he doth not 'forget his statutes;' if he be outwardly deformed, but yet the hidden man of the heart be well adorned, even with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price, 1 Peter 3:3, 4. Any great affliction soon maketh an impression upon the skin. This flower of beauty is soon blown off; age or sickness will soon shrivel it up, and make it look like a bottle in the smoke; but let us regard the beauty of the soul, which fadeth not.

3. A dried bottle in the smoke is contemned and cast aside and of no use; so was David no more esteemed and regarded among men than such a bottle would be; and to this Christ alludeth, Mat. 9:17, 'Men do not put new wine into old bottles, lest the bottles break, and the wine runneth out and perisheth.' An old, dry shrivelled bottle is good for nothing, the force of wine will soon break and rend it, therefore it is cast away as a thing of no use. So many times, to the great grief of their hearts, may God's children be laid aside as useless vessels. The world may cast them off as unworthy to live among them: 'It is not for the king's profit to suffer them,' Esther 4:8; and 1 Cor. 4:13,

περικαθάρματα, 'We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things.' So Heb. 13:13, 'Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.' At that time they were cast out of the synagogues, or cities and societies. Was not Christ himself cast off, 'despised and rejected of men'? Isa. 53:3, 'The stone which the builders refused;' though he were the cornerstone of the building, yet they laid him aside as if he were of no use, as rubbish, or a refuse stone. So are his people thrust out by the world, laid by, as not deemed worthy to be employed for any use: Acts 22:22, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live.' This is the judgment which the world maketh on God's servants.

Secondly, What are the usual sins which are incident to such sharp and tedious afflictions?

1. Impatience and murmuring against God. When our wills are crossed we cannot bear it. To be sick of the fret is a disease very incident to such as have not learned to deny their own wills, and entirely to give up themselves to the conduct of God's providence: Gen. 30:1, 'Give me children, or I die;' Ps. 37:1, 'Fret not thyself because of evil-doers.' We should not vex and fret, but we are apt to do so, to murmur and repine against God, and that for small matters, as Jonah for a gourd: 'I do well to be angry,' Jonah 4:9. So strangely are men transported! Pettish desires earnestly solicited, and finally disappointed, breed this impatience in us. In every frame of heart, when notably stirred, we should say, Is this well? God puts the question to Jonah, 'Dost thou well to be angry?' What! to be discontented with God's own providence, especially in small matters? But we let loose the reins to our passions, and if we be crossed a little, then 'Let me die.' Some of this impatience was in good David, for it presently followeth the text, ver. 84, 'How many

are the days of thy servant?' If the affliction must last yet longer, then even let me know when I shall die.

2. A spirit of revenge against the instruments of our trouble. When we dare not let fly against God, we vent our passions freely against men, and seek their hurt and loss, and think we are safe. Whereas Christianity establisheth a universal and diffusive charity, even to enemies, that we should pray for them, and seek their good: Mat. 5:44, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.' The command of love doth not extend only towards kindred and friends and acquaintance, but even to enemies. I say into you, Christ will try our sincerity and obedience by this precept, by forgiving wrongs, and forbearing all unjust and unmerciful revenge, and our love by loving our enemies. It is hard to bring the revengeful heart of man to it. The faults they have committed against us do not exempt us from the general law of charity, from doing good to them according to our power. As we must not hate or curse, or requite injury with injury, so we must love, bless, do good, and pray for them, wishing them all the good in the world, especially that which they most want, the good of their souls; returning friendly words for railing and evil speaking; feeding and clothing them when hungry, thirsty, or naked; desiring pardon and grace. This is our rule; but how few Christians comply with it, and conquer their unruly passions! No; rather justify them by the greatness of their temptations, and if they be kept from retaliating of injuries, that is rare. Most have too great a coldness and indifference for enemies: Prov. 24:29, 'I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.' This is to take the work out of God's hands, to review the arrogance of Adam, 'Be as gods.' Generally men are vindictive and transported with uncomely passions when wronged by men: 2 Sam. 16:9, 'Why should this dead

dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.' This was the ruffling humour of Abishai; but David was in a calmer, cooler frame and temper of spirit: No; 'God bid him curse.' Many a man can bear afflictions, but not injuries. No man is troubled at a shower of rain, but if one cast a bucket or basin of water upon us, we shall not let it pass, if it be in the power of our hands, without revenge.

3. Using indirect means for our relief. It is better to pine away in affliction than to be freed from it by sin, to be as a bottle in the smoke than to forget our duty; therefore no trouble should drive us to sin, or to use sinful means for our escape; though worn out with expectation, let our duty hold our hands from evil. Whatever our trouble be, from the hand of God or men, we have no reason to go to the devil to ease us of it; as Saul goeth to the witch of Endor: 1 Sam. 28:7, 'Seek me out a woman that hath a familiar spirit.' And to the devil we go when we use bad means. Carnal shifts are very natural to us, and when we cannot trust God, and depend upon him, we presently are apt to take some indirect course of our own. Affliction is often compared to a prison, and the sorrows which accompany it to fetters and chains. Now, God, that puts us into prison, can only help us out again, for he is the governor and judge of the world. Now, to use carnal shifts is an attempt to break prison. We are not able to hold out till God send a happy issue, but take some carnal course of our own. If the heart be not the better resolved, thus it will be. The devil will make an advantage of our afflictions, if he can; he tempted Christ when he was hungry, Mat. 4:3, so he tempteth us when he seeth us needy, disgraced, reproached, trampled under foot. No; though our estate be low, and the fountain of our supplies be dried up, though our credit be smutched and blacked with slander and reproach, though we be cast out as useless things, as an old withered skin-bottle, counted unfit to hold wine, yet we must not forget God's

precepts. We need not take a sinful course for the vindication of our credit from unjust reproaches: Isa. 51:7, 'Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law: fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings.' You that make reckoning of keeping close to my word, that have my law not only in your heads, but in your hearts, God hath his times to vindicate you; you need not distrust the providence of God under straits. When Jacob was low, he tells Laban, 'My righteousness shall answer for me,' Gen. 30:33. The hand of God will help us and reward honest labours, without our being false or unfaithful to men. We need not make a foul retreat in the day of trial, nor shift for ourselves by complying with the lusts of men, nor wax weary of our duty as quite discouraged and disheartened, Heb. 12:3, as we are apt to do when troubles are grievous, and long continued.

4. Another evil is desponding and distrustful thoughts of God. David, after all his experiences, was surprised with this kind of thoughts: 1 Sam. 27:1, 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' He had a particular promise and assurance of the kingdom, and had seen much of God's care over him, and yet after all this David doubted of the word of God, and bewrayed his weakness of faith and affiance in him, who had watched over him, and delivered him out of many great and imminent dangers in a marvellous manner, when there was less appearance of hope than now, 1 Sam. 22:5; so Ps. 31:22, 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless, thou heardest the voice of my supplications, when I cried unto thee.' God hath no more care and thought of me than if I were not. This was said at the very time when deliverance was coming. Here David yielded a little to foolish haste, and lost the staidness of his faith: so Ps. 77:7, 8, 'Will the Lord cast off for ever? will he be favourable no more? is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore?' Questions to appearance full of despair and despondency,

yet there is some faith couched under them. Will the Lord cast off? It implieth the soul cannot endure to be thrust from him. Will he be favourable no more? It implieth some former experience, and desire of new proof. Is his mercy clean gone? I have deserved all this, but God is merciful. Will not mercy help? To appearance indeed despair carrieth it from faith; that is uppermost

5. Questioning our interest in God merely because of the cross. Our Lord hath taught us to say My God in the bitterest agonies; but few learn this lesson: Judges 6:13, 'If God be with us, why is all this befallen us?' As if they were never exercised with trouble who have God with them. Sometimes we question the love of God because we have no afflictions, and anon because we have nothing but afflictions; as if God were not the God of the valleys as well as of the mountains, and his love did change with our outward condition, and worldly prosperity were a mark of grace, which, when lost, our evidence were gone. How hardly soever God dealeth with his people, yet he loveth them: Heb. 12:6, 'Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth;' so Rev. 3:19, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.' A father is a father when he smileth and when he frowneth; he may have love in his heart when a rod in his hand; and we have no reason to question our adoption merely because we are put under the correction and discipline of the family.

6. Not only despairing thoughts do arise, but atheistical thoughts, as if there were no God, no providence, no distinction between good and evil, and it were in vain to serve him: Ps. 73:13, 'I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.' The flesh is importunate to be pleased, and therefore, when it meeteth not with desired satisfaction, we are apt to question all, and to cast off the fear of God, and all regard of his service: Mal. 3:14, 'Ye have said, It is in vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept his



ordinance, and walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?' When temptations are sore, and afflictions tedious, thoughts of so horrid a complexion may float in our minds.

These are the distempers which are incident to those who have been long afflicted, and are often disappointed in the issue which they expect.

Thirdly, That this should not be. David omitted not his duty for all this, though his troubles were long and tedious. How great soever our trials be, they should not weaken our love to God and our respect to his word. God's precepts must not be forgotten, though we are withered and dried up with sorrows, as a skin-bottle is shrivelled in the smoke.

1. Because then we plunge ourselves into a greater evil, if we fall into sin because of trouble and affliction, and so make our condition so much the worse. Job's friends charged this upon him, that he had chosen sin rather than affliction, Job 36:21, when he would rather give way to impatience than patiently bear what God had laid upon him. Many are so transported with their pains and grievances that they care not what they say or do, as if they were loosed from all bands of duty. On the contrary, it is said of Moses, Heb. 11:25, 'Choosing rather to suffer afflictions,' &c. The least sin is worse than the greatest suffering. Suffering is an offence done to us; sin is an offence done to God. By suffering we lose some worldly comfort, but by sinning hazard the favour of God. Suffering is only an inconvenience to the bodily or animal life; sinning bringeth a blot and blemish upon the soul. The sinful state is far worse than the afflicted. And therefore, how calamitous soever our condition be, we must take great care it be not sinful. Wormwood is bitter, but not poison.

2. A sincere love to God will make us adhere to him when he seemeth to deal most hardly with us. Among all his corrections, God hath not a rod smart enough to drive away a gracious and loving soul from himself: Ps. 44:17, 'All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, nor dealt falsely in thy covenant.' God is the same, and his ways are the same, though his dispensations be changed; so different a thing it is to love the ways of God upon foreign and upon intrinsic and proper reasons; and the intent of such dispensations is to put us upon trial,—what be our reasons and motives why we love God and his ways, and whether our love be strong enough to encounter with difficulties, whether it can overcome temptations from sense and the world. Till all probabilities be spent, and our afflictions grow long and tedious, we are not tried to the purpose. Our covenant vow to God bindeth us to own him in all conditions, whatever our portion be in the world.

3. By forgetting God's precepts we put away our own comfort from ourselves, and make our afflictions the more grievous. Take the word precepts either strictly, for his commandments or statutes, or more largely, as it may also include his promises. If any faint and fail in trouble, it is because they trust not the promises, or keep not the commandments of God: these two mutually strengthen one another. If you would not have your faith broken, labour to keep the commandments. In the 166th verse of this psalm, 'I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.' And if you would keep the commandments, confirm your faith in the promises of forgiveness of sin, of God's providence, and eternal life; for if thou canst believe these, no pleasure or pain shall make thee forsake thy obedience, Ps. 130:4. A child of God dareth not warp and turn away from God, in part or in whole, nor slacken any part of his diligence in God's service. Faith in God's promises breedeth obedience, and obedience confirmeth faith in God's promises. We apprehend

promises to check that sensitive lure which would entice us from God and our obedience to him. A greater benefit is offered to counterbalance the baits and troubles of the flesh. The more we obey the precepts the more we believe the promises; for together with our obedience, our confidence and sound comfort increaseth: so that to forget the word is to throw away our strength from ourselves.

4. Afflictions rightly improved are a means to make us remember God's precepts rather than to forget them, Heb. 12:11. The baits of the flesh are removed that the spirit may be more at liberty, 2 Cor. 4:16. God seeth fit to afflict the bodies of his people sometimes. The body, being in good plight, is a clog to the soul; therefore they are withered and wrinkled that the soul may thrive the more. Our worldly portion is blasted that our heavenly treasure may be increased. When we are at full we wax wanton, neglectful, forget his precepts. Now, that we may remember them the more, God sendeth such afflictions which sit near and close. The moon is never eclipsed but when it is at full; so many have eclipsed the glory of the spiritual life when full and at ease: therefore in afflictions we should not forget his word.

Use 1. To reprove us who are so soon discouraged in the ways of God. If we suffer but a little sickness, and a little trouble and contempt in the world, a little loss of honour and interest, the mocks and scorns of foolish men, we cannot bear it, but murmur and are impatient. David could submit himself to the Lord, and find sweetness in the word, though he were 'like a bottle in the smoke.' Few now-a-days suffer any great matter for Christ. Surely when God's people have endured harder things, we should be ashamed of our tenderness. Were we only appointed to escape the afflictions and inconveniences of our pilgrimage? And must God make a new way to heaven for our sakes, wherein we shall meet with no difficulty in our passage? Or

rather, in defiance of all sense, would we abide here for ever, and flourish in ease and plenty, and never see change? No; it becometh us betimes to prepare for the cross. None so strong now but they shall wither, so ruddy and beautiful but their beauty shall consume as a moth; nor so happy and flourishing in honour and esteem but they will be laid aside as a dried, withered bottle. We must look to have, our turn, and bear it patiently.

2. Let us not for any afflictions and troubles whatsoever abate of our zeal and diligence and respect to God's service.

First, It is not obedience to God's precepts or godliness that is the cause of our sufferings and chastenings, but our sin and folly: Micah 2:7, 'Are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' God delighteth not in dealing harshly with his people. The rod is not that he taketh pleasure in, if our case do not call for it: Lam. 3:33, 'He afflicts not willingly.' We provoke him to it. And shall we grow weary of his service because we suffer justly for our sins? There is reason indeed why we should grow weary of sin, Jer. 2:19; we find the bitterness of it; but no reason why we should grow weary of duty. Sin less and suffer less. Provoke not God, and nothing will proceed from him but what is good and comfortable; he doth not punish or chasten men for holiness and well-doing; no, it is for want of holiness. Shall the physician be blamed for the trouble of physic, when the patient hath contracted a surfeit that makes it necessary? It was sin in general brought us into a state of suffering, and particular errors that actually bring it on.

Secondly, The benefits and fruit of afflictions should allay and abundantly recompense the trouble of them, that they should not be a hindrance or a snare, but a help to godliness. They prevent our surfeit of worldly prosperity, which would cost us dearer than all the

troubles of the flesh which we meet with. Alas! what sad work doth honour and wealth and power make in the world! Blessed be God that he keepeth us under, low, humble, and contemned, like bottles in the smoke. Shall a little affliction, which saveth us from these opportunities of discovering our corruption, be so resented by us as that we should wax weary of God and forget his precepts? Great and long prosperity would be a sorer temptation to us than sharp and tedious affliction; the one keepeth us modest and humble, whereas the other would make us vain and proud and wanton. 'When Jeshurun waxed fat he kicked:' Deut. 32:15, 'He forsook God that made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation;' slighted God, and grew cold in duty, ready to sin. As a rank soil breedeth weeds, a pleasant estate doth but fill us with vanity and folly.

Thirdly, God in good time will send help and deliverance. If we remember to plead the promise, God will remember to fulfil the promise. And those who are not unmindful of their duty, God will not be unmindful of their safety: Mal. 3:16, 'The Lord hearkened and beard; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for those that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name.' You see there that God will not forget those that forget not his word. Those that keep their feet in the worst times, when others reel and stagger, God hath a great care of them. Every word you speak for God, every inconvenience you suffer for him, every duty you perform to him, it is all upon record.

Fourthly, We may with the more confidence recommend our case to God: Ps. 119:153, 'Consider mine affliction, and deliver me, for I do not forget thy law.' They that do not make haste to deliver themselves, God will deliver them. The same God that requireth duty doth assure them of comfort.

## SERMON XCII

### **The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.—VER. 85.**

THIS verse containeth a complaint against his enemies, whereas most of the other verses express his affection to the law of God. Yea, this verse strongly implieth it; for he censureth and condemneth his enemies mainly upon this ground, because they did what they pleased, without any regard to that law which he himself took to be the rule of his duty, and the charter of his hopes and happiness. Observe three things:—

1. The character of David's enemies, the proud.
2. Their practice, or subtle and treacherous dealing with him, they have digged pits for me.
3. David's censure of that practice, or their manifest iniquity, which are not after thy law.

Let us explain the words.

The proud.—In the scripture it signifieth—(1.) Either the wicked in general: Ps. 119:21, 'Thou hast rebuked the prond which are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.' It is a horrible arrogancy to oppose God's laws and interests in the world. (2.) More particularly such as are puffed up with worldly happiness and success, and so either Saul's or Absalom's counsellors may be intended.

Have digged pits for me.—A metaphorical phrase, usual in scripture, to represent the secret plots and treacherous dealings of wicked

enemies; an allusion to them who dig pits to take wild beasts. In the Greek it is, 'They have told me tales.' Though this rendering was occasioned by a mistake of the word, yet it agreeth well enough with the sense, for this digging of pits by false pretences and ensnaring counsels: Prov. 16:27, 'An ungodly man diggeth up evil, and in his lips there is as a burning fire.' But let us keep to the translation we have. The manner of toils among the Jews was digging pits, and covering them over, and hiding snares in them, that as the beast pressed the clod, and fell therein, he might be caught, and kept from getting out again. Therefore David saith, Ps. 35:7, 'Without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for ray soul.'

Which are not after thy law.—Heb., 'Not after thy law.' It may refer to the men or the practice; who walk not according to thy law, or which fraudulent practices of theirs are not agreeable to thy law. The law of God condemned pits for tame beasts: Exod. 21:33, 34, 'If a man open a pit, or dig a pit, and not cover it, and an ox or ass fall therein, the owner of the pit shall make it good, and give money to the owners of them.' Though it was lawful for hunters to take wild beasts, yet they were to take heed that a tame beast fell not therein, at their peril. Yet not for men innocent, and holy men. But there is a litotes in the words. That is said not to be good or well done which is extremely evil, very contrary to thy law. Thus we are wont to speak of a thing horrid in terms of extenuation; as when we speak of a fact, It is not very commendable, when we mean it is extremely abominable. So crafty and subtle dealing consenteth not with the truth of God's word; that is, it is extremely opposite to it. This is produced by David as a ground of his confidence, why he hoped he should not be taken in these pits. These practices were not only injurious to himself, but contemptuous of the law of God. He layeth forth his enemies' carriage before God. Note—

1. That secret plottings against the interests of God and his people in the world are an ancient practice.
2. That these plots usually begin in pride.
3. That God can, when he will, and usually doth, protect his people against the plots of the proud, or the fraud as well as the violence of enemies.
4. That God's law forbiddeth all mischievous, ungodly, treacherous designs, attempts, and actions.
5. That the innocent should not be much troubled to be maligned and hated by them who contemn God's laws, as well as oppose his people.

I shall gloss on these points, and then close all with application.

First point. That secret plottings against the interest of God and his people are an ancient practice.

David here complaineth that the proud had digged pits for him; and Ps. 37:12, 'The wicked plotteth against the just;' yea, ver. 7, it is a description of a wicked man, 'The man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.' It is so known a practice that it is gotten into their name and style. A wicked man's brain is a forge that is always hot. So Ps. 7:14, 'Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood.' Wicked men conceive, and then travail, but usually the birth proveth abortive. To represent the truth to you, I shall give you a draught of some of the designs of wicked men:—(1.) For the suppressing of God's interest and people in the world. (2.) Private persons.

For the first, you cannot imagine that I should unravel all the secrets of the kingdom of darkness, and break open the devil's cabinet. I



shall only point at some few plots and contrivances for the ruin of God's interest in the world.

First, Plots to foment and promote divisions, either between them and themselves, them and their rulers, or them and God himself.

1. Them and themselves. Ever since God had a people in the world, the devil and his instruments have sought to divide them, that they may first ruin one another, and then become a prey to their common adversaries. Nothing hath hindered the growth of Christianity so much as the spirit of division. Πολλοὺς χριστιανίζειν ἀπέτραπεν (Sozomen). And Chrysostom's ἦλθεν ἔθνικος τις, in his homilies upon the Acts: there came a certain ethnic to him, and told him, I would fain be a Christian, but there are so many parties among you that I know not to whom I should join myself. And Christ's prayer intimates, John 17:21, 'That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me,' &c. The world are apt to look upon Christ as an imposter, and his religion as a fond superstition, when they see his people so divided and scattered one from another. Divisions in the church breed atheism in the world. Now Satan and wicked men have endeavoured all they can to keep up these divisions and hatred among Christians. This was Julian the apostate's design. When he had a mind to suppress Christianity, he did not openly persecute it, but took the worst sort of Christians and upheld them, that they might still maintain a quarrel between them and others. In Germany the Jesuits go over to the Lutherans to keep up the difference; they blow the coals, and then warm themselves by the flame. And among us the envious man hath sown tares: 'Is not the hand of Joab in all this?' By what spirit are the Quakers and others acted, and why are these things kept up, but to render Christianity odious? Sanballat and Tobias set up a party among the Jews to hinder the work of their restoration, Ezra 4:4, that they might foment division among them,

and so hinder the growth of the people's prosperity, for they had now the countenance of the king of Babylon, and by this means they thought to do so.

2. To divide between them and their rulers. The devil knoweth what an advantage it is to religion to have the countenance of princes, and, on the other side, how jealous they are of their authority and prerogative; and therefore by his instruments seeketh to prejudice and prepossess them against it, and those that profess it in strictness and power. Thus 'Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words,' Amos 7:10. He chargeth him with treason and open rebellion, that he withdrew subjects from their duty, and excited the people against his authority, and this by clancular insinuation, when Amos was not called or heard. Thus they pretend great friendship to authority, to sharpen the rage of princes against God's servants. So Ezra 4:12, 'Be it known unto the king that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city,' &c. So Saul against David, as appears by his expostulation with him about it: 1 Sam. 24:9, 'Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?' So Haman against the Jews: Esther 3:8, 'Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them.' So in primitive times; thus did they take the Christians, who were most innocent, though they were more numerous; yet still they were faithful to their prince: *Bibamus pro salute imperatoris*; they would rather endure to die than venture upon it, for they did apprehend it as a heathen sacrifice. Thus whisperers make princes conceive an ill opinion of religious men.

3. To divide between them and God. The devil turneth every stone. Would you ever think malice should rise so high as to disengage God from the protection of his people, and to disaffect him against them? How can it be? Have Satan and his instruments a plot upon God himself? What else should be the meaning of all his temptations? But see Balaam's plot, Micah. 6:5, 'O my people, remember what Balak the king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered from Shittim unto Gilgal,' &c. Balak and Balaam are framing a project how to overcome the Israelites, and that can never be as long as God is with them; and how shall they do to get away God from them? Jehovah was not as a heathen god, to be called out by sacrifices and enchantments, as they had their charms and rites among the heathens to call out their tutelar gods from among the nations against whom they came to fight. Macrobius hath a chapter, *De Ritu evocandi Deos*. They were now to deal with the God of Israel, who would not be moved with such deceits and blandishments; therefore they will have a plot to disengage him from his people. It is insinuated, Num. 24:14, 'Come now, and I will advertise thee what thou shalt do.' Moses doth not express the counsel given, because it was whispered secretly into Balak's ear; therefore you see the sense is imperfect in that place, and indeed there is a pause in the Hebrew, to show that something must be supplied. But what the plot was may be known by the effect, in the 25th of Numbers, and is in brief set forth, Rev. 2:14, where it is said of Balaam, that 'he caused Balak to lay a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication.' This was the plot, to send some beautiful women of Midian to wander about the camp of Israel, to tempt their lusty youth and martial men first to uncleanness and then to idolatry, that so God might be provoked against them—a plot so full of refined malice, that it can hardly be paralleled. Thus the devil and his instruments play their part sufficiently, to divide God's people, to prejudice their rulers, yea, to disaffect God himself.

Secondly, Plots to discourage and suppress religion. So there are many ways which wicked men take. Who can name them all? I shall only instance in two policies of Julian the apostate, the most refined instrument the devil used either for wit or malice; two ways especially did he seek to undermine religion.

1. One was to forbid the use of schools to the Christians, and suppress human learning. To make a people irreligious, the way is to make them ignorant; discourage learning, and piety will not be long in fashion, not able long to maintain itself: in the dark men will adore any fancy. This was like Nahash his condition to Jabesh Gilead, 'Put out their right eye.' God's two famous instruments who wrote most both of the Old and New Testament, Paul and Moses, were both excellently skilled in secular learning.

2. Another was to put none to death for religion, but to oppress them with all manner of vexations and discouragements. To put them to death he apprehended to be glorious; but sometimes banished them towns. As Athanasius deprived them of all offices civil and military, wasted them with burdensome levies and exactions: Let us make them poor, saith he scoffingly, for it is a hard matter for the rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The devil doth his work more cleverly and handsomely when Christians are not called out to the fire and gibbet, but are wasted by lingering inconveniences and loss of privileges.

Thirdly, Plots to introduce persecution.

1. Defamation. Infamy is the forerunner of more trouble, and the showers of slander are but presages of grievous storms of persecution. The devil is first a liar and then a murderer, John 8:44. When the children of God are represented as criminal, they are more

easily destroyed. It was a fashion in the primitive persecutions to invest Christians with a bear's skin, and then to bait them as bears. And it is a usual practice of Satan and his instruments to blast the repute of religious persons, to clothe them with the livery of reproach, and then prosecute them as offenders: Ps. 5:9, 'Their throat is an open sepulchre.' The slanders of the wicked are preparatives to death, as the sepulchre when opened is prepared to receive the dead carcass. Men first slander and then molest. The devil is afraid to meddle with unstained innocence. A good report is a great security against open violence.

2. To destroy the church, under the pretence of the church; as the beast in the Revelations pushed with the horns of the lamb, Rev. 13:11. It was a proverb, All evil began in the name of the Lord—In nomine Domini incipit omne malum. And it hath been a false pretended zeal for the church that hath of later years raised and fomented all or most of the persecutions of Christians.

3. To destroy Christians upon the pretence of civil quarrels and laws, and to disguise hatred against religion under a pretence of public peace; kill you, as well as cast you out of the synagogue. Dan. 6:4, the Persian noblemen 'sought to find occasion against Daniel because of the kingdom, though they found none.'

4. To make way for errors and falsehoods; so many pits do the wicked dig to beguile unwary and unstable souls, sometimes by more than ordinary pretences of love, meekness, and sweetness. 'They come to you in sheep's clothing,' saith our Lord, 'but inwardly are ravening wolves,' Mat. 7:15. Sheep's clothing, that is, all for love and kindness, and so steal away the hearts of the people, as Absalom by his submission and servile flattery. And then by debasing, opposing, and crying down a faithful ministry. Demosthenes' fable of the

wolves agreeing with the sheep in lusu would send away their dogs. Now thus they do by questioning their calling, as the false teachers did Paul's; and we have been so long unministering one another, that all ministry is hated in the hearts of many an anti-ministerial spirit. Sometimes by decrying maintenance. The lamp is starved when not supplied with oil. Some, to gain credit and entrance, and to disgrace Paul and the true evangelic ministers, whose poverty needed a supply, will take no maintenance; therefore Paul saith, 2 Cor. 11:12, 'That wherein they glory we might be as they;' but there is no end of raking in this puddle.

Secondly, Private persons. Cain against Abel, drew him into the field, disputed with him about God and providence and the world to come, Gen. 4. The princes of Darius against Daniel, Dan. 6. The kingdom was but newly subdued by the Medes: this would try the affection of his subjects; no request to be made to God or man for thirty days. The Medes and Persians were wont to ascribe divine honours to their kings, as Brissonius proveth. The report of this reverence would be glorious. Religion was at stake; therefore Daniel would venture the lions' den. Judas's treason against Christ: Luke 22:3, 'The devil entered into Judas.' The Jews' laying in wait for Paul: Acts 23:12–14, 'Certain Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, or oath of execration, that they would not eat or drink till they had killed Paul: and they were more than forty that had made this conspiracy.' And this they would do with the consent of the chief priests, as he was coming to the Sanhedrim. A parallel in the fifth of November. So Jezebel's plot against Naboth for his vineyard; makes use of God's name and worship to bring it about, 1 Kings 21:8–10. But I must stop, being carried beyond my first intention: plotted mischiefs are an ancient practice.

Use of all. How much are we obliged to God's providence, who doth not only defend us against open violence, but secret machinations! It is the Lord taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and disappointeth the counsels of wicked men against his people, Job 5:12. Many things are contrived against us in the dark that we know not and see not, but the eye of the Lord watcheth for us: Isa. 8:10, 'Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought: speak the word, and it shall not stand, for God is with us.'

Second point. That these plots usually begin in pride; for David saith here, 'The proud have digged pits for me.' Therefore it is pride that puts men upon designs of mischief and ruin to others. Pride showeth itself in the envy of superiors, contention with equals, or the disdain of inferiors.

1. Take pride as it venteth itself by envy at any excellency, or supposed excellency, in others. Search the scriptures, and you will say this puts men upon plotting the mischief of their neighbours' religious eminency. Man cannot endure to be outstripped in religion; therefore men malign and hate what they will not imitate, and then seek to destroy and undermine God's people. It was Abel's goodness that made Cain plot against him, to draw him into the field that he might kill him, 1 John 3:12. The power of godliness is an eyesore to those that would look no further than the form of it. Or it may be the men of the world do envy the godly should thrive by them. This made the presidents lay a snare and gin for Daniel. When the gospel is likely to get credit, 'the Jews, moved with envy,' seek to suppress it, Acts 17:5. Pride is loath to stoop, or to see opposites in any honour and request. The Pharisees conspired to take Christ: John 12:19, 'Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? the whole world is gone after him.' They were galled to the heart to see such flocking and resorting to Christ after he had raised Lazarus from the dead. Some men will

neither serve Christ themselves, nor endure that others should do it, therefore Christ must be taken out of the way. The plots of Sanballat and Tobias were their envy at the Jews.

2. As pride venteth itself by contention with equals; for only 'by pride cometh contention.' Thus the Jews conspired to kill Paul; they looked upon him as one that had cried down the customs of their nation. This made Absalom plot the death of Amnon, because of the quarrel he had with him, and the dishonour he had done his sister: he bids him to dinner, and plieeth him with cups till he is merry, and then killeth him, 2 Sam. 13:22.

3. As it venteth itself by the disdain of underlings. Haman could not endure to see Mordecai in the king's gate, Esther 5:13, and therefore contriveth how to root him out and all his nation. Pride disdaineth the meanness of God's people, and that they should have any subsistence, and think they may oppress them freely, and root them out: Ps. 123:4, 'We are filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.' They scorn the people of God, and think they may do what they please with them without control.

Well, then, this informeth us how much we should look to things betimes. The wickedness of David's enemies began in pride, went on in malicious plotting, and then they stick at no iniquity. When once we are engaged in a course of sin, there is usually no stop. Pride in some sense is the original of all wickedness, but more especially of malicious dealing with the people of God: Ps. 10:2, 'The wicked, in the pride of his heart, doth persecute the poor.' The godly many times are in a mean condition when their adversaries are in power, and can easily oppress them as underlings; but men forget the great God, who is their defender, and whose work and business it is to cast



down the proud: James 4:6, ἀντιᾶσεται, he standeth in battle array. And proud they are certainly who use their power to oppression, and care not what terms they put upon them.

Third point. That God can, when he will, and usually doth, protect his people against the plots of the proud; for therefore David bringeth the cause before God.

First, That God can, when he will, protect his people against the fraud and violence of their enemies. There are two grounds of trust—his wisdom, and the vigilancy of his providence.

1. His wisdom. As we have God's power to trust in against their violence, so God's wisdom against their frauds and deceits: Job 12:13, 'With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding.' Wisdom implieth his accurate knowledge of things; counsel, his advised government of them; wisdom, his disposing and ordering things aright with respect to their ends. He hath understanding to find out all secrets, counsel to know fit means to bring his purposes to pass, and wisdom to order the means for attaining these ends.

Observe there, first, how wisdom and strength are there coupled; as in that text, so elsewhere: Job 9:4, 'He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength.' As he hath wisdom to judge, so power to execute or effect all his counsels. So Job 36:5, 'Behold God is mighty in strength and wisdom.' There is no standing out against supreme wisdom and invincible power; both together make God the most dreadful enemy and the most desirable friend.

Observe, again, how God's wisdom is set forth by these three words, understanding, counsel, wisdom, to assure the hearts of the faithful that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against' the church of God,

Mat. 16:18. In the gates anciently was their strength, and there their magistrates and council sat. Now, they that believe that God is wise, of whom should they be afraid? Prov. 21:30, 'There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord.' There may be wisdom, counsel, and understanding in the enemies of the gospel; and in the Lord there is wisdom and strength, counsel and understanding. Only against him there is the wisdom, counsel, and understanding of the creature; in him, of the creator. Surely the wisdom, counsel, and understanding of the creature can do nothing without him, nothing against him. Not without him, for it is dependent; whatever the creature hath it cometh from him; otherwise our understanding is but ignorance, our counsel rashness, our wisdom folly. Pharaoh thought to go wisely to work, Exod. 1:10; but that wisdom costs dear when it tends to suppress God's interest. Ahab, when God threatened to cut off his posterity, begets seventy sons, bestowed them in fenced cities, 2 Kings 10:1; but those seventy sons were slain. Herod thought to go wisely to work, to destroy him that was born king of the Jews in the cradle; but Christ was preserved for all that. The synagogue of Satan is hatching crafty counsels to destroy the spouse of Christ, but with what effect? The man of sin is consumed more and more. We are afraid of our subtle enemies, but are we in such straits as God knoweth not how to bring us out? They cannot outwit the Lord. Whatever is plotted in Rome or hell against us, God knoweth it, for he hath understanding; God counter-worketh it, for he hath counsel; therefore they will but play the fool, for he hath wisdom. He heareth every word they say, knoweth their secret juggling, is at work for those that depend upon him; therefore let us rest in God's wisdom, and not be disquieted with every rumour.

2. The care and vigilancy of his providence. It is emphatically expressed in two places: Heb. 13:5, 6, 'He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my

helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me;' and Ps. 121:4, 'Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.' In both there is a negative gradation. His eyelids try the children of men; the Lord waketh for us all.

Secondly, That usually he doth protect his people against the plots of the proud, and bringeth the mischief they intend to others upon their own heads: Job 15:35, 'They conceive mischief and bring forth vanity, and their belly prepareth deceit.' But to keep the notion of the text: Ps. 7:15, 'He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made;' Ps. 9:15, 16, 'The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared by the work of his own hand: they are sunk down into the pit they digged; in the net which they hid is their own feet taken.' So Ps. 35:7, 8, 'For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul. Let destruction come upon him at unawares, and let his net that he hath hid catch himself: into that very destruction let him fall;' and Ps. 10:2, 'Let them be taken in the device they have imagined;' and Ps. 57:6, 'They have prepared a net for my step; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, in the midst whereof they are fallen themselves.' All these places show how usual it is that their devices do not succeed; yea, that the wicked cannot take a nearer course to ruin themselves than to seek the overthrow of God's church and people. All their machinations turn to their own loss, and the mischief they design to others falls constantly on themselves. As a stone thrown up or an arrow shot up against heaven returneth upon the head of him that throweth it, their acts and attempts of hurting others are converted to their own ruin, and destruction seizeth upon them by that very means by which they thought to bring it upon other men. This God doth, partly as they are proud, as they despise God and his people: Ps. 10:4, 'The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is

not in all his thoughts.' They are so confident of all they design, that they will not so much as call upon God for a blessing: this is so firmly laid, that all things shall succeed. They will not seek after God through the pride of their countenance; or suppose they should pray, it is but as Balaam offering sacrifice to entice God to curse his own people. The Lord telleth us, Prov. 21:27, 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?' Partly because of God's care and respect to his people: 'The poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless,' Ps. 10:14. He trusts his all with God, who is the patron of the innocent and oppressed.

Use 1. To direct us to carry the cause to God, as David in the text: Ps. 83:2–4, 'For lo, thine enemies make a tumult, and they that hate thee have lift up the head: they have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones: they have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.' You must make the Lord the party still against the wicked. So Ps. 37:12, 'The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth.' The wicked plotteth; but do the just countermin him? No; the Lord interposeth; he laugheth at him. It is a mighty support to the soul to oppose his justice to their wickedness, his omnipotency to their power, his wisdom to their craft, his love to their enmity. They are in God's hands, and cannot stir without him: as if one designed to poison me, but cannot do it without my father's consent. Wicked men are full of their boasts, but their brags and threats are but as the brags of a man on the scaffold, who is ready to be executed. Their day is coming.

2. When God doth so it must be acknowledged with thankfulness and praise; yea, though an old mercy, Micah 6:5. The godly are preserved though there be pits digged for them. Surely such experiences ought

much to engage his people's hearts to him, for it showeth how mindful he is of their safety and welfare. Blessed be God that yet we subsist, that their devices are disappointed, and their designs brought on them what they had projected against others.

Fourth point. That God's law forbiddeth all ungodly, treacherous designs, attempts, and actions.

As contrary to justice. To design mischief and treachery against the life of any is the guise of wicked men.

As contrary to sincerity and godly simplicity: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'For our rejoicing is this, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-wards.' Crafty and subtle dealings consenteth not with those that profess to direct their ways by the word of God.

As contrary to charity and mercy, which we owe to all men. How God hath guarded the life of the innocent by his precepts, and what a base perverse spirit it is to dig pits for them.

Use. Here is some plea for religion. It is not *feralis superstitio*. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum?* It is not a false, unnatural, unkind superstition, when men, under pretence of it, commit such evils, digging pits, laying mines and barrels of gunpowder, that religion should persuade all this. The world thinks that religion is a sour superstition, that it makes men ill-natured. No; it is the peaceablest and meekest thing that can be. A false religion indeed efferates the mind, begets a bloody spirit: Jude 11, 'Gone in the way of Cain;' in the way of blood and murder. They that have either a false religion, or are false in the true religion, indeed they are ill-natured and possessed with a rough spirit, unfit for human society.

The true religion, which God hath established in his law, is the meekest thing in all the world.

Fifth point. That the innocent should not be much troubled to be maligned and hated by them who contemn God's laws. Why?

For their wickedness, fraudulency, and cruelty is a certain prognostic of their ruin. The more their sins are aggravated, their judgment cometh the sooner. God's law is wronged, as well as our interest endangered.

It is a great case to the conscience of the godly that they dig pits for us without a cause, Ps. 35:7. The most godly and innocent may have pits digged for them. It encourageth us in our addresses to God, that we have no enemies but those who are enemies to God also and his ways; and the most wicked men are most violent against God's people. Who was it first raged against the Christians but Nero? And what a beast was Nero! That must needs be some great good that was condemned by Nero, but it was an honour and credit to religion to have such an enemy as Nero: Ps. 5:10, 'Let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for they have rebelled against thee.' It is some argument of confidence that their ruin is coming.

Use. What use shall God's people make of the whole for themselves?

1. Never to engage in any design but what will suit with God's word, and you may commend to God in prayer. Do not dig pits which are not after God's law. Examine it according to rule. Never break a law for safety, nor for the best ends in the world dispense with your duty to God or man. It is horrible distrust of God's promises to venture upon the breach of his precepts for our pretended safety. Take heed

of doing anything or carrying any plot against God's law, unless you would be like the enemies of the gospel.

2. Walk with greater simplicity, without that guile and double-dealing and serpentine wisdom that is so proper to wicked men. He that walketh uprightly walketh safely. Protection holds good for the road and not for byways, 2 Cor. 1:12. The proud are those that dig pits; the character of those that shall have pardon for their sins is this, 'In whose spirit there is no guile.' A guileful spirit ill suits with the gospel and the grace of God.

3. Take heed of carnal affections. Pride, envy, contempt of others, we know not how far these lusts may transport us, to what horrid, unnatural designs. When once the devil hath a man upon the hip, when engaged in an evil design, it is hard to stop; pride then digging pits, and then casting off God's law; and then he never cares whether to please or displease, honour or dishonour God, is not troubled with such kind of thoughts.

4. Take heed how you engage against God's people, or dig pits for them that fear the Lord. God's interest usually goeth along with them: Isa. 8:9, 10, 'Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken to pieces: take counsel together, and it shall come to nought.' As the captain's servant said, 'Take heed what ye do, for this man is a Roman.' So these men are children of God, he is their patron and protector; God is interested in their protection; they are little ones, but they have a great God, Mat. 18:10. Therefore take heed of having any interest opposite to the strict people of God, for this is but to ruin yourselves.

## **SERMON XCIII**

## **For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.—VER. 89.**

THESE words are usually rendered as making but one proposition; but the accent athnah showeth there are two branches, the one asserting the eternity of God, the other the constancy and permanency of his word. Thus—(1.) 'For ever art thou, O Lord;' (2.) 'Thy word is settled in the heavens.' So the Syriac version readeth it; and Geierus, and after him others, prove and approve this reading. And so this verse and the following do the better correspond one with another, if we observe beginning and ending, as 'Thou art for ever, O Lord,' and 'Thy faithfulness unto all generations,' which are exactly parallel. And then the last clauses, 'Thy word is settled in the heavens,' 'Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.' And implieth, as God is eternal, so is his word, and hath an emblem and fit representation both in heaven and in earth: in heaven, in the constant motion of the heavenly bodies; in earth, in the consistency and permanency thereof; that as his word doth stand fast in heaven, so doth his faithfulness on earth, where the afflictions of the godly seem to contradict it.

First, Of the first clause, 'Thou art for ever, O Jehovah.'

1. That Jehovah is the one, only, eternal, and everlasting God. What eternity is passeth our skill exactly to define. As we understand it, it is the duration of a being that is without beginning or end. Duration is a continual tract of being; and eternal duration implieth an immutable and unterminable abode in being. So it is here.

[1.] It is an infinite, unterminable duration, without beginning or ending: Ps. 90:2, 'From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.' God never was nothing, never shall be nothing. All the generations past



were, but now are not. We heretofore were not, but now are. God is the beginning and end of all things, yet himself without beginning or end. He had an infinite, incomprehensible being before any part of the world was framed, and will remain the same still when the world shall be no more. The soul, in viewing God, is enclosed between infiniteness before and infiniteness behind, and which way soever it looketh it seeth infiniteness round about it.

[2.] Immutable; as without beginning and end, so without any change: Ps. 102:25–27, 'Of old thou hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands: they shall perish, but thou shalt endure, yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.' God from the mount of eternity beholdeth all the successions and changes of the creature; but he is not changed, his nature is one and the same from everlasting to everlasting. We change every day; we are not that to-day which we were yesterday; we have left some part of our life behind us, which is gone, and cannot be recovered; and our duration lesseneth every day; but God abideth for ever one and the same, though all things be in continual flux and motion about him.

2. Now, that God is eternal I shall prove by scripture and reason.

[1.] By scripture: Gen. 21:33, 'Abraham called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.' The gods of the nations were upstart gods, but lately found out and soon destroyed; but he is the eternal God, who ever was, and is, and ever will be: Job 36:26, 'Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out.' He speaketh of God's eternity in such terms as man is capable of; for God's being is not to be measured by days and years, but so we express it for our understanding, for his duration is

far above our reach and capacity. So Isa. 57:15, God is said to 'inhabit eternity.' Thus the scripture propounds God's eternity as matter of our faith, reverence, and admiration.

[2.] By reason, because the perfection of the first cause requireth that his duration should be without beginning or ending, or, which is all one, eternal. He is Jehovah, that hath his being from himself, and all other things have their being after him and from him. Something must be eternal, or else there would be nothing made. It is certain that if there had been a time when nothing was, there never would be anything, for something cannot come out of nothing; therefore we must stop in some first cause and eternal being.

3. That eternity belongeth to God is to be seen in all his attributes; for if God be eternal, his wisdom, power, and goodness are eternal also.

[1.] His wisdom is eternal, for all things are present to the knowledge of God. Things come to our knowledge successively, some before, and some after. We see and know things according to their duration and existence. We compute by days and years, yesterday, to-morrow, last year, and next year. One generation passeth and another cometh, but in God's understanding there is no succession of before and after: 'Known to God are all his works from the beginning,' Acts 15:18. God, that doth all things in time, knew them all before time, otherwise his knowledge was not infinite and eternal; they are all present to his understanding. Hence is that expression: 2 Peter 3:8, 'One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' All those differences of duration, which to the creatures are longer or shorter, are all alike to God; for all things are constantly present to God, and under his view and prospect. Indeed the Lord is pleased to condescend to our shallow capacities, and to give us leave to express

his duration in our own terms, whilst he calleth himself 'Yesterday, to-day, and for ever,' Heb. 13:8; and Rev. 1:4, 'From him which is, which was, and which is to come.' Yet in proper speaking, God always is. I AM is his name; and all things to him are present, either past, present, or to come. Time hath no succession to him: he beholdeth at once what is not at once, but at several times; there is nothing past to him, to come to him, but all present. He knoweth the end of all things before he giveth them a beginning.

[2.] His power is eternal; therefore it is said, Rom. 1:20, that his eternal power and godhead is clearly understood from the creation of the world, and seen in the things that are made. How else could so many things be educed out of nothing, and still kept from returning into their original nothing, if there were not an infinite and eternal power then and still at work? So Isa. 26:4, 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.' We may depend upon him, for his arm is never dried up, nor doth his strength fail; there is no wrinkle upon the brow of eternity. God is where he was at first; he continueth for ever a God of infinite power, able to save those that trust in him.

[3.] His goodness and mercy are eternal: Ps. 136, it is often repeated, 'For the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever.' It is true a parte post it holdeth good; his love and affection continueth the same, and shall do for ever; he is not weary of doing good, nor is his mercy spent. You have both, Ps. 103:17, 'The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him.' The mercy was decreed and prepared before the beginning of the world, and we shall have the fruits and effects of it when the world shall be no more. It was from everlasting; for God, foreseeing the fall of Adam, provided us a remedy in Christ; and having all lapsed in his prospect and view, did out of his free love choose some, whilst others are passed by, to life

and salvation by Christ. That God did from eternity decree and purpose this is manifest, because he doth in time effect it, otherwise he should not 'work all things according to the counsel of his will,' Eph. 1:11, or else his will would be mutable, willing that in time which he willed not from eternity; whereas in him there is no variableness or shadow of turning. And that his mercy is to everlasting appeareth because he doth in time convert and sanctify them, and so bring them to glory and blessedness; for the eternal God will make his people eternally happy with himself.

4. That God showeth himself as an eternal being, both as a governor and benefactor.

[1.] As a governor. His eternity is seen in his government, in threatening eternal misery to the wicked, and appointing eternal happiness to the godly: Mat. 25:46, 'These shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life everlasting.' The joys of the blessed are everlasting; there shall never be a change of nor interruption in their happiness, but after millions of years they are to continue in this life as if it were the first moment. Thy crown will be thy crown for ever; thy kingdom thy kingdom for ever; this glory will be thy glory for ever; thy God will be thy God, and thy Christ, for ever. We affect the continuance of this life, though it be a life of pain and misery: 'Skin for skin, and all a man hath, he will give for his life.' Oh, how much more valuable should this eternal life be, which is a life of uninterrupted joy and felicity! On the other side, the punishment is everlasting, the loss is eternal, the wicked are everlastingly deprived of the favour of God. The disciples wept when Paul said, 'Ye shall see my face no more.' Oh, how much more terrible will it be to be banished everlastingly out of God's presence! Mat. 25:41. Besides, the pain will be eternal, as well as the loss. This worm never dieth, this fire shall never be quenched, Mark 9:44.

Neither heaven nor hell hath any period or end, either of them are eternal. Now this way God ruleth and governeth the creature, as becoming his infinite and eternal majesty. The laws of kings and parliaments can reach no further than some temporal punishment; their highest pain is the killing of the body; their highest reward is some vanishing and fading honour, or perishing riches; but God's law concerneth our everlasting estate, our eternal well or ill-being; eternal life or eternal death is wrapped up in these commandments. These are rewards suitable to the eternal majesty of the lawgiver; and if thou do evil there is an eternal loss of heaven, and an eternal sense of the wrath of God. If you believe and obey the gospel there is eternal salvation provided for you; for Christ is 'the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him,' Heb. 5:9.

[2.] As a benefactor he showeth himself also an eternal being. There is a double beneficial goodness of God—common and special. His common goodness runneth in the channel of creation and common providence; his special goodness in the channel of redemption and renovation by Christ.

(1.) He is a benefactor to all men; he hath given them an immortal spirit that shall abide for evermore: Eccles. 12:7, 'The dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God that gave it.' There is an immortal soul that dwelleth in a mortal body. The body was made of corruptible principles, was dust in its composition. It is true, God can annihilate it; but the soul, as it is a spirit, hath no corruptible principles in it; it is a thing that cannot be killed or destroyed by any created power. Now this divine spark, which cannot be quenched, is a pledge and effect of God's eternity; for he that giveth immortality certainly is immortal himself: nothing can give what it hath not. And besides, because our souls are immersed and sunk into matter, and forget their divine original, therefore God by

the blessings of his providence seeks to raise them up to look after this supreme and spiritual being, and giveth us all kind of comforts and mercies, whose creatures we are, 'that we may seek the Lord, if haply we may feel after him, and find him,' Acts 17:27; that we may own him as the first cause or father of lights, by whom this spark was kindled in us; or seek him as the chief good, in whom alone this restless soul of ours can find contentment and satisfaction.

(2.) He is a benefactor in a way of grace and recovery by Christ. This also sets forth his eternity. The first rise and bottom cause of all this grace and favour that stirred and set all the causes on work which concurred to it, was God's everlasting love, John 3:16. And Christ saith, Prov. 8:31, 'I was set up from everlasting;' and this 'grace was given us in Christ before the world began,' 2 Tim. 1:9. Before the foundation of the world was laid this business was transacted with Christ for our benefit. And then the way how it was brought about, it was by an everlasting redemption, Heb. 9:12, of an eternal force, value, and efficacy. And the grace wrought in us; it is called 'incorruptible seed,' 1 Peter 1:23. There is an eternal principle in our hearts, and that is the reason why a believer is so often said to have eternal life abiding in him, because of the beginning, seed, and principle of it that is sown in his heart; and the comfort and fruit of it that we have here is called 'everlasting consolation,' 2 Thes. 2:16, 'He hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation, and good hope, through grace.' It is not bottomed on any poor fading thing, but on matters of an eternal duration; the happiness itself is the eternal fruition of the ever-blessed God: 1 Thes. 4:17, 'We shall be ever with the Lord.' So that we are made eternal also both in body and soul; whence you see how abundantly God discovereth his eternal being, in all his gifts and graces by Christ.

5. When the creatures are spoken of as eternal, it must be understood; it is a communicated, dependent, half eternity, and so no derogation to this perfection which is proper to God.

[1.] It is communicated to us, for originally God only hath immortality, 1 Tim. 6:16. We have it by derivation, God hath it originally in himself and from himself. God dispenseth and measureth out the duration and continuance of all other things, their races and stages, when they shall begin and when they shall end. And that immortality which the angels and the souls of men have is ascribed to us by participation; we have it from God, because he was pleased to give it to us.

[2.] It is a dependent eternity, for every moment we depend upon God; if he take away his Spirit we are gone, man or angel. We assert the immortality of the soul because it hath not the principles of corruption in it as the body hath; but yet we cannot, must not cut off the dependence upon the first cause and fountain of being. In his hand is the breath of all living, and he is often called 'the God of your life,' and 'the God of the spirits of all flesh.'

[3.] It is but a half eternity: we sometimes were not, God is from everlasting to everlasting; but we are appointed to eternal life, and time was when we lay in the womb of nothing. We are but of yesterday, poor upstarts, that had but an existence and a new being given us of God; if he will lengthen it out, and continue it to all eternity, it is not such an eternity as he hath, but a half eternity; not an eternity without beginning, but only without ending.

6. This eternity of God is not seriously and sufficiently enough thought of and improved, till it lessen all other things in our opinion and estimation of them and affection to them. Two things should

especially be lessened—the time we spend in the world, and the things that we enjoy in the world.

[1.] The time we spend in the world. Alas! what is this to God's eternity! Ps. 39:5, 'Behold, thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth, and mine age is nothing before thee.' Whether our days be spent in prosperity or adversity they are but short, a hand-breadth, a mere nothing, compared with God's eternity: Ps. 110:4, 'A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.' A thousand years, compared to eternity, are but as a drop spilt and left in the ocean, or as time insensibly past over in sleep. Forty, fifty, or seventy years seemeth a great time with us; yet with God, who is infinite, ten thousand years is no considerable space, but a very short and small duration.

[2.] As time, so the things of the world: 2 Cor. 4:18, 'The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' They are short as to continuance and use. As to continuance, he calleth the honours and delight of Pharaoh's court, Heb. 11:25, 'The pleasures of sin for a season.' Whatsoever is temporal a man may see the end of it. Be it evil: a man in the deep waters is not discouraged as long as he can see banks; but in eternity there are neither banks nor bottom. If good: Ps. 119:96, 'I have seen an end of all perfection.' The most shining glory will shortly be burnt out to a snuff; it wastes every day. Eternity maketh good things infinitely good, and evil things infinitely evil. If it be temporal, whatever paineth us is but a flea-bite to eternal torments. Whatever pleaseth or delights, it is but a may-game to eternal joys. So for use too, it is but for a season, Deut. 23:24; the law gave an indulgence to eat of his neighbours' grapes for refreshment; 'But thou shalt not put any in thy vessel:' 1 Tim. 6:7, 'For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.' The manna was useful and refreshing when



used in the day, but if kept all night it perished and was useless; it was useful in the wilderness, but ceased when they came to Canaan.

The uses are many.

Use 1. First, Comfort to the godly, for their own particular. He is an eternal God that ordereth and guideth all things, that he may bring them to their eternal felicity, and will in time admit them into it: Ps. 48:14, 'For this God is our God for ever and ever, and he will be our guide even unto death.' After death he will be their God still; death doth not put an end to this relation; for God is Abraham's God when he is dead, Mat. 22:32. God is the same still, both in himself and to those that believe in him: he will constantly guide them all the days of their life, and after death receive us to the everlasting enjoyment of himself, and revive our dust. Oh, what a blessedness is this, to have an interest in such an eternal God! Secondly, As to the community and society to which they do belong. God's eternity is the church's stability; and so it is urged in scripture: Mal. 3:6, 'For I am the Lord; I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed;' Ps. 102:27, 28, 'Thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end; the children of thy servants shall continue.' So when the flourishing of the wicked is spoken of, when they spring as grass: Ps. 92:8, 'But thou, O Lord, art most high for evermore.' If they be high, God is higher, and they are but upstarts to him; their power is of a late rise and short continuance. So Ps. 93:2, 'Thy throne is established of old; thou art from everlasting.' God's throne is as eternal as his being. So Lam. 3:17, 'Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever, and thy throne from generation to generation.' Is the life of thy enemies long? God endureth for ever. Is their power great? It is but dependent. God had power before them, and will have power when they shall be no more.

Use 2. Terror to the wicked: Heb. 10:31, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' They may outlive other enemies, but they cannot outlive God, who abideth for ever, to avenge his quarrel against them. And judge you if his controversy against them be not just, since they are such impious fools and brutes as that they prefer the creature before the creator, and choose temporal things rather than everlasting, and prefer earth before heaven, and the satisfaction of their bodily lusts before the saving of their souls. Can you blame God of any injustice in dooming them to everlasting misery? What part of the punishment would you have relaxed? the loss, or the pain? The loss is double—of God's favour or their natural comforts. Would you have God admit those to the sight and everlasting fruition of himself who never cared for him? Or return again to their natural comforts, that they may eternally run riot with them, or abuse them to an occasion of the flesh? Or is it the pain? Would you have God take off that when the sin and impenitent obstinacy doth still continue, since they preferred a temporal good before that which is eternal, and would 'sell their birthright for one morsel of meat'? Heb. 12:16. How just is it for God to make them everlastingly to lie under the fruits and effects of their own evil choice!

Use 3. To press us to seek after the everlasting fruition of this blessed and ever-glorious God, because many live as if they had never heard of things eternal; most live as if they did not believe any such thing; the best do not improve those things as they ought: therefore I shall a little insist upon a quickening exhortation, to stir you up to seek an eternal happiness in God.

1. As we are reasonable creatures, we were made for eternity; for God hath given us an immortal spirit, and there is no proportion between an immortal soul and temporal things. It cannot be content with

anything that shall have an end, for then we may survive our happiness. If we had souls that would perish, it would be more excusable to look after things that perish. What will you do when your souls shall be turned out of doors, when ye fail? Luke 16:9. To what region will the poor, shiftless, harbourless soul betake itself when you die? All your thoughts that concern the present world perish; and if you did perish too, it were no such great matter. But you shall live; and what will you have to comfort yourselves if you have not an interest in the eternal God? In whose hands will you be if you have slighted him while you were upon earth, and the eternal happiness he offereth to us, and could not find enough in God and his eternal salvation to take off your hearts from the pleasures and vanities of the world? Can you expect that he will favour you and be kind to you?

2. Eternity is made known to us Christians, and clearly set before us in the doctrine of the gospel: 2 Tim. 1:10, 'He hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.' Nature hath but guesses at it, the law but shadows; but here it is clearly, certainly, and fully revealed. You know that you have an eternal God to please, and an infinite and eternal reward to expect. The whole drift of our religion is to call us off from time to eternity, from this world to a better. Christ came not to settle us here in a state of prosperity, nor to make this world our rest and portion, but to draw us up to God and heaven.

3. The same religion showeth that we are already involved in an eternal misery, and stand under a sentence binding us over to the curse and everlasting wrath of God: John 3:18, 'He that believeth not is condemned already: and this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness more than light, because their deeds are evil.' God hath offered life and immortality to them

who have so miserably lost it, and involved their souls in eternal death. Therefore, if we know what it is to be liable to the wrath of an eternal God, and to be interested in the hopes of eternal glory, we should awaken and be more serious in a business of such concernment.

4. You will shortly be summoned to give an account, Luke 16:2. You have received so much from me, such riches, honours, parts, sufficiencies, such invitations to draw you home to me, what will you answer? Nay; there is not only a little time between you and judgment, but a little time between you and execution; nothing but the slender thread of a frail life, which is soon fretted asunder. And will you, can you sleep in sin so near eternity, and laugh and dance over the brink of hell? You cannot soon enough flee from wrath to come.

5. Consider what poor deluded wretches, who are in that everlasting estate, would give, if they might be trusted with a little time again, that they might provide for eternity. How happy would they think themselves if God would but try them once more! If careless creatures would but anticipate the thoughts of another world, how soon would they discern their mistake! How miserably will you bewail yourselves when you have lost eternity for poor temporal trifles! What comfort will it be to you that you have been merry here, lived in pomp and ease, when you must endure the wrath of God for evermore, and wish for any allay of your torments? Luke 16:24, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.' It is better to believe than try; provide against it, than try.

6. If you be Christians indeed, you have not the spirit of this world. Christianity, as it is acted by us, is but the exercise of faith, hope, and love. Now, the eternal fruition of God is the matter that all those graces are conversant about. Faith believeth that there is an eternal being, and that our happiness lieth in the fruition of him, Heb. 11:6. Love is that which levelleth and directeth all our actions to this blessed end, that we may see God and enjoy him as our portion and felicity: Ps. 73:25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee.' Our desires are after him, our delights in him; it is our work to please him, our happiness to enjoy him. The truth of his eternal being is the object of our faith; so the apprehension of him as our chief good and felicity is the object of our love, so as he is capable of being enjoyed; and our participated eternity is the object of our faith: this is the end of all our desires and labours, and the expectation of this fortifieth us against all the difficulties of our pilgrimage, and so directeth us what to mind, be, and do: 2 Cor. 5:9, 'Therefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of the Lord.'

Directions what we shall do.

Direct. 1. Meditate often and seriously of eternity. There is a great deal of profit gotten by this meditation; nothing doth more promote the great ends of the gospel than this meditation.

1. For Christ. Nothing makes Christ precious but serious thoughts of eternity, he being the only means to deliver us from wrath to come, which is the great evil of the other state, and procure for us the eternal enjoyment of God, which is the good of that estate: Ps. 84:11, 'He is a sun and a shield, and no good thing will he withhold from them that live uprightly.' You can make a shift without Christ in this world, you are by ordinary means well provided against the evils of

this life, and well fortified with the good things thereof; but in death, Christ will be to thee gain and advantage.

2. It would promote the great change. What will make a proud man humble, a vain man serious, a covetous worldling heavenly, a wicked man a good man? Let him think of eternity, where only the humble, the heavenly, are favoured and accepted, 2 Cor. 3:11.

3. What would check temptations, either from the pleasures, riches, or honours of the world? These are not eternal riches, nor eternal pleasures, nor eternal honours; transitory things are not our business, nor our scope, Heb. 11:25.

4. What would quicken diligence, and put life into our endeavours but the meditation of eternity? Everything should be laboured for that hath an everlastingness in it; the travail of your souls should be laid out upon those things: Isa. 55:2, 'Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfies not?' So John 6:27, 'Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but that which endureth to life everlasting.' Surely serious diligence is necessary. Shall I trifle away that time which I am to improve for eternity?

Direct. 2. Let the enjoyment of an eternal God be your end and scope: 2 Cor. 4:18, 'While we look not to things which are seen, but to things that are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' When you have set eternal things before you, then make your choice. On the one side there are eternal joys, on the other eternal torments. Now vain pleasures lead to the one, solid godliness to the other. By the neglect of God you run the hazard of a miserable eternity. By the choice of God for your Lord and portion, you get an interest in a blessed eternity: only let me warn you—

1. To choose end and means together: Mat. 7:13, 14, 'Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it.' They must be coupled; both quicken each other, the intention of the end quickens to a diligent pursuit and an earnest use of means; and the use of means will sooner give you to understand what your condition will be than a bare reflection upon the end.

2. Do not confound principal and subordinate means, so as one should jostle out the other. The primary means of going to the Father is Christ: John 14:6, 'Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father but by me.' The secondary means is holiness: Heb. 12:14, 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.'

Direct. 3. Be resolvedly true to your end, which is the enjoyment of God, and that will quicken you the more, and direct you; for the end is both our measure and our motive. In short, do all things from eternal principles to eternal ends. The eternal principle is the grace of the Spirit; the eternal end is the pleasing, glorifying, and enjoying of God: Phil. 1:11, 'Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God.' Actions carried on from eternal principles, according to an eternal rule, for an eternal end, cannot miscarry.

## **SERMON XCIV**

## **Thy word is settled in heaven.—VER. 89.**

THIS will bear two senses—(1.) Relating to God's decree, made in heaven; (2.) An emblem of its constancy, is in heaven.

1. It may be referred to God's decree, 'Thy word is settled in heaven,' in thy mind and will. The words of temporal kings are on earth, and therefore their laws and edicts are subject to many changes, and are often revoked and altered, either by themselves or by their successors; but the word of God is above all changes and alterations, as being decreed in heaven. It is preached on earth, believed on earth, fulfilled on earth; but decreed in heaven, fixed and settled there by God's unalterable purpose and will.

2. That in heaven there is an emblem of it. It is usual in scripture to set forth the stability and constancy of God's word by this similitude; as Ps. 89:2, 'Mercy shall be built up for ever, thy faithfulness hast thou established in the very heavens.' So when it is compared with the covenant of day and night: Jer. 33:20, 21, 'Thus saith the Lord, If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, that there should not be day and night in their seasons; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant.' So Jer. 31:35–37. This sense I incline to, because in the next verse it is compared with the stability of the earth. Well, then, his word is settled in heaven, partly because the heavens stand fast by the same word by which they were first made: Gen. 1:3, 6, 'And God said, Let there be light, and there was light; Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and divide the waters from the waters; and it was so.' So Midrash Tillim. And partly because the being and order of heaven showeth the settledness of God's word, as the heavens were created and settled in a course, which they constantly observe in their motions; and this duration and equability in the motion is so exact,



that men can foresee eclipses long before they happen; therefore the Psalmist saith, Ps. 104:19, 'The sun knoweth his going down;' that is, 'keepeth so to the just points of his compass as if he were an intelligent agent, and knew the exact time when to set and rise. Now when we lift up our eyes to heaven, and see how punctually and exactly the order is observed which was once settled by God's will; even from the beginning of the world to this day no remarkable change hath been observed; the heavenly bodies keep their tenor and course, and by their constant motions distribute their light and influence to the world, and this from their first creation, and all because he hath said, It shall be so; in the strength of his word they abide. This continuance of the heavens showeth the permanency of his word.

Doct. That God's word is of an eternal truth and immutable constancy.

By his word is principally meant the gospel covenant. It is said by the prophet Isaiah, chap 40:8, 'The grass withereth, and the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand for ever.' And the apostle Peter, quoting and improving the same place, saith, 'The word of God is the gospel preached unto you,' 1 Peter 1:24, 25. And more especially the promise of eternal life; for that is opposite to the fading glory of the present life, and is the eternal effect of the word of God abiding in our hearts. When all other things fade and decay, this blessed estate, offered in and conveyed by the gospel, will not fail us.

1. I shall give you the reasons.
2. The emblem and representation.
3. The profit and usefulness of this meditation.

First, The reasons. In every promise, that it be certain and firm, three things are required:—

1. That it may be made seriously and heartily, with a purpose to perform it.
2. That he that hath promised continue in his purpose without change of mind.
3. That it be in the power of him that promiseth to perform what he hath so promised. Now of all these things there can be no doubt.

[1.] Certainly God meaneth as he speaketh, when he promiseth to give eternal life to those that believe and obey the gospel. There is no question but he is so minded, when he hath written a book to assure the world of it; for what need God to court the creature with an imaginary happiness, or to tell them of a glorious estate which he never meant to bestow upon them? Yea, why should Amen, the faithful witness, come from heaven further to assure us of it by his doctrine, die the death to purchase it for us, and afterward rise again, and enter into that happiness which he spake of, 'That our faith and hope may be in God?' 1 Peter 1:21. Why should he, as soon as he was ascended, give gifts unto men, send forth messengers into the world to preach this doctrine, and give notice of this blessed estate to be had on these terms, and attest it by divers signs and wonders, partly to alarm the drowsy world to regard it, and assure the incredulous world of the truth of this salvation? Heb. 2:3, 4. Not to believe that God is serious in all this, is to make him a liar indeed, yea, to establish a lie and falsehood with great solemnity.

[2.] That God doth continue his purpose is beyond doubt, if we consider his eternal and unchangeable nature: Mal. 3:6, 'For I am the Lord; I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed;'

and James 1:17, 'With him is neither variableness nor show of turning.' And what should alter his purpose? Doth he meet with anything that he foresaw not, and knew not before? God doth never repent, and call back his grant, that he hath by this act of grace insured eternal happiness to the saints on such terms: 1 Sam. 15:29, 'For the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent;' Ps. 110:4, 'I have sworn, and will not repent: thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedeck.' Christ is instated in full power of entertaining and blessing his faithful servants, which shall never be retracted. To take off all doubt, he hath given us double assurance—his word and his oath: Heb. 6:17, 18, 'God being willing more abundantly to show to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, wherein it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge,' &c. God hath ever been tender of his word; above all that is famed or believed of God, this is most conspicuous: Ps. 138:2, 'Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.' Now this needed not, for an oath is interposed in a doubtful matter; but it showeth God's extraordinary care for our satisfaction; his good-will is seen in the promise, his solicitude in the oath. In short, God would never be so fast bound, but that he doth continue his purpose.

[3.] That he is able to perform it: Mat. 19:26, 'With God all things are possible;' Rom. 4:21, 'Being fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able to perform;' Phil. 3:21, 'According to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself.' He is able to find out a way whereby sinners may be reconciled, sanctified, subdued by his Spirit; whereby his interests may be preserved in them against the assaults of the devil, the world, and the flesh; finally, able to raise our bodies after eaten out by worms and turned into dust. Matters of faith being chiefly or mainly future and

to come, and difficult to be performed, therefore an express belief of God's power is necessary. To convert such an obstinate, and to sanctify such a sinful creature, and to raise the dead, are no slight things.

Secondly, The emblem of this immutable constancy is settled in the heavens; it is not measured by the floating estate of things here upon earth, but by the perfection of the heavens, which are free from all changes and chances.

1. They are fit emblems of the stability of the word, for they continue

to be what his word once made them to be. There is no jostling among the stars, but all obey God's word and law: Ps. 148:4–6, 'Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and waters that be above the heavens: let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded, and they were created: he hath also established them for ever and ever; he hath made a decree which shall not pass.' So that when a believer looketh up to heaven, there he seeth the book of the creatures opened, wherein he beholdeth God's constancy and certainty written in indelible characters. God's powerful voice did first separate the waters from the waters, and those celestial bodies move in that order wherein God hath set them. Now is not this a help to us, when we open the book of scriptures, and compare the one with the other, how the stated course of nature, and the stated course of grace, agree with his power? For as long as you trust God's word you can never fail, for both heaven and earth are sustained by it: Heb. 1:3, 'He upholdeth all things by the word of his power.' All is easy to God, for he preserveth the heavens in that estate wherein they are governed, and can preserve his people in the most difficult cases.

2. God's constancy and truth doth appear in the heavens also; there is a witness there of his eternal truth; for when he had once said, 'Let there be heavens,' &c., they presently were, and ever since have kept one constant tenor and course. Yea, heaven shall sooner fail than God's word fail; he will not retract what he hath once said; and therefore his word is more firm and stable than the frame of heaven and earth: Mat. 5:18, 'Till heaven and earth pass, not one jot or tittle shall pass from the law till all be fulfilled;' Mat. 24:35, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.' So that God's word is more stable than heaven and earth.

Thirdly, The profit of this meditation.

1. That we may set the sureness of this word against the diffidence and distrustfulness of our own hearts: Luke 24:25, 'Slow of heart to believe.' Though God hath so firmly bound himself to the creature by his own word, yet the promise to us seemeth doubtful and uncertain, especially when men are clouded with troubles and temptations; for we look only to present sense, and would not be put on any trial. Now it is comfortable to remember that the order and course of nature is not so settled as the grace of the covenant is: let it have its course, resolved and patient obedience will at length end in eternal happiness; and therefore we should build surely upon a firm foundation, that we may not 'stagger through unbelief, but give glory to God,' Rom. 4:20.

2. To comfort us when our hopes are delayed. In due time the promise cannot want the effect, Heb. 6:12. There will be day and night, summer and winter, in their season; therefore as in the night we wait for day, and in the winter for summer, so must we wait for our eternal consolation.

3. To support us against the various changes in the state of worldly things. Many things fall out in this world that breed trouble in us, therefore if we should only look to the present state of things, our hearts would float up and down; but we must look to the immutable constancy of God's word, that is a sure rock for the anchor of hope to take hold on. There is a sure rule to walk by, sure promises to build upon, if we would be everlastingly happy. There are 'the sure mercies of David,' Isa. 55:3. The changes of this world perplex our faith; therefore we should not look to the instability of things below, wherein there are continual vicissitudes, but to the sure covenant.

4. Not only when our hopes are delayed and obscured by the changes and chances of this world, but contradicted by contrary appearances; God seemeth to cast us off, to have no pleasure in us. Now to bear up our faith in the hardest condition, that we may say, Job 13:15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,' and believe in hope against hope, we should remember the settledness and constancy of his word. The promises stand firm in heaven, when they seem to fail on earth. God may cover himself with frowns, and his dispensations may seem contrary to his intention; as Joseph spake roughly to his brethren, when he meant to discover himself to them, or as Christ dealt with the woman of Canaan, Mat. 15. But when there seemeth to be such a contradiction between the word and works of God, when his voice is sweet like Jacob's, and his hand rough like Esau's, we must remember that the smart rod is consistent with covenant love, Ps. 89:32. And we must not interpret the promise of God by his providential dealing with us, but rather his dealing by his promises; his promise being as the light part of the cloud, and his dealing as the dark part of it. God is fulfilling promises by hard dispensations, and sharp afflictions belong to his faithfulness, Ps. 119:75. Many times that is best for us, not what we think best, but what God thinks best.

The buffetings of Satan and oppositions of the world may be most wholesome to us, though not most pleasing to the flesh.

5. To wean us from the fading vanities of the world, Isa. 40:8, and 1 Peter 1:24. There is nothing firm and lasting in this world till we lift up our eyes to heaven, and seek an happiness in the promises, 1 John 2:17. Our happiness lieth not in the present life, but in the everlasting enjoyment of God: in the covenant all is settled and sure, but in the world all is unstable and uncertain. God's covenant provideth for us eternal joy and bliss.

Use 1. To show what contrary and different conclusions the carnal and spiritual will draw from the same principles. The scoffers said, 2 Peter 3:4, 'Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.' Because the whole frame of nature had kept one constant tenour and course, they plead for the eternity of the world and the falsehood of the promises. Now David reasoneth quite the contrary way. They see the mercy of God, that the things of nature keep ordinarily one constant course, and are not terrified with the frequent change thereof; yea, they are thereby confirmed in the belief of the Lord's constancy and faithfulness. But men in love with their lusts make a woful use of this consideration, hardening themselves in their conceit, that there shall never be a change, and so sin more securely. See the like in other things: 1 Cor. 7:29; 1 Cor. 15:32; Jude 24; Rom. 6:2; 2 Sam. 7:2; with Hag. 1:2; 1 Sam. 3:18; 2 Kings 6:33.

Use 2. Whenever you look to heaven, remember that within you have a God who hath fixed his residence and shown his glory there, and made it the seat both of his mercy and justice. You have also there a Saviour, who, after he had died for our sins, sat down at the right hand of majesty, to see his promises accomplished, and by his word

to subdue the whole world. There are 'angels that fulfil his commandment, hearkening to the voice of his word,' Ps. 103:21. There are glorified saints, who see God face to face, and dwell with him for evermore, and came thither by the same covenant which is propounded to us as the charter of our peace and hope. Without, we see the sun and moon and all the heavenly bodies move in that fixed course and order wherein God hath set them; and will God show his constancy in the course of nature, and be fickle and changeable in the covenant of grace, wherein he hath disposed the order and method of his mercies?

Use 3. To cure our unbelief, by considering how God's grace is settled in the covenant, so as to leave no cause or occasion of doubting or suspecting the truth and certainty of those blessings which he hath promised us; and shall we live in jealousy, as if we were not upon such sure terms with God? If we transact with another about certain benefits, the transaction may prove to no purpose, if the matter about which we contract with them hath no being, or the terms be impossible, or the conveyance be not firm and strong, so as to hold good in law. Now, none of these can be imagined in our entering into covenant with God. For—

1. Eternal life is not a chimera, or a thing that hath no being. You might run uncertainly, 1 Cor. 9:24, if it were a dream or a well-devised fable. No; it is the greatest reality in the world, Heb. 4:9, we cannot be mistaken; we see it before us in the promises so confirmed.

2. It is not upon impossible terms, but such as are performable by the grace of God: Eph. 2:8, 'By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.' And the apostle telleth us, Rom. 4:16, 'It is of grace, that it may be sure to all the seed.' It is grace maketh it sure. God giveth what he requireth. There are



conditions that concern making covenant and keeping covenant. First, conditions for making covenant: Jer. 24:7, 'I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord;' Ezek. 36:26, 'A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I bestow upon you.' After this for keeping covenant: This is a covenant that keepeth us as well as we keep it: Jer. 32:40, 41, 'I will put my fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from me;' so Ezek. 36:27, there is a promise of influence, 'I will put my spirit into you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.' This to prevent the danger of discovenanting.

3. Or that the conveyance be not strong and firm, so as to make a plea in law; for it is as strongly confirmed as anything can be by God's word and oath, as before it is upon record in heaven among the ancient decrees of God. It is written in the word for our comfort; yea, upon our hearts. It is sealed by the blood of Christ, Heb. 9:16, 17; sealed by the Spirit, Eph. 1:13. And therefore the conveyance will bear a plea, both now in prayer, and hereafter before the tribunal of God. We may show him his promises, plead the satisfaction of Christ, as he pleadeth it in heaven, Heb. 9:24. But where is there room for any doubt? If any, it must be of your qualification; for on God's part all is ordered and sure; and there two things:—First, That all the qualifications of the gospel must be evangelically interpreted, not legally; not in absolute perfection, but prevalent degree, Mark 9:29, and Can. 5:2. Secondly, Your only way to obtain comfort is to make the qualification more explicit; 1 John 2:5, 'Whosoever keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby we know that we are in him;' and 1 John 3:19, 'Hereby we know that we are of the truth.'

4. Let nothing that is uncertain keep you from this blessed and sure covenant. All things without it are uncertain. Riches are uncertain, 1

Tim. 6:17. The like may be said of honours, they are slippery places; of friends, health, life itself. Now, do not forsake your own mercies for lying vanities. Some vain thing or other taketh us off from God and seeking his favour, which will certainly prove a lie to you; therefore employ your time, care, and thoughts about these things.

5. If the covenant be settled, never expect to alter it, or model it, and bring it down to your fancies and humours. It is God only that can prescribe conditions and laws of commerce between us and him; man is not allowed to prescribe the conditions, or treat about the making of them, but is only bound to submit to what God was pleased to prescribe, and to fulfil the conditions without disputing. They are not left free and indifferent for us to debate them, and modify, and mitigate, and bring them down to our own liking and humour. We are to take hold, not to appoint, Isa. 56:4, and Rom. 10:3; so that it bindeth our duty as well as assureth our comfort. Our vote cometh too late to retract and alter God's eternal decrees. What would you have to be done for your freedom from hell and the wrath of God? Oh, that God would alter those severe constitutions which he hath made, and not insist so strictly on the self-denying duties required in the gospel covenant for the salvation of sinners! You may as well ask that God should repeal the ordinances of nature, turn night into day, and day into night for your sakes. But if the gospel covenant were repealed, that you may be more secure, what then? In what a case are you then? What will you hold by then? You Have no hope if the gospel stand in force; but what hope would you have if the gospel were abolished? Must the whole world be ruined to establish your security and indulgence to sin? Oh! surely this gospel thus stated hath more stability than the foundations of heaven and earth. Therefore, expect nothing to be altered for thy sake. The gospel constitution was settled long before thou wert born, and it is an unalterable decree, which cannot be reversed. All this is spoken to

confute them that look upon the gospel as true and to be believed, till they meet with something which crosses them, and then they hope it is not so. In short, God is true when he promises, true when he threatens, true when he commandeth. Or thus, if the gospel covenant be false, thou has no ground of hope; if true, it doometh licentious sinners to eternal destruction.

## SERMON XCV

### **Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.—VER. 90.**

THESE words contain a truth which is—(1.) Asserted; (2.) Represented by a fit and lively emblem, thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. He had before said, 'Thy word is settled in the heavens;' now he speaketh of it as manifested in the earth. There the constancy of God's promises was set forth by the duration and equal motion of the heavenly bodies, now by the firmness and immovableness of the earth. God's powerful word and providence reacheth to the whole world, this lower part here upon earth, as well as the upper part in heaven.

Doct. That in all ages God ever showed himself a true God, and faithful in all his promises. It is here confirmed by experience, and represented by an emblem.

1. God's faithfulness relateth to some promise wherein he hath engaged himself to his people: Heb. 11:11, 'She judged him faithful who had promised.' It is his mercy to make promises, but it is his

faithfulness and truth to fulfil them. His truth is pawned with the creature till he discharge it, Micah 7:20.

2. His truth dependeth upon his unchangeable nature, but it is confirmed to us by experience. His unchangeable nature, Heb. 6:18. If a promise can be made out to be of God, we have no more reason to doubt of it than of the nature and being of God. Yet, quoad nos, it is confirmed by experience: Ps. 18:30, 'The word of the Lord is a tried word.' We are led by sensible things, and what hath been done doth assure us of what shall be done, or may be expected from God.

3. That therefore God hath been ever tender of his truth, that the event may answer the promise, and we might know that God that hath been faithful, and kept touch with the world hitherto, will not fail at last. The heathens ascribed a double perfection to their gods—ἀληθεύειν καὶ εὐεργετεῖν. So the true God is known by his mercy and his fidelity; he never failed to perform his part of the covenant with any: Ps. 138:2, 'I will praise thy name, for thy loving-kindness and thy truth; for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.' As he hath made us admirable and great promises of giving his Son, and with him all things, so he will certainly perform all to the utmost importance of them. The matter of his word is mercy and loving-kindness, and in the performance thereof there is great truth and fidelity; as he hath made great and excellent promises, so he performeth them most punctually. So that in fulfilling his word, God will be known above all that is named, or famed, or believed, or apprehended, and spoken of them. Here is his great glory and excellency.

4. That the experience of all generations doth confirm God's faithfulness in his promises; for it is said in the text, 'His faithfulness

is unto all generations,' In the Hebrew it is, 'From generation to generation.'

The point may be amplified by two considerations:—

First, That some promises have been received by one generation, and fulfilled in another.

Secondly, That the same common promises have been fulfilled to the faithful in all ages.

First, That some promises have been received by one generation, and fulfilled in another, when the matter so required; as, for instance, Israel's going out of Egypt: Gen. 15:13, 14, 'And he said unto Abraham, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years: and also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge; and afterwards they shall come out with great substance.' Compare now Exod. 12:41, 'and it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.' Thirty years were added, because of their fathers dwelling in Canaan; but God kept touch to a day. So for the promise of the Messiah and calling the Gentiles; that God fulfilled in due time, and sent a Saviour into the world: Gal. 4:4, 'In the fulness of time God sent his son.' When the sceptre was gone from Judah, Gen. 49:10, when the crown was possessed by Herod, a tributary and foreigner, during the Roman monarchy, which at length Christ should utterly destroy. Dan. 2:35, Nebuchadnezzar had a vision of an image of four different metals, the head of gold, arms and breasts silver, belly and thighs brass, and the feet part iron and clay. While he beheld the image, and surveyed it from head to foot, he saw a stone hewn out of the mountain without hands, which stone smote the image, not upon the

head, breast, or belly, but upon the feet of iron and clay, upon which it vanished away, and the stone became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. This vision Daniel expounded of four Gentile kingdoms, which should succeed one another with great extent of dominion. The first of the Babylonians, which then was; the second of the Modes and Persians; the third of the Grecians; the fourth of the Romans, which subdued all the others, and because possessed of the riches and glory of the former; during this last kingdom was the stone hewn out of the mountain, and smote the iron feet. This stone was the kingdom of the God of heaven, which Christ set up. But not to trouble you with mysteries and nice debates, the apostle telleth us, Rom. 15:8–10, 'That Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again, it is said, Rejoice, ye Gentiles.' The event in all these cases afterwards did speak for itself; so in all that is yet to come, we should depend upon the veracity of God; as the calling of the Jews, the destruction of antichrist, a more ample effusion of gifts on the church, together with a dilation of its borders; as the patriarchs 'all died in faith:' Heb. 11:13, 'Having not received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them.'

Secondly, That the same common promises have been fulfilled to the faithful in all ages; there is but one and the same way to eternal life in necessary things, and the dispensations of God to every age are still the same; and so in every generation the promises of God are still fulfilled as if they were directed to that time only. God's faithfulness hath been tried many ways and at many times, but every age furnisheth examples of the truth of his promises. From the beginning of the world to the end, God is ever fulfilling the scripture

in his providential government, which is double—external or internal.

[1.] External, in the deliverance of his people, the answers of prayer, and manifold blessings vouchsafed to believers and their seed. See Ps. 22:4, 5, 'Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them: they cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.' The godly in former times trusted God, and trusted constantly in their troubles, and in their trusting they cried, and did never seek God in vain; which should support us in waiting upon God, and to depend on his mercy and fidelity; for they that place their full affiance in God, and seek his help by constant and importunate addresses, shall never be put to shame.

[2.] Internal, in conversion to God, the comforts of his Spirit, establishment of the soul in the hopes of the gospel, as to the pardon of sins and eternal life. Certainly God, that hath blessed the word throughout many successions of ages, to the converting and comforting of many souls, showeth that we may depend upon the covenant for pardon and eternal life. How many have found comfort by the promises! Now, as the apostle speaketh of Abraham, 'It was not written for himself alone, but us also,' Rom. 4:23, 24; so these comforts were not dispensed for their sake alone, but for our benefit, that we might be comforted of God; having the same God, the same Redeemer, the same covenant and promises, and the same Spirit to apply all unto us. If they looked to God and were comforted, why should not we? His faithfulness is to all generations; he is alike to believers, as they be alike to him: Rom. 3:22, 'There is no difference.'

5. That the experience of God's faithfulness in former ages is of use to those that follow and succeed, to assure them of God's faithfulness; for God's wonderful and gracious works were never intended merely

for the benefit of that age in which they were done, but for the benefit also of those that should hear of them by any creditable means whatsoever. It is a scorn and vile contempt put upon those wonderful works, which God made to be had in remembrance, if they should be buried in oblivion, or not observed and improved by those who live in after ages; yea, it is contrary to the scriptures: Ps. 145:4, 'One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts;' Joel 1:3, 'Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation;' Josh. 4:6–8, 'That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, What mean you by these stones? then shall yon answer them, that the waters of Jordan were cut off from before the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God.' So Ps. 78:3–7, 'That which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. we will not hide them from their children, showing to the generations to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.' From all which I observe:—

[1.] That we should tell generations to come what we have found of God in our time, and more especially parents should tell their children; they are bound to transmit this knowledge to their children, and they to improve it, either by word or deed. By word, by remembering the passages of providences, and publishing his mercies to posterity: Ps. 89:1, 'I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever: with my mouth I will make known thy faithfulness to all



generations.' Or by deed, putting them in possession of a pure religion, confirmed to us by so many providences and instances of God's goodness and truth.

[2.] That this report of God's gracious works, and owning his covenant, is a special means of edification. Why else should God enjoin it, but that the ages following should receive benefit thereby? Surely it is an advantage to them to hear how God hath owned us in ordinances and providences.

[3.] And more particularly I observe, that this tradition is a great means and help to faith; for it is said, ver. 7, 'That they may set their hope in God.'

6. That to be satisfied in point of God's faithfulness is of great importance to believers. Partly because their fidelity to God is much encouraged by his fidelity to us. They that do not trust God cannot be long true to him: Heb. 3:12, 'Take heed lest there be found in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God;' and James 1:8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways,' διψυχος ἀνήρ, one that doth not stick fast to God, and is ever unresolved, being divided between hopes and fears concerning his acceptance with God. A wavering Christian is divided between God and some unlawful course for his safety, divided between God's ways and his own, and cannot quietly depend upon his promises, but is tossed to and fro, doth not entirely trust himself in God's hands, but doth wholly lean upon his own carnal confidence. And partly because God is invisible, and dealeth with us by proxy, by messengers, who bring the word to us. We see not God in person: Heb. 13:7, 'Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken to you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversations;' their manner of living, their perseverance till death in

this faith and hope. And partly because the promises are future, and the main of them is to be accomplished in another world. Now, nothing will support us but the faithfulness of God: Prov. 11:18, 'The wicked worketh a deceitful work, but to him that soweth righteousness there shall be a sure reward.' Men think to be happy by their sin, but find themselves deceived at last; but none can be deceived that trust in the living and true God. Partly because many of the promises contradict sense; as when the soul is filled with anguish because of the guilt of sin: 1 John 1:9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' And the power of sin: 1 Thes. 5:24, 'Faithful is he who calleth you, who also will do it.' Supported in great distress: 1 Cor. 10:13, 'He will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able.' That we may be able to stand in the judgment: 1 Cor. 1:9, 'God is faithful, by whom ye are called into the fellowship of his son Jesus Christ.' Here is a Christian's great security and support, God's faithfulness, testified by Christians now and in all ages, confessing they have found by their experience the word of God to be true; for they have transmitted religion to us by their constant consent, and left it to us under a seal of God's faithfulness; and therefore we should persevere in our duty to God.

Secondly, As represented by an emblem. We should consider it, for it is a help to frequent meditation, as being always before our eyes; and they are without excuse who see not God in this thing; every time we set foot on the ground we may remember the stability of God's promises. And it is also a confirmation of faith, thus:—

1. The stability of the earth is the effect of God's word, this is the true pillar upon which the earth standeth; for 'he upholdeth all things by the word of his power:' Ps. 33:9, 'For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.' Now his word of power helpeth us to

depend upon his word of promise. God, that doth what he pleaseth, never faileth in what he promiseth. We see plainly that whatever standeth by God's will and word, cannot be brought to nought. Whence is it? how came this world to have a being? It is the work and product of that God whose word and promise we have in scripture. Certainly the power of this God cannot fail, it is as easy for him to do as to say.

2. Nothing appeareth whereon the globe of the earth and water should lean and rest: Job 26:7, 'He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.' Now, that this vast and ponderous body should lean upon the fluid air as upon a firm foundation is matter of wonder. The question is put in the book of Job, chap. 38:6, 'Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who hath laid the corner-stone thereof?' Yet firm it is, though it hang as a ball in the air. The globe of the earth is encompassed with the regions of the air and the celestial spheres, and hath no visible support to sustain so heavy a body hanging in the midst of so vast an expansion; yet God hath settled and established it so firm as if it rested on the most solid basis and foundation; fitted so strange a place for it that, being a heavy body, one should think it would fall every moment; yet which, whensoever we would imagine it, it must, contrary to the nature of such a body, fall upwards, and so can have no possible ruin but by falling into heaven. Now since his word beareth up such a weight, all the church's weight, and our own burden leaneth on the promise of God; he can, by the power of his word, do the greatest things without visible means: Luke 7:7, 'But say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.' Therefore his people may trust his providence; he is able to support them in any distresses, when no way of help and relief appeareth.

3. The firmness and stability offereth itself to our thoughts. The earth abideth in the same seat and condition wherein God left it, as long as the present course and order of nature is to continue: Ps. 104:5, 'He hath laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be moved for ever.' God's truth is as immovable as the earth: Ps. 117:2, 'The truth of the Lord endureth for ever.' Surely, if the foundation of the earth abideth sure, the foundation of our salvation laid by Jesus Christ is much more sure: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one tittle of the word and law of God, till all be fulfilled,' Mat. 5:18. If the law given by Moses be so sure, much more the promises of salvation by Christ: 2 Cor. 1:20, 'For all the promises of God in him are yea and amen.'

4. The stability in the midst of changes: Eccles. 1:4, 'One generation passeth away and another cometh, but the earth abideth for ever.' When man passeth away, the earth stayeth behind him, as a habitation for other comers, and abideth where it was, when the inhabitants go to and fro, and can enjoy it no more. All things in the world are subject to many revolutions, but God's truth is one and the same. The vicissitudes in the world do not derogate from his fidelity in the promises; he changeth all things, and is not changed. Though there be a new face of things in the world, yet we have a sure rule to walk by, and sure promises to build upon. And therefore, in all conditions, we should be the same to God, and there is no doubt but he will be the same to us.

5. In upholding the frame of the world, all those attributes are seen which are a firm stay to a believer's heart, such as wisdom, power, and goodness. Wisdom: Prov. 3:19, 'The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth, by understanding hath he established the heavens.' Look on it, it is the work of a wise agent. So for power: This great fabric is supported by his almighty power. His goodness is seen

in that he hath made the earth to be firm and dry land, that it may be a fit habitation for men; this is a standing miracle of goodness. Luther saith we are always in *medio rubri maris*—kept, as the Israelites were, in the midst of the Red Sea. The Psalmist telleth us, Ps. 24:2, 'He hath founded the earth upon the seas, and established the world upon the floods.' That part of the world whereon we dwell would suddenly be overwhelmed and covered with waters were it not for the goodness of God, for this the order of nature showeth in the beginning of the creation, Gen. 1:7, that next under the air were the waters covering the whole surface of the earth. But God made such cavities in the earth as should receive the waters into them, and such banks as should bound and bridle the vast ocean, that it might not break forth, Gen. 1:9; and so now by his providence the water is beneath the earth, and the earth standeth firm upon that fluid body as upon the most solid foundation; which, as it is a work of wise disposal and contrivance, so an effect of the goodness of God for the preservation of mankind. And though once, for the sins of the world, these waters were appointed to break out and overwhelm the earth, yet God hath firmly promised that they shall never be so again; wherein his truth is also verified, and applied to the covenant of grace: Isa. 54:9, 'For this is as the waters of Noah to me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wrath with thee, nor rebuke thee.' The covenant of grace is as sure as the covenant made after the deluge; so that we cannot look upon this earth but as an emblem of those attributes which confirm our faith in waiting upon God till his promises be fulfilled to us.

Use. Let us be then more firmly persuaded of God's faithfulness, that we may depend upon it both for his preserving the church and ourselves in the way of our duty, till we enjoy our final reward.

1. For the preservation of Christ's kingdom, God's faithfulness chiefly appeareth in the government of his church or spiritual kingdom, and this is a kingdom that cannot be moved when all things else are shaken: Heb. 12:28, 'Having received a kingdom that cannot be shaken.' Christ cannot be a head without members, a king without subjects. And we are told. Mat. 16:18, 'That the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.' Many disorders happen, but let us depend upon the faithful God. The world was well guided before we came into it, and other generations have had experience of God's faithfulness, though we complain that we see not our signs, nor any tokens for good.

2. For the preservation of our bodies to the heavenly kingdom. We have many discouragements within and without, but while we persevere in our duty, God will not fail us; his word is as sure as the earth: 2 Thes. 3:3, 'The Lord is faithful, who shall establish and keep you from evil.' God hath promised not only to give us our final reward, but to secure and defend his people by the way, that they be not overcome by the evils they meet with in their passage.

## SERMON XCVI

### **They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.— VER. 91.**

THE prophet is proving the immutability of God's promises from the conservation and continuance of the whole course of nature. He had spoken of it by parts, now conjunctly; apart, first of the heavens, ver. 89; of the earth, ver. 90; now both together, they continue, &c.

In the words we have two things:—

1. An observation concerning the continuance of the courses of nature; they, that is, the heaven and the earth. Heaven doth continue in its motion, and earth in its station, according to the ordinance of God, that is, by virtue of that order wherein he placed things at first: Ps. 148:6, 'He hath established them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass.' As he ordained at first by his powerful decree, so heaven and earth is still continued. God's laws are fixed for the government of all creatures, and in the manner and to the end for which God appointeth them they stand and continue.

2. The reason, for all are thy servants. The reason saith more than the assertion, and therefore doth over and above prove it; not only the heavens and the earth, but all things which are contained therein, from the angel to the worm, they all serve God; they attend upon him as their supreme Lord and master every moment.

Doct. That it is a great help to faith to consider God as the omnipotent creator, preserver, and absolute governor of the world, disposing of all things as he pleaseth.

This is the meditation which the Psalmist produceth and exposeth to our view in this verse.

His creation is implied in that, thine ordinances; when God first settled the course of nature by a wise and powerful decree.

His preservation, in those words, they continue this day. The course of nature is so settled that it doth not fail to go on according to God's decree; everything standeth or falleth according to God's command, and the order first settled by God still obtaineth; his decree is not yet out of date.

His being the absolute governor of the world, in these words, for all are thy servants, which implieth his sovereign dominion and empire over all the creatures as his servants, who are at the beck of his will. To evidence this to you more fully, consider there are in God two things—power and authority, might and right.

First, By power we mean a liberty and sufficiency in God to do whatever he will: 'With God all things are possible,' Mat. 19:26. Or take the negative, which bindeth it the stronger: Luke 1:37, 'With God nothing shall be impossible.'

Secondly, Authority or dominion, or a right over all things to dispose of them at his own pleasure. In this right there are three branches:—

1. A right of making or framing anything as he willeth, in any manner as it pleaseth him, as the potter hath power over his own clay to form what vessel he pleaseth of it. This right God exercised in his creation:



Rev. 4:11, 'Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.' This was his absolute freedom and sovereignty, to create all things according to his own pleasure.

2. A right of having or possessing all things so made and framed by him, for God is owner and possessor of whatever he made, since he made it out of nothing. Heaven is his, earth is his; so angels, man, beasts, gold, silver; all things he challengeth as his right: Ps. 115:16, 'The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's.' It is the Lord's to dispose of, not only the lower, but the highest heavens, which he hath provided for his own palace and court of residence. So 'the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness therefore,' Ps. 24:1. This whole lower world is his by right of creation and providential preservation, and so are all the sorts of creatures with which he hath replenished it: it was by him produced at first, and every moment continued and preserved. And so the angels are his; they are called his ministers or servants: Ps. 104:4, 'He maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flame of fire.' Though he is able to do all things by himself, or administer the whole world as he at first created by a word, by saying, and it was done; yet he pleaseth to make use of the ministry of angels, who some of them in subtle bodies of air, others of fire, come down to execute his commands upon earth. Men are his creatures and his possession; we are not lords of anything we have, neither life, nor limb, nor anything; our bodies and our souls are his, 1 Cor. 6:20. Christ had power to lay down his life and take it up again, but no mere man hath; he is accountable to a higher Lord, who hath an absolute, uncontrollable right to dispose of us according to his own pleasure: 'He killeth and maketh alive, bringeth low and lifteth up; for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,' 1 Sam. 2:6–8; meaning that God is the Lord of the dwellers upon earth, from the one pole to the other: Dan. 4:35, 'None can stay his hand, and say unto him, What doest thou?' None can call him to an account, for his

will is absolute. So for the beasts: Ps. 50:10, 'Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.' He hath a plenary dominion over all the cattle on earth, wild and tame, and the fowls of the air, and a certain knowledge where every one of them resideth, that he can readily command any or all of them whensoever he pleaseth; all is the Lord's by primitive right. So for gold and silver, and those precious things which are most valued by men: Hag. 2:8, 'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.' The absolute dominion of the riches or the splendour of the world belongeth to the Lord of hosts, to dispose of them as he pleaseth; and therefore is to be owned, acknowledged, and submitted unto by every man in his lot and portion. All that we want he hath at his command, and would not withhold it, if it were not for our good.

3. He hath a right of using and disposing, and governing all things thus in his possession, according to his own pleasure. Certainly the use and benefit and utility of anything belongeth to him whose it is. Now God, who is the disposer of all things, made them for himself; he governeth them ultimately and terminatively for himself, immediately for man: Prov. 16:4, 'God hath made all things for himself.' But he considereth man's good subordinately in all sublunary things; for 'the earth he hath given to the children of men,' Ps. 115:16, chiefly to his people, Rom. 8:28. But this government of God is twofold—either natural or moral.

[1.] I begin with the last. His moral government is by laws; so he governeth angels and men, who are rational and free agents, but in the relation of subjects to God, and therefore are under his command; which if they decline, they are rebels, yet cease not to be under God, as the devils and wicked men, who have disturbed the order of the creation, and withdrawn themselves from God's government, yet they cease not to be under his power. Of the devils,

we read they sinned, 2 Peter 2:4, and therefore 'were thrown down into chains of darkness;' meaning thereby, their unappeasable horrors, and the 'restraints of God's invisible providence'. Of men, that they withdrew their allegiance, and would not be subject to his laws: Ps. 12:4, 'Our tongues are our own: who is lord over us?' Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God.' But yet they are under the restraints of his providence, and he governeth all their actions to his glory: Ps. 76:10, 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee;' and serveth himself and the designs of his providence of their sins.

[2.] His natural government is that order into which by his positive decree God hath necessitated and disposed all creatures for the benefit of the world. Rational creatures he ruleth by moral means, as subjects, requiring duty from them, under the sanction of penalties and rewards, where the law is the rule of our duty, the sanction of his process; but other creatures he ruleth by natural motions and inclinations or tendency, according to the decree and order which he hath settled in their creation. Surely such a kind of empire he hath over all his creatures, for if he had made creatures which he cannot rule, he could not carry on his providence, for there would be something beneath him which might resist his will, and that will not suit with the perfection of God. Now this natural government is twofold—ordinary or extraordinary.

(1.) Ordinary is that which is according to the course of second causes, or that order of nature which God hath established in the world, which is nothing else but his preserving the creatures, and working by them according to their natural motions. So it is said in the text, 'They continue this day according to thine ordinance;' and is confirmed by the apostle, Heb. 1:3, 'He upholdeth all things by the word of his power;' that is, in that course wherein he hath set them.

The being and motion of every creature is ordered by the will of God; they move as he hath set them, and can move no further nor longer than he supplieth them with power.

(2.) Extraordinary is when God doth things above or beside nature; as when he made the sun stand still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley Ajalon, Josh. 10:12, 13; or made the sun to go back ten degrees in Ahaz's dial, Isa. 38:8; his interdicting the Red Sea that it should not flow, Exod. 14:22; causing iron, which is a heavy body, that it should swim upon the top of the water at the prayer of Elisha, 2 Kings 6:5; the fiery furnace not to burn, Dan. 3:22; shutting the mouths of hungry lions, Dan. 6:22; making ravens, which are by nature birds of prey, to be caterers for Elijah, 1 Kings 17:6; the cleaving of the earth and swallowing up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Num. 16:32, 33. Often in the New Testament we find the creatures acting contrary to their common nature, as the star that directed the wise men to Christ, Mat. 2:2; the opening of the heavens at Christ's baptism, Mat. 3:16; the eclipse of the sun at his death, Mat. 27:45; the fishes that came to net, Luke 5:5; and furnishing money, Mat. 17:26; the sea to be as firm ground to Peter, Mat. 14:24–29; Christ stilling the tempest of a sudden, Mat. 8:26; the earthquake at Christ's death, Mat. 27:51; the tree suddenly withered, Mat. 21:14. When the will of God is so that the creatures shall depart from their own private nature for a common good, we see how readily they obey him.

Now I shall prove to yon that no creature can decline or avoid this dominion. The text saith, 'They are all his servants;' that is, all at the beck and will of God.

1. The celestial bodies are his servants: Isa. 48:13, 'Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together;'

where they are compared to servants that stand attending on great persons, ready at a word or beck to obey their Lord and master, and go instantly about whatever he doth enjoin them.

2. The angels, the inhabitants of heaven, are said to be his ministers and hosts; and therefore he is called 'the Lord of hosts;' and it is said, 'They fulfil his pleasure, hearkening to the voice of his word,' Ps. 103:21.

3. The winds and seas, and storms: Ps. 135:6, 'Whatsoever the Lord pleased that did he in heaven, and in earth, and in the seas, and all deep places;' again, Ps. 148:8, 'Fire and hail, snow and vapour, stormy wind fulfilling his word.' So Job 37:12, 'The clouds are turned about by his counsels.' The changes in the air by storms and tempests are not by chance, but are all directed by God for some intent of his; and in what work he doth employ them they fail not to execute his will, and by these things many times God hath executed great matters in the world: Judges 5:20, 'The stars in their course fought against Sisera.' By their influence, Josephus saith, caused a great storm of hail and rain, that they could not hold up their targets.

4. Sickness and disease: Mat. 8:9, 'Speak but the word, and my servant shall be healed.' Christ wondered at his faith. So that all things contained in heaven and earth are at God's beck, and do whatsoever he hath ordained.

Use 1. To teach us to increase our faith by this meditation. There are two things by which we glorify God—by subjection and dependence; or, the two bonds by which we adhere to him are faith and obedience: faith, by which we trust ourselves in his hands; obedience, by which we submit to his will; to his commanding will by holiness, to his disposing will by patience. Now the one increaseth the other. Faith doth mightily befriend obedience; if we can depend

upon God, we will subject ourselves, and be faithful to him. The first cause of man's warping was that he would be at his own finding. God taunted him with it: Gen. 3:22, 'And the Lord said. Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil.' While man contented his mind in the wisdom, goodness, and all-sufficiency of God, he kept innocent; but when he grew distrustful of God, and desired, as the prodigal, to have the stock and portion in his own hands, he presently fell from God, and would preserve himself by his own shifts and skill. The reason why we are not faithful to God is want of faith and trust in his fatherly care, and will be at our own finding Heb. 3:12. Trust him, and you will adhere to him; distrust him, and you will depart from him. Man would have his safety and comfort in his own hand rather than God's; and this is a deadly blow to our obedience.

2. There is one consideration feedeth and encourageth both our dependence upon God and our subjection to him, and that is a sound and thorough persuasion of God's all-sufficiency: Gen 17:1, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou perfect.' We will trust God in the way of our duty, and not fly to our own carnal shifts. Now that which doth assure us of God's power and all-sufficiency to effect his promises and do us good is that which is here represented.

[1.] His power is implied, which made the world out of nothing. Other artificers must have matter to work upon, or else their art will fail. The mason must have timber and stones prepared to his hand, or he cannot build a house. The goldsmith must have gold and silver, or he cannot make so much as a cup or a ring. But God made the world out of things that did not appear, Heb. 11:4, yet it standeth fast. Now this power is engaged to us in the promises.

[2.] Here is a power which placeth and maintaineth all things in their order, both in heaven and earth, and causeth every part of nature to do its office; and therefore, why should not we live in a total dependence upon God for life and being every moment? What God hath once settled, it doth and shall continue in the order that he hath appointed; the same power that created them upholdeth them; the same wisdom directeth and ordereth them still. Therefore, when he hath settled grace in the established order of a covenant with his people, the word of God is a foundation that cannot fail; for God needeth no other means to effect anything hut his own word and will. The word of God is as powerful in the work of grace as in the works of nature, to renew, convince, subdue, and comfort the heart: Heb. 4:12, 'For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart;' 2 Cor. 10:4, 5, 'For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and everything that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.' Depend upon that word, Ps. 130:5, 'I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.' It is as unchangeable as powerful: Isa. 45:23, 'The word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return;' Ps. 89:34, 'I will not alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.'

[3.] Here is a power to which they are subject, 'For they are his servants;' and be they never so averse and opposite to God, they cannot hinder his work, for he performeth what he will, and who can let? Certainly what God hath engaged himself to do he will not fail to bring it to pass, to give grace at present and glory hereafter, Ps. 84:11. Look neither upon the weakness of the means, nor the greatness of the work, but the truth and power of him that promised.

3. Here is something offered to each apart, both to feed trust and dependence, and to engage to subjection and obedience.

First, For trust and dependence.

[1.] We see here that God is a great God, who taketh the care and charge upon him of the sustentation and government of all things to their proper ends and uses. How soon would the world fall into confusion and nothing without his power and care! Now this should recommend him to our esteem and love. Oh, what a blessed thing is it to have an interest in this powerful and almighty God! All his strength and power is engaged for the meanest and weakest of his children: 1 Peter 1:5, 'We are kept by the power of God to salvation;' and therefore we are bidden to be 'strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.' Surely they are blessed that have such a mighty God on their side, and engaged with them against their enemies: 1 John 4:4, 'Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.' He can enable them to do their work, satisfy their desires, maintain them in the midst of opposition: John 10:29, 'My father, which gave them me, is greater than all.' Such is the efficacy of his providence, that he can subject all things to himself, make them servants, to do what he would have them. Oh, how safe is a Christian in the love and covenant and arms of an almighty God, whom he hath made his refuge! Our trials are many, and grace received is small in the best; but our God is great; he that made all things, and sustaineth all things, and governeth all things, and possesseth all things, is our God; surely 'his grace is sufficient for us,' 2 Cor. 12:9, and his everlasting arms can bear us up: Deut. 33:27, 'The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.' He can recover us from our falls, and lift us over all our difficulties. If we could but rest upon his word and lean upon his power, why should we be



discouraged? Oh, let us rejoice, then, not only in the goodness but greatness of that God whom we have chosen for our portion!

[2.] We see here that God is an unchangeable God in goodness: 'They continue this day according to thine ordinance.' The stability of his works showeth how stable the workman is. Heaven and earth continue by virtue of his word, that man may have the use and benefit of it from generation to generation, that the continual vicissitudes of day and night may be continued, that man may have light to his labour, and darkness drawn about him as a covering for his rest, and also that there might be a constant succession of summer and winter, to prepare and ripen the fruits of the earth. Now, if God forsake not the world, will he forsake his people? For the benefit of mankind he preserveth the courses of nature, and keepeth all things in their proper place, for their proper end and use; and will he not keep one way with his children? Shall there be a failure in the covenant, when there is not a failure in common providence? as if he would satisfy the expectation of heathens, that look for a constant succession of day and night and summer and winter, and would not satisfy the expectation of his children, when they look for a blessed morning after a dark night of trouble and conflict, and the light of his countenance after the storms of temptation.

Secondly, For subjection, which I made to be double.

[1.] Submission to his disposing will. God's appointment giveth laws to all; there is not the least thing done among us without his prescience, providence, and wise disposal, to which all things in the world are subjected. The Lord's will and pleasure is the only rule of his extending his omnipotency, and is the sovereign and absolute cause of all his working, for all is done in heaven or in earth according to his ordinance, and no creature can resist his will;

therefore let us submit to this will of God. If God take anything from us, let us bless the name of the Lord; he doth but make use of his own: 'It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good,' 1 Sam. 3:18; it is none of ours, but God's, and let him do with his own as it pleaseth him. God is the disposer of man as well as other creatures, and must choose their condition, and determine of all events wherein they are concerned. We usually dislike God's disposal of us, though it be so wise and gracious. But consider his sovereignty; you cannot deliver yourselves from the will of God, and get the reins into your own hands. And alas! we are unfit to be disposers either of the world or ourselves, as an idiot is to be the pilot of a ship: therefore let God govern all according to his own pleasure. Say, 'Lord, not my will, but thine be done.' We are safer by far in God's hands than our own.

[2.] Obedience to his commanding will. All creatures do serve God as his word hath ordained; so should we do. We have law and ordinances too. Shall man only be eccentric and exorbitant and transgress his bounds? Winds and sea serve him, only man, made after his image, disobeyeth him: they serve God for our benefit; the heavens continue their motion to convey light, heat, and influence to us, and the air to give us breath and motion, and the earth to be a sure fixed dwelling-place. When all things are created and continued for our use, shall not we serve our bountiful creator? We are sensible of the disturbance of the course of nature when these confederances are dissolved, when the floods increase, or rains fall in abundance. Oh, bemoan rather thy own irregular actions, which are a greater deformation of the beauty of the universe!

In short, no creatures are *sui juris*; they are subject to God, by whose word and commandment they must rule their actions. Surely none of us are too great or too good to submit to God. Angels enjoy immunities, yet are not exempted from service. The creatures have

acted contrary to their common nature for God's honour; let us obey God, though contrary to our own wills and inclinations.

## SERMON XCVII

**Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.—VER. 92.**

IN the verses before the text, David meditateth upon the constancy of the course of nature, whereby is represented God's constant fidelity in performing all his promises to his people. Now he produceth his own experience, and showeth that all this had been matter of most pleasant meditation to support him under his afflictions; when all other comforts failed, he found sufficient consolation in the word of God, unless thy law had been, &c.

In which words observe—

1. David's condition; he was afflicted.
2. His bitter sense of that condition; he was ready to perish in his affliction.
3. His remedy; the word of God.
4. The way of application; it was his delights.

1. For his condition. Though he was a man after God's own heart, yet he had his troubles: Ps. 132:1, 'Remember David, Lord, and all his afflictions.'

2. For his sense and apprehension, 'I should then have perished.' Then; that is, long since. If you suppose him now under trouble, probably he should have sunk under the weight of it; or if out of trouble, he remembereth from experience what did comfort him when he was ready to perish. But how perished? It may be understood—

[1.] Either as given over to the will of his enemies, if he had not confided in God; for all human help and comfort was cut off, and then did divine help appear.

[2.] Died for sorrow; for 'worldly sorrow worketh death,' 2 Cor. 7:10. We are apt to despond and despair in great and sore troubles. Affliction worketh heaviness, 1 Peter 1:6, and heaviness drieth the bones and wasteth our strength. What kept him?

3. His remedy was the word of God; for he saith, 'Unless thy law had been my delights.' Some take the word law strictly, for the precepts of the law, which keepeth us from sin, which doth involve us in danger. But rather it is taken for the whole word of God, and chiefly for the promises of support and deliverance. I had despaired if I had not consulted with thy word. He doth not here speak of direction, but of support; elsewhere he found nothing but sorrow, but in the word of God joy and comfort.

4. The way of application, my delights. The word is plural, and increaseth the sense, in what way soever it may be interpreted. Now it may be interpreted passively or actively.

[1.] Passively, that the word of God refreshed him, and afforded him matter of delight, and so renewed his strength. David had many sorrows, but here he found delights, as many comforts as troubles. The word of God yieldeth comfort for every state of life; if there be

many sorrows, there are many delights; but with advantage, heavenly comforts for earthly afflictions, eternal comforts for temporal sorrows.

[2.] Actively. He delighted in the word of God, yea, counted it his delights. It increaseth the sense.

(1.) It was his chief delight. Other things might be thankfully accepted and acknowledged, but this was the solace and delight of his soul.

(2.) His continual delight and comfort, to which he retreated upon all occasions.

(3.) His whole, or only delight; when deprived of all other things, this was instead of all delights to him: all which show his high esteem of the word.

Doct. That the afflicted man's true consolation is in the word of God.

I will pursue the point in the method that I have laid forth in the parts of the text.

First, A man after God's own heart, such as David was, may be afflicted. Why?

1. Because God hath chosen another way of expressing his love to his people than by outward things; for he will govern the spiritual part of the world by faith, and not by sense: therefore 'None shall know love and hatred by things that are before him,' Eccles. 9:1; that is, by mere outward events, or things obvious to outward sense; the significations of his love are more hidden. Prov. 3:31, 32, Solomon supposeth that the oppressor may be in a flourishing condition, yet all this while the Lord hates him; his secret is with the righteous. We

know his fatherly love to us, not by things without us, but things within us, Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:2, 4, 'Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us;' Gal. 4:6, 'He hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.' Outward things would soon be overvalued, and we should take them as our whole felicity and portion, if, besides their suitableness to our present needs and appetites, they should come to us as special evidences of God's love.

2. Afflictions are necessary to the best. Certain it is God will conduct his people to glory, not only by his internal, but external providence. Now to humble us, to wean us from the world, there is need of afflictions: 1 Peter 1:6, 'Ye are in heaviness for a season, if need be.' We are wanton, vain, neglectful of God, unmindful of heavenly things; if God did not put us under the discipline of the cross, our minds and hearts would be more alienated from God and heavenly things: Ps. 119:67, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray.' Now, since the best need it, God will not be wanting in any part or point of necessary government to them.

3. That they may know the worth and benefit of God's word, and the comfort of it may be seen and felt by experience, how able it is to support us, and to uphold a sinking heart under any trouble whatsoever, Rom. 15:4. In full prosperity, when we seem to live upon the creature, we know not the benefit of God's promise, nor how to live by faith; as the use of bladders in swimming is not known while we are upon firm land. The word of God provideth comforts for the obedient, not only at the end of the journey, but for their support at present, while they are in the way. These comforts would be useless if never put upon the trial; therefore none of God's children must look to be exempted: 1 Peter 5:9, 'All these afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.' Our condition is no harder than the rest of the saints of God that have passed through the world.

Secondly, David was ready to sink under his burden; and so are other the people of God ready to perish, when they look to the bare afflictions. This may come:—

1. From the grievousness of the affliction, which staggereth and amazeth them: Ps. 60:3, 'Thou hast showed thy people hard things; thou hast made us to drink of the wine of astonishment.' Their thoughts are confounded, as a man that has taken a poisonous potion. They know not to what hand to turn, are wholly dispirited, and put out of all comfort.

2. It comes from the weakness of the saints. There is some weakness and imbeeility in the best, more than they are aware of; as when David was ready to faint under the cross before troubles came. We are like unto Peter, we think we can walk upon the sea; but some boisterous wind or other assaults our confidence, and then we cry out, 'Help, Master, we perish,' Mat. 14:30. We reckon only upon the sea, but do not think of the wind, and so our weakness is made evident by proof. Whence cometh this weakness?

[1.] Partly because we look more to the creature than to God, and to our dangers than to the power that is to carry us through them: Isa. 51:12, 13, 'I, even I, am he that comforteth thee: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor?' We that have the immortal and almighty God to be our protector and saviour, why should we be afraid of a frail, mortal man?

[2.] If they look to God, yet God doth not seem to look to them. If a thin curtain be drawn between God and us, we are presently dismayed, as if he were wholly gone; and because of our hardships, question the love of God: Ps. 77:9, 'Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?' Isa. 49:14, 'Zion hath said, The Lord hath forsaken me, my God hath forgotten me;' though our condition be every way consistent with the fatherly love of God: Heb. 12:5, 'Have you forgotten the exhortation which speaketh to you as children?' We are children, though under discipline; and God is a father, though he frowneth as well as smileth.

[3.] Impatience of delay; if we question not his love, yet cannot tarry his leisure. Certainly it is very good to wait God's leisure; though he seemeth asleep, he will awake for our help. Faith makes us like people that dig the pit, and wait for the rain to come down and fill it; to lay the cloth, though we know not whence the provision will be sent. But the people of God have not always the strength of faith, and therefore faint, and are ready to perish: 'I said in my haste, I am cut off,' Ps. 31:22.

[4.] Religion itself tendereth the heart; a father's anger is no slight thing to a gracious soul. When we are afflicted, and God is angry, the trouble is the more grievous, and it is hard to steer right between the two rocks of slighting and fainting. Well, then, pity poor creatures under their burden, and help them, but censure them not.

Thirdly, His remedy, God's word; there is the paradise of delights, and the only requies to allay the bitter sense of all our troubles. Why?

1. As to the main blessings, there is represented to us the true fountain of all comfort, who is God, the Father of mercies, and the



God of all comfort, 2 Cor. 1:13; who distributeth comfort when and where and to whom he pleaseth.

2. There is discovered to us the meritorious and procuring cause, who is Jesus Christ: 'Who hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,' 2 Thes. 2:16.

3. The Spirit, who is the applier of all comfort, therefore called the Comforter; and he giveth us peace and joy in believing, Rom. 15:3.

4. The true instrument, means, or condition whereby we receive comfort, and that is faith, John 14:1.

5. The true matter of comfort, and that is pardon and life.

[1.] Pardon and reconciliation with God, Rom. 5:10. No solid cause of rejoicing till then, when reconciled to God; then true peace, and peace that passeth all understanding, which will guard both heart and mind, Phil. 4:7; then all miseries are unstinged. Solid peace of conscience is your best support and comfort under afflictions, the intrinsic evil of afflictions is then taken away: Lam. 3:39, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?' While sin remaineth unpardoned, the thorn still remaineth in the sore.

[2.] The promise of eternal life, Rom. 5:2. There is the crown set against the cross, heavenly comforts against earthly afflictions; the afflictions of God's children comparatively are light and short: 2 Cor. 4:17, 'This light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' Nothing should be grievous to them that know a world to come, where all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, and we shall enjoy fulness of joy and pleasure for evermore.

6. It showeth us who are the parties capable—the renewed or sanctified: Ps. 32:11, 'Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous, and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.' To all Christ's sincere, faithful, and obedient servants, these promises are matter of abundant joy.

As to particular comforts concerning afflictions, it is endless to instance in all, but take a few instances.

1. The word of God teaches us not only how to bear them, but how to improve them. As it teaches us how to bear them, it breedeth quietness and submission; but as it teaches us how to improve them, it breedeth peace and joy. To bear: Micah. 7:9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.' To improve them: Heb. 12:11, righteousness brings peace along with it. The fruit is better than the deliverance, as we get spiritual advantage by them, as they promote repentance, purge out sin, bring us home to God. They rid us of the matter of our trouble, and bring us to the centre of our rest.

2. The word teaches to depend upon God for the moderating of them, and deliverance from them, 1 Cor. 10:13. Before he giveth a passage out of our pressures, he vouchsafeth present support to us, and will not permit his servants to be tempted beyond what they are able to bear.

3. His people have most experience of God under the cross; they have a more peculiar allowance from God for sufferings than for ordinary services. Paul was strongest when weak, 2 Cor. 12:9, 10. The greater pressures, the more sensible the divine assistance. And when ordinary means fail, and they are pressed above their own strength,

the more visible the proof of God's help. When they are most apt to have jealousies of God's love, they have had the highest manifestations of it; never more liberty than in the house of bondage; most of God's smiles when all things seem to frown upon them. In short, have had more understanding, not only of God's word, but his love.

4. God's governing all things for the benefit of his people: Rom. 8:28, 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God;' sure, then, afflictions. Now they submitting, and being exercised under sharp dispensations, may find it verified to them; many things seem for our hurt intendedly, many thought so by ourselves, but God knoweth how to bring good out of them, Cant. 4:16.

Fourthly, David saith, 'My delights.' They that seek their solace and delight in the word shall find it there. It is an excellent frame of heart to be satisfied with the comforts which the word offereth; every one cannot be thus affected. To raise this delight:—

1. Faith is necessary; for the comforts of the word are received and improved by faith. Unless we expect the sure accomplishment of God's promises, how can we be supported by them? Ps. 27:13, 'I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living;' that is, without a full assent to the promises which God had made him of his restoration, for he had particular assurance of the kingdom, as we have of the kingdom of heaven. So for the consent, as well as assent, to take the happiness contained in the promises as our whole felicity: Ps. 119:111, 'Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; they are the rejoicing of my heart.' There is heritage and portion rich enough in God's promises, and this breedeth joy in all afflictions.

2. Meditation is necessary; for thereby the sweetness of the word is perceived and tasted, and the promises laid before us. It is the fruit of delight: Ps. 1:2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' And it is the cause of it: Ps. 104:34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord.' They who delight in a thing will often view it and consider it, and thereby their delight is increased. The most lively truths work not on us for want of serious consideration.

3. There must be mortification and self-denial, or prizing spiritual favours before temporal benefits. The cross will not be grievous to a mortified spirit, when they compare their gain with their loss, 2 Cor. 4:16. To others we speak in vain, whose hearts are set upon worldly advantages; but they who value all things in order to the chief good, and have weaned their hearts from the false happiness, they have their end if they be brought nearer to God, though by a bitter and sharp means.

Use 1. Reproof to four sorts.

1. To those that know no comfort but what ariseth from the enjoyments of sense. Alas! these comforts are dreggy and base, and leave a taint upon the soul, Jude 19. Again, they leave us destitute when we most need comfort, Job 27:8. When other comforts forsake us, and have spent their allowance, the comforts of the word abide with us. Again, these comforts increase our grief, though for a time they seem to mitigate and allay it. They are like strong waters, that warm the stomach for the present, but destroy the true temper and natural heat of it, and leave it the colder afterwards; they cheer us a little, but the end of that mirth is heaviness. Oh! how much better are the comforts of God's word, which giveth us matter of joy in the saddest condition; and do not only save us from desperation in

troubles, but make us rejoice in tribulation, and can bring pleasure to us in our bitterest afflictions! There are breasts of consolation for every distressed creature to suck at and be saved.

2. It reproves them that think philosophy as good, or a better institution than Christianity. Certainly we should own the wisdom of God, by what hand soever it is conveyed to us; as Elijah refused not his meat though brought by ravens. But when this is done by men of a profane wit, in a contempt of God, we must convince them of their dangerous error and mistake, and show how complete we are in Christ, that we be not spoiled by the rudiments of vain wisdom or philosophy, Col. 2:8. Surely God's comforts have greatest authority over the conscience to silence all our murmurings, Ps. 94:19. Man speaks to us by the evidence of reason, but in scripture God himself speaks to us, and impawneth his truth with us to do us good. They knew not the true cause of trouble, sin; nor the true remedy, Jesus Christ. And surely those great mysteries of Christ as procurer of comfort, the Spirit as the applier, heaven as the matter, the word as the warrant, faith as the means to receive, all these are a more accommodate means to settle the conscience than those little glimmerings of light which refined nature discovered. They speak of submitting out of necessity, little of reducing the heart to God; and their very doctrines for comfort were rather a libel against providence than a sure ground of peace and tranquillity of mind; and they taught men to eradicate the affections rather than to govern and quiet them; and therefore keep up your reverence to the scriptures. A Seneca may speak things more neatly, and to the gust of carnal fancy, but not with greater power and efficacy; this is reserved for the word.

3. It reproves them that undervalue the consolations laid down in the word, as if they were but slender, empty, and unsatisfactory, and would have some singular and extraordinary way of getting comfort:

Job 15:11, 'Are the consolations of God small with thee? is there any secret thing with thee?' God's ordinary way is the sure way, the other layeth us open to a snare; therefore they who undervalue the ordinary comforts of the word, obtained in a way of faith and repentance, and close walking with God (as Naaman undervalued the waters of Jordan), and would have signs and wonders to comfort them, they may long sit in darkness, because if God comfort them not in their way, they will not be comforted at all. Now, though God hath sometimes, in condescension to his people, granted them their desires—as to Thomas—yet it is with an upbraiding of their weakness and unbelief, John 20:28. We should acquiesce in the common allowance of God's people, lest we seem to reflect on the wisdom and goodness of God, and lay open ourselves to some false consolation and dream of comfort, while we affect new means without the compass of the word; especially when we find not our expectations there speedily answered, like hasty patients, readier to tamper with every new medicine they hear of, than submit to a regular course of physic. Gregory tells us of a lady of the emperor's court that never ceased importuning him to seek from God a revelation from heaven that she should be saved. He answers, *Rem difficilem et inutilem postulas*—it was a thing difficult and unprofitable; difficult for him to obtain, unprofitable for her to ask, having a surer way by the scriptures, 2 Peter 1:19, than oracles. The adhering of the soul to the promises is the unquestionable way to obtain a sound peace. Luther, as he confesseth, was often tempted to ask a sign of the pardon of his sins, or some special revelation. He tells also how strongly he withstood these temptations—*Pactum feci cum Domino meo ne mihi mittat visiones, vel somnia, vel etiam angelos: contentus enim sum hoc dono, quod habeo scripturam sanctam; quæ abunde docet et suppeditat omnia, quæ necessaria sunt tam ad hanc vitam, quam ad futuram,*—I indented with the Lord my God, that he would never

send me dreams and visions; I am well contented with the gift of the scriptures.

4. It shows how much they are to blame that are under a scripture institution and do so little honour it by their patience or comfort under troubles. Wherefore were the great mysteries of godliness made known to us, and the promises of the world to come, and all the directions concerning the subjection of the soul to God, and those blessed privileges we enjoy by Christ, if they all be not able to satisfy and stay your heart, and compose it to a quiet submission to God, When it is his pleasure to take away his comforts from you? Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Will not the whole word of God yield you a cordial or a cure? It is a disparagement to the provision Christ hath made for our comfort.

[1.] Surely this comes either from ignorance or forgetfulness; you do not meditate in the word, or study the grounds of comfort, and remember them: Heb. 12:5, 'Have you forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children?' Hagar had a well of comfort nigh at hand, yet ready to die for thirst.

[2.] You indulge a distemper, and the obstinacy and peevishness of grief: Jer. 31:15, 'A voice was heard in Rama, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, and refused to be comforted.' Certainly you do not expostulate with yourselves, and cite your passions before the tribunal of reason, Ps. 42:5; or else look altogether to the grievance, not to the comfort; aggravate the grievances, extenuate the comforts; you pitch too much upon temporal happiness, would have God maintain you at your own rate: Heb. 13:5, 6, 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' A man must be purged from inordinate

affection when he would trust in God. Do not pitch too doatingly upon temporal happiness.

Use 2. Let us get these comforts settled upon our hearts. Was this peculiar to David alone? No; every godly man, as Theodoret observeth, may say in his trouble, Unless thy word had been my delights, I had perished in mine affliction. So Daniel when forbidden to pray; so the three children in the furnace; all the martyrs; yea, all the afflicted servants of God. Therefore let us—

1. Prize the scripture, and be more diligent in hearing, reading, meditating on the blessed truths contained therein. The earth is the fruitful mother of all herbs and plants; yet it must be tilled, ploughed, harrowed, and dressed, else it bringeth forth little fruit. The scripture containeth all the grounds of comfort and happiness, but we have little benefit unless daily versed in reading, hearing, meditation. Surely if we prize it as we should we would do so: Ps. 119:97, 'Oh, how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day.' There is the only remedy of sin and misery, the offer of true blessedness, the sure rule to walk by.

2. If you would have these comforts, you must get such a spirit of application under afflictions: Job 5:27, 'Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.' All efficacy is conveyed by the touch; the nearer the touch, the greater the power and efficacy; bring it down to your hearts: Rom. 8:31, 'What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?'

3. The law of God must be your delight in prosperity, if you would have it your support in adversity: Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my paths.' That which is our antidote against our lusts is our best cordial against our passions: 2 Peter 1:4, 'Whereby are given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that



by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.' When afflictions come upon you, consider what is your greatest burden and what is your greatest comfort, for then you are best at leisure to consider both; your greatest burden, that you may avoid it, your greatest comfort, that you may apply yourselves to it.

## SERMON XCVIII

**I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.—VER. 93.**

IN these words observe two things:—

1. David's thankful resolution, I will never forget thy precepts.
2. The reason of it, for with them thou hast quickened me.

First, In his thankful resolution, take notice:—

1. Of the object, thy precepts.
2. The duty promised, and negatively expressed, I will never forget.

1. For the object, 'Thy precepts;' thereby may be meant the word in general; he had found benefit by it, and the word of God should ever be dear and precious to him, especially the gospel part of it. Surely that is the great means of quickening; that may be comprised in the term, thy precepts, if not principally intended; or else most especially some particular truth which God had blessed to the use and comfort of his soul: I shall never forget that truth, those precepts of thine.

2. The duty promised, 'I will never forget.' Forgetting or remembering is sometimes taken in scripture for a notional remembrance or notional forgetting, when we retain the notions of such a truth, or the notions of it vanish out of our minds. And sometimes it is taken practically, when we are suitably affected, as the thing or truth remembered deserves. Both may be intended; I remember, retain, feel the fruit of thy word. That which hath done us good, the very notions of it will stick in our minds. Or else it may be for the practical remembrance; so it signifies, I will prize, I will cleave fast to it as long as I live. To remember is to esteem, and to forget is to neglect; as Heb. 13:16, 'To do good, and to communicate, forget not;' that is, neglect not. I may remember to communicate, yet not perform; but forget not, that is, neglect not. In this sense we usually say, You forget me, that is, you neglect to do that which I desired of you. So David saith, 'I will never forget thy precepts.' The remembrance of his promises is effectual and perpetual. It is effectual; for I will remember it, prize it, and lay it up in my heart with thankfulness. And it is perpetual; 'I will never;' the Hebrew is, 'not to all eternity;' 'I will not forget thy precepts for ever,' as we render it fitly.

Secondly, The reason, 'For with them thou hast quickened me.' The reason is taken from his experience of the benefit of this word; and there we have the benefit received, quickening; the author, thou hast quickened; the means, with them. God by this means had quickened his soul.

1. The benefit, quickened. There is a double quickening, when from dead we are made living, or when from cold and sad and heavy we are made lively. One sort of quickening the word speaks of is when from dead we are made living, Eph. 2:1. Another when from cold, sad, heavy, we are made lively, and so not only have life, but enjoy it

more abundantly, according to Christ's gracious promise, John 10:10, that they may be living, lively, kept still in vigour. Now this second quickening may be taken either more largely for the vitality of grace, or strictly for actual comfort. Largely taken; so God quickens by increasing the life of grace, either internally by promising the life of grace, or morally and externally by promising the life of glory. More strictly; his quickening may be taken for comfort and support in his affliction; so it is likely to be taken here: he had said before, ver. 92, immediately before the text, 'Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in mine affliction;' and now, 'I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.' It was great comfort and support to him, and therefore he should prize the word as long as he lived. This is the benefit received, thou hast quickened me.

2. Here is the author, thou. God put him, by the inspiration of grace, upon the meditation of his word, and then he blessed that meditation; his assistance and grace doth all. We receive all degrees of life from the fountain of life. The word was the means, but thou hast quickened me.

3. The means, by them; that is, by his precepts; the word was spirit and life to him. By the Spirit God makes his word lively in operation, and conduceth very much to quickening, comforting, and supporting of the saints.

Doct. Those that have received comfort, life, and quickening by the word of God, find themselves obliged to remember it for ever.

I shall illustrate this proposition by these considerations:—

1. That God's children are sometimes under deadness.

2. That in such deadness the word of God is the only means to quicken them.

3. Though the word be quick and lively and powerful, yet it is God that must bless it, that must make it a support to the soul.

4. That whenever we have received these comforts, quickenings, and supports from him, they should ever be recorded and treasured up in the registers of a thankful memory, for the great uses of Christianity.

First, God's children are under deadness sometimes, which happeneth to them for many causes.

1. By reason of some sin committed, and not repented of, or not fully repented of. God smites them with deadness and hardness of heart, and the spiritual life for awhile is greatly obstructed and impaired, that it cannot discover itself, and they have not those lively influences of grace as formerly. Thus it was with David when he had strayed so greatly from God, and begs God not to cast him off: Ps. 51:11, 'Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.' As a wound in the body lets out the life, blood, and spirits, so these grievous sins are as a wound in the soul. Sin against the conscience of a renewed man defaceth the work of the Holy Spirit, so that for a while he seems to be shut out from God's favour, and his gracious abilities are lessened and impaired; he is like a wounded man, till he be cured and made whole again. The Spirit being grieved and resisted, withdraws, and the strength of the soul is wasted; and therefore be very tender, stand in awe not only of greater, but smaller sins.

2. By reason of some good omitted, especially neglect of the means whereby we may be kept alive, fresh and lively in God's service. Lazy fits of indisposition and omissions of duty do more frequently steal

in upon believers than positive outbreakings and commissions of sin, and they are more ready to please themselves in them, and lie still under them, and so by this means contract much deadness of heart. As a lute that is not played upon, but hangs by the wall, and not used, it soon grows out of keller for want of use; so if we do not diligently and constantly exercise ourselves in godliness, our hearts grow dead and vain. It is the complaint of the church, Isa. 64:7, 'There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.' If we do not stir up ourselves to keep on a constant commerce with God and respect to God, alas! deadness creeps upon the heart unawares; and we are commanded, ἀναζωπυρεῖν, 2 Tim. 1:6, 'To stir up the gift of God which is in us.' Surely a slothful servant will soon become an evil servant: Mat. 25:26, 'Thou evil and slothful servant.' Therefore our sinful sluggishness is one cause of our deadness; for he that doth not trade with his talents will necessarily become poor: and if we do not continue this holy attendance upon God, the heart suffers loss: 1 Thes. 5:19, 20, 'Despise not prophecy; quench not the Spirit.' The coupling of these two things together shows, that if we despise prophecy, we quench the Spirit; as fire goes out not only by pouring on water, but by not stirring and blowing it up. To expect help from God when we are sluggish is to tempt Christ, and put him still upon a miraculous way to heal and cure our distempers. Who will bring bread and meat to a sluggard's bed, who will not arise to labour for it, or will not rise at least to fetch it? Therefore, if we will not attend upon God in the means of grace, he will not bring us that help, comfort, and supply that otherwise we might have. God worketh, but so that we work also: Phil. 2:12, 13, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh,' &c. God's working is not a ground of laziness, but for more strict observance. Since all depends upon God, therefore 'take heed you do not offend God, and provoke him to suspend his grace. We must not lie upon a bed of ease, and cry, Christ must do all; for this is to abuse the power

of grace to laziness. It is notable that God bids his people do that which he promiseth to give them, Ps. 31:24; Ps. 27:14, 'Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart.' As if he had said, Strengthen thine heart, and he will strengthen thy heart. The courage of faith is both commanded and promised. Why? God by this would show how we should shake ourselves out of our laziness and idleness; that though God gives us grace and power, yet he will have us to work; as a father that lifts up his child's arm to a burden, and bids him lift it up. Usually we complain of deadness with a reflection upon God; he quickens the dead, and therefore I am dead. Ay! but what hast thou done to quicken thy self? for grace was never intended that we might be idle. You must complain of yourselves as the moral faulty cause; God is the efficient cause. You do not meditate, pray, draw life out of the precious promises. When the spouse sleeps and keeps her bed, then Christ withdraws, Cant. 5:6.

3. Another cause is unthankfulness for benefits received, especially spiritual benefits; for God loves to have his grace acknowledged. He stops his hand, and suspends the influences of his grace, when the creature doth not acknowledge his bounty: Col. 2:7, 'Be established and rooted in the faith, abounding therein with thanksgiving.' The way to grow in faith, and get by faith, is to be thankful for what we have received; that is an effectual means both to keep it and to get more. Therefore if we be always querulous, and do not give thanks for the goodness of God to us for what he hath already vouchsafed to us in Christ, no wonder that deadness and discouragement creep upon our hearts.

4. Pride in gifts; for we are told, James 4:6, 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.' The garland we put on our own heads soon withers, and those gifts which we are puffed up with are

presently blasted, and have deadness upon them; for he will teach us to ascribe all to himself.

5. Some great and heavy troubles. We read, ver. 107 of this psalm, 'I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word. Oh! when we are afflicted sore, there is a deadness upon the heart, the spiritual life clogged. With what alacrity did they go about good things before! But then there is a damp; worldly sorrow deadens the spirit, as godly sorrow quickens it, and is a means to keep us alive to God.

6. Another cause is carnal liberty, or intermeddling with worldly vanities. So much we may learn from that prayer, Ps. 119:37, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way.' Oh! when the children of God let loose their minds to vanity, and take immoderate liberty in the delights of the flesh, there is a deadness comes upon them, for therefore he goes to the cause: 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.' Immoderate liberty in earthly things, or in gratifying the flesh, brings on a deadness upon the heart. The Spirit withdraws when the soul is taken off from other comforts, and is more addicted to vain pleasures: Jude 19, 'Sensual, not having the Spirit.' As we are enlarged to the flesh, we are straitened to the spirit. As sensuality increaseth, so the life and vitality of grace decays.

Secondly, In such cases, the word of God is the only means to quicken us. Why the word? For two reasons:—

1. Because the word contains the most quickening considerations, and the affections are wrought upon by serious and ponderous thoughts; for there God interposeth in the way of the highest authority, straitly charging and commanding us, under pain of his displeasure: and there he reasons with us again in the most potent

and strong way of argumentation, from the excellency of his commands, their suitableness to us as we are reasonable creatures; from his great love to us in Christ, whom he hath given to die for us; from the danger if we refuse him, which is no less than everlasting torment; from the benefit and happiness in complying with his motions, which is no less than eternal and complete blessedness both for our bodies and souls; and all this is bound upon us by a strict day of impartial accounts. Oh, what a company of quickening considerations are there, to set us awork with life, vigor, and seriousness, when we are to answer for our neglects, or else to receive the reward of our diligence! Now what will quicken us if this will not? If the high and glorious authority of the supreme lawgiver awe us not, if the reasonableness of God's commands invite us not, if the wonderful love of God in Christ constrain us not, if the joys of heaven do not allure us, and the horrors of everlasting darkness do not preserve upon us a lively sense of our duty, what will work upon us if this do not, and gain us to a constant diligent care and serious preparation for our own happiness and salvation? Out of what rock was the heart of man hewn, that all this shall be brought to him in the most persuasive way, as it is in the word of God, and will not work upon him? Again, if the deadness should arise from our negligence in our duty, the word of God how powerfully doth it quicken us! But if the deadness should arise from sorrow and discomfort, is not the word as powerful to raise and quicken the soul to a delight in God as to inforce our duty? What puts a damp upon us? Is it fury of men? We have a living God to trust to, who will remain when they are gone, who will pardon our sins, help us in all our straits, who will lay upon us no more than we are able to bear, who will never leave us utterly destitute, but will sanctify all, and make all work together for the best, for our everlasting salvation, and finally bring us into his glorious presence, that we may live for ever with him. Here is comfort enough, whatever our heaviness be; such a



powerful God to stand by us in all our troubles, and make all work for good, that at length we may be brought home to God. If this word did but dwell richly in our souls, it would keep us fresh and lively, and we need not fear man or devil, Col. 3:16. Again, 1 John 2:14, 'The word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.' We need fear nothing, for whoever trouble us, they are something under God. Whatever is our misery, and whatever befalls us, it is something less than hell, which we have escaped by Christ, and will all be made up in heaven. The first sight of God and the first glimpse of everlasting glory will recompense all the sorrows of the present life, and as soon as we step into heaven, all shall be forgotten. In short, God's particular providence, fatherly love and care, the example of Christ, the promise of the comforting Spirit, the hopes of glory, should revive us in all our languishings. So that if deadness comes from backwardness and slowness in our duty, in the word there are most quickening considerations; or if from troubles, we have enough in God, Christ, the covenant, the promise of eternal life to support us. This is the first reason; the word of God is the only means to comfort us, because it contains proper quickening considerations, that may keep life and vigour in us, if either carnal distemper invade the heart, or worldly sorrow and fear, which is apt to perplex us.

2. The quickening Spirit delights to work by this means. The ordinary chariot, that carrieth the influences of grace, is the word of grace. The Spirit that speaks in the word speaks his own lively comforts to us. Alas! they are but cold comforts we can find elsewhere. The Spirit of God rides most triumphantly in his own chariot. The word and the Spirit are often associated, to show they go together. The word goes with the Spirit: Isa. 59:21, 'My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart,' &c. Isa. 30:20, when God promiseth, 'Their eyes shall see their teachers;' it is promised

also, 'They should hear a voice behind them, saying, This is the way;' God would afford the word and Spirit in times of their affliction. The Spirit works still in concomitancy with the word, that it may the better be known to be a revelation from God. If God will set up a word and revelation of his mind distinct from the light of nature, it is fit it should be owned; and that is done by a concomitancy of his grace, and powerful operations of his Spirit, that goes along with his word: John 17:17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.' We find the word to be truth, because it is associated and accompanied with the operations of the Spirit: 1 Peter 1:22, 'Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit.' The Spirit still goes along with the truth of the gospel, and with God's word. His word is the sword of the Spirit. God will not bless any other doctrine so much as the word to quicken, revive, and comfort the soul; and therefore here we should busy ourselves, for it contains the surest grounds of comfort, and the Spirit is associated with it, and goes along with it, to bless it to our souls.

Thirdly, Though the word be the means, yet the benefit comes from God, 'for with them thou hast quickened me.' Life comes from the fountain of life. The gospel is a sovereign plaster, but it is God's hand that must apply it and make it stick, make it to be peace, comfort, and quickening to our souls. It is said, 1 Tim. 6:13, 'That he that quickeneth all things is God.' The quickening of life natural or life spiritual is to be ascribed to God alone. Let me evidence this by three considerations:—

1. The life of grace is begun and carried on in a constant way of dependence upon God; he will not trust us with a stock of grace in our own hands, but our life is in Christ's hands: 1 John 5:12, 'He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son, hath not life.' He hath it in his own hands, and he gives and conveys it to us. And

Gal. 2:20, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' Christ made the purchase, and therefore it pleased the Father that the purchased treasure should be put into his hands, and not immediately into ours. We have so foully miscarried already, that God will trust his honour in our hands no more, as at first he did. We have nothing but what we have daily from Christ and in Christ: he must influence us, and without him we can do nothing: John 15:5, χωρὶς ἐμοῦ. Apart from him we can do nothing, therefore we cannot quicken ourselves; for God hath reserved this life of grace, and kept it in his own hands, that we may have our daily supplies from Christ.

2. The vitality or liveliness of grace is not dispensed by a certain law, but according to the sovereign will and good pleasure of God. God gives life to his people, but the activity of it is only from his good pleasure: Phil. 2:13, 'For it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of (or according to) his good pleasure.' He gives out comfort, and he gives degrees of quickening as he pleaseth, to some more, to some less, and not always in the same degree to the same persons; therefore we must look up unto God if we would have this life and quickening; it is very necessary to our well-being, but it is a favour, 'he worketh in us according to his good pleasure.'

3. The means cannot work without the principal agent. As the word could not convert us at first but by the power of God, or as his grace works by it, quickening a dead soul, purifying a defiled heart, humbling a proud mind; so when the conscience grows sleepy, you need quickening excitations to duty. The same grace which caused a spiritual life doth give us spiritual strength, and maintain that life, by inclining the mind and will, by stirring up the affections by longing desires after Christ and glory; so the soul is still kept alive in the same way as it was begotten by God at first: 1 Cor. 3:7, 'Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but it is God that giveth the increase.'

All is of God, who only hath the supreme power over men's hearts, to enlighten the mind, incline the will, and enlarge the affections. Though we use the means (and we sin if we do not), yet it is God that quickeneth us; he hath the supreme power over the heart of man.

Fourthly, These powerful experiences in this kind will be and should be recorded and remembered by us; for, saith David, 'I will never forget thy precepts.'

1. They will be remembered if we have met with any powerful experiences of the Lord's quickening and awakening the heart. (1.) We will remember what most concerns us. (2.) We will remember all those things which make notable impressions upon our souls.

[1.] Things that concern us will be remembered by us. Every one's memory is as his affections are. Let a child read the scripture, that chapter wherein mention is made of Joseph's parti-coloured coat, that will stick in his mind more than better things, because it suits with his childish fancy, and his desires that his parents should make such a garment for himself. And it is usually observed that youth is most taken with the histories of the Bible, because of their desire to know things past. And if once they come to manly age, they are more taken with the doctrines of the Bible, because when they grow men they begin to form their opinions of religion. And elder persons are taken with psalms, and holy devotional strains in scripture, because then, as they grow in age, it is time to address themselves to God. Persons in doubts and fears by reason of sin will be most affected with tenders of grace, as suiting best with their condition; persons in affliction, with the consolations appointed for the afflicted; persons in conflict with any sin, with those passages which afford most direct help against them. Still that which more especially concerns us should and will be most observed and remembered by us, for there it

speaks to our very hearts. Now, saith the soul, in such a point, in such extremity, the word of God did my heart good; I shall remember it as long as I live; when a seasonable word is spoken to their case; their judgment was not passed over by the Lord: I was dead, and it revived me; disconsolate, and it comforted me; ready to stray, and it reduced me; under such a temptation, and it relieved me. I should transcribe the whole scripture, especially the psalms, if I should tell you how often David takes notice what the word of God did to him in such and such a condition; for still things that nearly concern us, they will affect us, and be remembered by us.

[2.] Those things will be remembered that make any notable impression, that leave a lively sense upon the heart; they impress a notice of themselves, and will not be forgotten: Luke 24:32, 'Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?' If opening of the scriptures causeth any burning of heart, or any strange workings of soul, when the heat is gone and past yet the burning cannot be forgotten; they remembered Christ still, and can speak of the actings of the Spirit, not only when they are on, but when they are over and past Christ was vanished out of sight and gone, yet they cannot forget the warmness of heart they felt while he opened the scriptures to them: Cant. 5:4, 'He put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him;' and ver. 6, 'My soul failed when he spake.' Oh! if we be soundly humbled or soundly comforted, or be effectually moved and stirred to the remembrance of God, then heavenly things that occasion this will not be forgotten.

2. These things should be remembered to confirm our faith, to increase our love.

[1.] To confirm our faith. Faith is taken either for a general assent to the word, or for a dependence upon God for some blessing that we want or stand in need of.

(1.) If we take it for a general assent to the word, why, these notable quickenings and experiences of the convincing or comforting or converting power of the word, they are a secondary confirmation of the truth of the word to us. I tell you why I put in that word, a secondary confirmation; they are not a primary, for we must believe the word before we can feel its efficacy and find it to be effectual to us; and therefore the primary grounds of faith are the impressions of God upon the word, the secondary are the impressions of God upon the heart. Now I have felt the virtue and power of the truth upon my soul, and all the world shall not draw me from it. I must have a primary confirmation of the truth of the word before I can believe, and before it can work in me. The apostle saith, 1 Thes. 2:13, 'Ye received the word, not as the word of man, but as the word of God, which effectually worketh in you that believe.' First I receive it as the word of God by some marks, and notes, and characters, some impress of God upon his word; some-what God hath left of himself in the word, and that awes my heart to reverence it, there I receive it upon my heart; but when it works in me mightily, I have a secondary confirmation. When I have eyes to see the impress of God upon the word, then I feel the power of it; and when I have felt the power of it, it is confirmed in my soul, 1 Cor. 1:6. When we feel the blessed effects, the quickenings and comforts of the word, it is a mighty help to faith. So 1 John 5:10, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.' What is that witness in himself? Why, the witness of the Spirit, applying the blood of Christ to the conscience, sanctifying and quickening the heart; then he hath the witness in himself, and is more confirmed that Jesus is the Christ, and the word of God is true, and cannot easily be divorced from it; he hath felt the

effects of it in his own heart: Col. 1:5, 6, 'For the hope that is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, and knew the grace of God in truth.' We guess at things before, and have but a wavering faith, such as may let in some work upon the soul; then we know it in truth, then it is more fully made good to us, by the convincing, comforting, and sanctifying Spirit, that evidenceth it to our souls, and this can be no other but the truth of God; this makes our faith more strong and rooted, and we may be confirmed in the hope and belief of the gospel, and may not easily be removed therefrom.

(2.) Take faith in the other notion, for a dependence upon God, for something that we stand in need of. Every manifestation of his grace should be kept as an experience by us for afterwards, when that frame may be away, when God may hide his face, and all dead in the soul; as David in his infirmity 'remembered the years of the right hand of the most high,' and former experiences of God, Ps. 77:10. As he, in an outward case, for outward deliverances, remembered the former help and succours he had from God, so we may remember former grace and former quickening. There are many ups and downs in the spiritual life, for even the new creature is changeable, both in point of duty and in point of comfort. Now it is a mighty confirmation when we remember what God hath done:—

(1st.) In point of duty. Sometimes you shall find you are dull and heartless under the ordinances of God; in reading and hearing you find little life, lazy, and almost indifferent, whether you call upon God in secret, or hear the word, or join in the communion of saints; no relish in any duty, do it almost for custom's sake, or at best but to please your consciences: you must do it, and you drive on heavily, not for any great need you feel of them, or good you find by them, or hope you expect from them. Now it is of great use to remember how I

have waited upon God formerly, and he hath quickened, refreshed, and comforted me; and therefore it is good to try again, to keep up our dependence upon his ordinances, when this dulness seizeth upon the soul, and this listlessness; when conscience is sleepy, and the heart hangs off from God, remember I have been quickened.

(2d.) If it be in point of comfort, fears and sorrows, why! is there no balm in Gilead? no physician there? Hath not God relieved in like straits before, and given in fresh consolations, when you have bemoaned yourselves and opened your case before him? There are none acquainted with the spiritual life but have many experiences both of deadness and comfort. Now one is a great help against the other, that our hands may not wax faint and feeble. God, that hath comforted, may comfort again, and why should I neglect his appointed means? No; I will continue there, and lie at the pool where the waters have been stirred.

[2.] They are of use, again, to stir up our affections to God and his word.

(1.) To increase our love to God. Oh! we should keep the impression of his kind manifestation still upon the heart, that the mercy may be continually acknowledged. Surely it is a favour that God will manifest himself to us, and own us in our attendance upon his word and other duties. The Lord Jesus promiseth it as a great blessing: John 14:21, 'He that loveth me, and keepeth my commandment, shall be loved of my father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.' Now, then, when any such sensible favour is vouchsafed to us, we should not forget it, but lay it up as a continual ground of thankfulness and love to God: Cant. 1:4, 'We will be glad, and rejoice in thee; we will remember thy love more than wine.' When God hath treated us most magnificently in his ordinances, either at his table or word, and hath



refreshed and revived our souls, oh! we will remember this, and lay it up for the honour of God, and knit our hearts in a greater love to God.

(2.) It is of great use to increase our love to the word, for the excellency and worth of the word is found experimentally by believers, so that their love and estimation of it is more fixed and settled upon their hearts, so that they purpose to make use of it always for their comfort and direction; it is a great encouragement when formerly they have found comfort and life thereby. The apostle, to settle the Galatians that began to waver, that were apt to be overcome by their Judaizing brethren, to settle them in love to the gospel, he puts them to the question, Gal. 3:2, 'This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?' The Spirit of regeneration, with all his comforts and graces, is not conveyed to you by the doctrine of the law, but the doctrine of the gospel. As if he had said, Stick to that doctrine where you have been quickened, comforted, revived, and your hearts settled, for God hath owned that doctrine. He appeals to their own conscience, and to their own known experience, that they should not quit the doctrine of faith, but prize and keep close to it; for surely that which hath been a means of begetting grace in our souls should be highly prized by us. If God hath wrought grace, and any comfort and peace, stick there, and own God there, and be not easily moved from thence. Another apostle reasons, James 1:18, 19, 'God hath begotten us by the word of truth, wherefore be swift to hear;' that is, Oh! do not neglect hearing; take heed of forsaking or neglecting the word, for then you go against your own known experience. You know here you had your life, quickening, comfort, strength, and will you be turned off from this?—for many times a seducer may turn off a believer from the word which hath given him his first knowledge of Christ.

There are three causes which carry saints to the word and other ordinances—viz., necessity, natural appetite and inward inclination, and experience. Necessity; they cannot live without the word. Natural appetite and inward inclination; they have hearts suited to this work; the Spirit, which wrought in the heart, hath put a nature in them suitable to the work. And experience; they have found benefit by it. These are the three grand causes of respect to the word, and they are all implied or expressed in that, 1 Peter 2:2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word,' there is natural appetite for the word; we have them come as new-born babes. And there is necessity; you cannot live, nor keep, nor increase what you have, unless you keep to the word. And there is experience; if so be you have tasted, you have had powerful impressions and quickenings by this word. We should engage our hearts upon experience, the comfort, life and light that we have had by the word of God.

Our own spiritual estate will sooner be discerned by these experiences, the comfort and quickening received from the word, in the way of duty; for 'experience worketh hope,' Rom. 5:4. If your experiences be observed and regarded, this works a hopeful dependence upon God for everlasting glory; your evidences will be more ready, and sooner come to hand. The motions of our souls are various, and, through corruption, very confused and dark; and this is that which makes it so difficult upon actual search to discern how it stands between us and God; it is for want of observation. But now, if there be constant observation of what passeth between us and God, how he hath quickened, comforted, and owned us in our attendance upon him, and what he hath done to bring on our souls in the way of life, these will make up an evidence, and will abundantly conduce to the quickening and comforting of our hearts.

Use 1. For information. It shows us—

1. The reason why so many neglect and contemn God's word; because they never got benefit by it, they find no life in it, therefore no delight in it. Those that are quickened acknowledge the mercy and improve it; they esteem the word, and have a greater conscience of their duty. It is not enough to find truth in truth, not to be able to contradict it, but you must find life; then we will prize and esteem it, when it hath been lively in its operations to our souls.

2. It shows the reason why so many forget the word, because they are not quickened. You would remember it by a good token if there were a powerful impression left upon your souls; and the reason is, because you do not meditate upon it, that you may receive this lively influence of the Spirit: for a sermon would not be forgotten, if it had left any lively impression upon your souls.

3. If we want quickening we must go to God for it; and God works powerfully by the influence of his grace, and so he quickens us by his Spirit; and he works morally by the word, both by the promises and threatenings thereof: and so, if you would be quickened, you must use the means, attend upon reading and preaching, and meditating upon the word. As he works powerfully with respect to himself, so morally by reasonings.

Use 2. By way of reflection upon ourselves.

Have we had any of these experiences? David found life in God's word, therefore resolves never to forego it or forget it. Therefore, what experience have you had of the word of God?, Surely at least at first conversion there was the work of faith and repentance, at first you will have this experience. How were you brought home to God? What! have you had no quickening from the word of God?

Case. But here is a case of conscience: Doth every one know their conversion, or way of their own conversion? Christians are usually sensible of this first work. There is so much bitter sorrow, and afterwards so much rejoicing of hope which doth accompany, that surely this should not be strange. But though you have not been so wary to mark God's dealings with you, and the particular quickenings of your souls, yet at least when the Lord raised you out of your security, and brought you home to himself, you should have remembered it: 1 Thes. 1:9, 'They themselves show of us what manner of entering we had unto you.' The entrance usually is known, though afterward the work be carried on with less observation. Growth is not so sensible as the first change. God's first work is most powerful, meets with greater opposition, and so leaves a greater feeling upon us; and therefore it were strange if we were brought home to Christ, and no way privy and conscious to the way of it, as if all were done in our sleep. I say, to think so were to give security a soft pillow to rest on. And therefore, what quickenings had you then? Can you say, Well, I shall never forget this happy season and occasion, when God first awakened me to look after himself? Many of God's children cannot trace the particular footsteps of their conversion, and mark out all the stages of Christ's journey and approach to their souls, for all are not alike thus troubled. But yet, that men may not please themselves with the supposition of imaginary grace wrought in them without their privy and knowledge, let me speak to this grand case, this manner of entrance of Christ into our souls, how we are quickened from the dead and made living.

1. None are converted but are first convinced of their danger and evil estate; God's first work is upon their understandings: Jer. 31:19, 'After I was instructed I smote upon the thigh,' &c. There is some light breaks in upon the soul which sets them seriously a considering,

What am I? whither am I going? what will become of me? And Rom. 7:9, 'When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' The commandment, the law of God, breaks in with all its terrors and curse upon the soul by strong conviction, and the man is given for gone, lost and dead. You know the way to the bowels is by the mouth and the stomach, and so by other passages. There is no way to the affections but by the ear, then to the understanding, and then passeth to the apprehension, the judgment, and conscience, and heart; from the apprehension to the grammatical knowledge, then they come to the judgment, then to the conscience; and when conscience is set awork, usually there is some feeling.

2. Conviction, where it is strong and serious, where it is not *levis et mollis*, it cannot be without some compunction. The eye affects the heart. Can a man be sensible of a lost condition, and of the necessity of a change, without being troubled at it, without making a serious weighty business of it? Are heaven and hell such slight matters that a man can think of the one or the other without any commotion of heart?—(pray do but bethink yourselves; I shall solve the particular cases, but I must establish the general one)—especially if he be convinced of his being obnoxious to one, and doth not know whether he shall have the other, yea or nay? Certainly whoever is instructed or convinced will smite upon his thigh and bemoan himself as Ephraim, Jer. 31. There is none ever came to Christ, the spiritual physician, but they were in some degree heart-sick; none ever came for ease but they felt a load upon their back. If there be conviction and compunction, this will be felt.

3. But then the degrees are various, some are more, some less, some earnestly solicitous, or deeply in horror. Some are brought to God by the horrors of despair, and are convinced with a higher and more smart degree of sorrow, before ever they come to settle; but all are

serious and anxious. There is certainly a difference; some men's conversion is more gentle, others more violent. To some, Christ comes like an armed man, and doth powerfully vanquish Satan in their hearts; to others, there is a great deal of difficulty and conflict, which must needs impress a notice of itself. Some are sweetly drawn, others are snatched out of the fire. To some the Spirit comes with a mighty rushing wind, to others by a gentle blast, sweetly and softly blows open the door. God opened the heart of Lydia; we read of no more, Acts 16:14. But when he comes to the jailer, he had more horror of conscience, and more sorrow and desperation, and was ready to kill himself, saying, 'What shall I do to be saved?' ver. 31. The Lord bids us to put a difference, to have compassion of some, and to pluck others more violently out of the fire, Jude 23. So here, the Lord's work is various, it is to some more gentle, but to others it is with a greater horror.

4. I answer—That no certain rule can be given as to this different dispensation, why some are so gently used, and others so violently brought home to God. Sometimes they which have had good education, and less errors of life, have less terrors of heart, as being restrained from gross sins; at other times they have had most terrors, because they have withstood so many means, and because they do not know when God works upon them. Sometimes those which are called to greatest services have had most terrors, that they may speak more of the evil of sin, having felt the bitterness of it: 2 Cor. 5:11, 'Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.' Sometimes it is quite otherwise; they which have been called to some eminent public service for God may not drink so deeply of this cup, but are spared, that they may be kept more entire for their public work, which serves instead of sorrow and trouble of conscience. Again, sometimes men and women of most excellent and acute understandings are most humble, as having clearest apprehensions of the heinousness of sin

and terror of wrath. At other times, on the contrary, these horrors and fears come from ignorance, as fears arise in the dark, and weak spirits are apt to be terrified, and have a knowledge of the remedy as soon as they know their disease; the work may be more gentle. Sometimes these terrors fall on a strong body, as being best able to bear them; sometimes on a weak, the devil taking advantage of their weaknesses and manifold infirmities. Many times in hot and fiery natures their changes are sudden, carried on with extremities; but sometimes soft natures, whose motions are slow and gentle, by degrees are surprised, and impressions of grace are made insensibly. Thus God acts as he will, but in the general all are serious and solicitous.

5. Because no certain rule can be given, the measure must not be looked after, but the effects; we are not so much to look to the deepness of the wound, as the soundness of the cure. The means only respect the end, therefore the end must be considered; and many times the effects are visible and more evident in fruit and feeling. Now, if we give sound proof that we are converted, I am contented. If the work be done, that sufficeth, which way soever it be done, though usually it is done by some notable and powerful impression upon the heart. Look, as the blind man said, John 9:25, 'Which way my eyes were opened I know not; but this I know, that whereas I was blind, I now see.' So if the renewed soul can say, How the work was done, I cannot tell; I have been waiting upon God, and have felt the fruits of his grace upon my heart.

6. The effects of this first work are these:—

[1.] A hearty welcoming of Christ Jesus into the soul; they do not take up with comfort on this side Christ. Men's troubles are known by their satisfaction. If honour satisfied men, then disesteem and

disrespect were their trouble, however they did palliate it with religious pretences. If riches satisfied men, then poverty pinched them. If the prosperity of the world satisfied men, it was worldly adversity was their trouble, though it crept under religious pretences. But if we see the necessity of a saviour, receive him into our hearts, and believe in him with all our heart's desire, and delight, and all is carried after Christ and after the refreshings of his grace, and are satisfied with none but Christ, and our hearts pant for him 'as the hart panteth after the water-brooks,' you ought to bless God that he hath left the impression of the effect, though he hath not left the impression of the way, Ps. 42:1. But now, when desires after Christ are either none at all, or cold and faint, and easily put out of the humour, and only provoke you now and then to put up a cold prayer, or express a few faint wishes or heartless sighs; that though you have a desire after Christ, yet it is easily diverted, and controlled by other and higher desires, and you can be satisfied, and take up with something beneath Christ, and Christ is not the precious and only one of your souls, you have not that impression which amounts to a hearty work.

[2.] Another impression is a thorough hatred of sin, and serious watchfulness and striving against it; when you seek to cast it out of your soul with indignation, Hosea 14:8; to 'hate every false way,' Ps. 119:104; when you are continually groaning under it, Rom. 7:24, and seek to weaken it more and more; for 'they that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof,' Gal. 5:24. This is a sensible impression left upon the soul.

[3.] A lively diligence in the spiritual life. Though you cannot tell how God brought you in, yet if you keep up a lively diligence in serving God, and with 'the twelve tribes instantly serving God day and night,' Acts 26:7, and you are always 'working out your own salvation with



fear and trembling,' Phil. 2:12, and you are hard at work for God; if this holy care be the constant business and drift of your lives, you have the effect of this conversion, though the first impression of it not so sensible.

## SERMON XCIX

### **I am thine, save me: for I have sought thy precepts.—VER. 94.**

IN these words you have—(1.) David's plea, I am thine. (2.) His request, save me. (3.) His argument to make good his plea, I have sought thy precepts. His plea is taken from God's interest in him, 'I am thine.' His request is for safety, to be saved either from wrath to come or from temporal danger, rather the latter; for he seeth trouble lie in wait for him, therefore 'save me.' And then the evidence of that interest, which may serve as an argument to set on the request, 'I have sought thy precepts.'

Let me speak of these in their order, and first of David's plea, 'I am thine.'

Doct. 1. That God hath a special people in the world, whom he will own for his.

David, as one of this number, saith to God, 'I am thine.' By a common right of creation all things are God's: 1 Chron. 29:11, 'Heaven and earth is thine, and all that is therein.' He made all, and therefore by a just right he is lord of all: Ps. 24:1, 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.' Now, as to this general right, God is no more bound to one than to another; there is no great privilege in

this to be God's in this sense, for so are the cattle upon a thousand hills, as we are his by creation. We cannot say with David, 'I am thine; save me;' for he that made them will not save them, if they have no other title and interest in him, Isa. 23:11. Thus by creation all things are God's, but more especially men: Ezek. 18:4, 'All souls are mine.' God hath a peculiar interest in the reasonable creatures, as their maker, governor, and judge. And yet further, his church is his by general profession; all the members of the visible church may say, Lord, we are thine; and that is some kind of plea for their safety and protection: Isa. 63:19, 'We are thine; thou never barest rule over them, they were not called by thy name.' So may all the members of the visible church speak to God. Yet more particularly there is a remnant in the world that are his by a nearer interest, and they are the saints or new creatures, who are his peculiar people, Titus 2:14, λαός περιούσιος. All the world else are but as the lumber of the house, but these are his treasure. A man is more chary of his treasure than of his lumber; yea, they are 'his jewels,' Mal. 3:17, precious and dear to him, and of special interest in his heart and affection; they are 'the first-fruits of his creatures,' James 1:18. The first-fruits were the Lord's portion. Now these God doth peculiarly take to be his portion, and valueth them more than all the world besides.

Let us see the grounds of his special interest in them; wherefore are they his?

He hath elected them before all the world: John 17:6, 'Thine they were, and them thou gavest me.' They were his by eternal election and choice, and they are purchased and bought by Christ, therefore called a purchased people, bought with a price, 1 Cor. 6:19, 20, and upon this ground they are said to be Christ's, 1 Cor. 3:23. Now, as they are Christ's and God's by purchase, they are also his by conquest and rescue from Satan. Prisoners in war belong to the conqueror,

Luke 11:21. The strong man that holdeth captive the carnal part of the world, they are his goods; but the stronger than he shall come and bind him and take away his goods. They were Satan's, but by rescue and conquest the prey falls to Christ: Col. 1:13, 'Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.' Once more, they are his by effectual calling and work of his grace: Eph. 2:10, 'We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works,' &c. So the title is changed by the right of the new creation. Again, they are his by covenant; we choose him to be our God, and the Lord chooseth us to be his peculiar people, Hosea 2:23. They acquiesce in him as their all-sufficient portion, and surrender and give up themselves to his use and service. This is that which is chiefly intended here, namely, that we are his by contract and resignation; for so David saith, 'Lord, I am thine.' All this doth abundantly make good God hath a special people in the world whom he will own for his. The grace by which we are inclined to resign up ourselves to God, that flows from election, through the redemption of Christ, by sanctification of the Spirit; but the grounds, reasons, and motives for which we dedicate ourselves to God, they are his right in us by creation and redemption. It is but fit God should have what he hath made and bought; we are his creatures, his purchase, therefore we are his.

Use 1. For trial. Are we of the number of God's peculiar people? As David said to the Egyptian, 'To whom belondest thou? whence art thou?' 1 Sam. 30:13. So, if the question should be put to you, Whence are you? to whom do you belong? Can you answer, 'Lord, I am thine,' I belong to thee? If it be so, then:—

1. When did you solemnly dedicate yourselves to him? If you be God's, can you remember when you first took your oath of allegiance to him? There is a solemn time of avouching one another, when God

avouched you to be his people, and you avouched God to be your God: Deut. 26:17, 18, 'Thou hast avouched this day the Lord to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and keep his statutes, and his commandments, and judgments, and to hearken to his voice: and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people.' When did you give up the key of your hearts to God, and lie at God's feet, and say, 'Lord, here I am, what wilt thou have me to do?' Acts 9:6. They that are God's come in this way, by resignation or spiritual contract, by entering into covenant with him.

2. What have you that is peculiar? Have you the favour of his people? Have you the conversation of his people? God's peculiar people have peculiar mercies; at least their hearts and spirits are carried out after them: Ps. 106:4, 'Lord, remember me with the favour of thy people.' Common mercies will not serve their turn, but they must have renewing and sanctifying mercies, and special pledges of his love; not increase of estate, honour, or esteem in the world; these are not things their hearts run upon; but, Lord, the favour of thy people; or, Ps. 119:132, 'Do good unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.' There is a goodness which God vouchsafeth to all his creatures; to the men of the world he gives a plentiful portion; their bellies are filled with thy hid treasure; but, Lord, let me have the comforts of thy Spirit, the manifestations of thy love and good-will to my soul in Christ Jesus. As Luther said and protested, God should not put him off with gold nor with honours; I must have his grace, his Christ, his Spirit; *Valde protestatus sum me nolle his satiari*. If you have such peculiar spirits, your hearts would be carried out after these distinguishing mercies. A man may have common mercies and go to hell and be cast away; but God's peculiar people have peculiar mercies; then they will not be contented with a common conversation: Mat. 5:47, 'If you love them that love you, what do you more than others?' There is *τι περισσὸν*, something over and above,

that should be seen in a Christian's life. It is a fault, 1 Cor. 3:3, 'Ye walk as men.' In the new creature there should be something more excellent. God's peculiar people, as there is a difference between them and others in point of privileges, so also in point of conversation; they should live at a higher rate, more heavenly, meek, mortified, more charitable than others. Christians should walk so as to convince the world, and make them wonder at the beauty, majesty, and strictness of their lives. You harden carnal men when you profess yourselves to be God's peculiar people, and there is no difference between you and others.

3. Doth your resignation appear in your living and acting for God? Is holiness to be written in visible characters upon all you do? Zech. 14:19, 20. The impress of God is upon his people, it is upon the horse bells, upon all the pots of Jerusalem; it is upon all they have, all they enjoy, 'Holiness to the Lord;' they spend their time as being dedicated to God, they spend their estates as being dedicated to God. Do you use yourselves as those that are Christ's, improving your time, relations, talents, interests for his glory? This may be discovered partly by checking temptations upon this account: 1 Cor. 6:15, 'Shall I take the members of Christ, and make them to be the members of an harlot?' This body is Christ's, and therefore must be kept in sanctification and in honour; this time I misspend, this estate is Christ's; and so you dare not give way to the folly and sin with which others are transported, for you look upon all that you have as Christ's. And so also are your contrivances and projects for God's glory; you will be casting about how you may honour Christ by your estate and relations, and everything you have: Neh. 1:11, 'Grant me mercy in the sight of this man: for I was the king's cup-bearer;' that is, he was considering what use he might make of this authority and esteem which he had with the king of Babylon, and what use he might make of it for God. God hath advanced me to such honour and

place; what honour hath God had? Look, as David, 2 Sam. 17:2, 'I dwell in a house of cedar, and the ark of God dwells within curtains.' Here the Lord hath abundantly provided for me, but what have I done for God? When you are in all things seeking the things of God, and laying out yourselves for the glory of God, and if God needs anything that is yours, you freely and willingly part with it.

Use 2. To persuade us to resign up ourselves to God, and to live as those that are God's.

First, To resign up ourselves to God: Isa. 44:5, 'One shall come and say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.' Come and subscribe to the God of Jacob, give it under hand and seal, enter your names in his muster-roll, that you are one of his subjects and servants. Motives are these:—

1. You owe yourselves to God, and therefore should give up yourselves to him: Philem. 19, 'Thou owest unto me even thine own self.' It is true with respect to God; thou owest all that thou hast to him, thou hast nothing but what he gave thee first. God calls it a gift, 'My son, give me thy heart;' but it is indeed a debt, for God gave it, not to dispossess himself and divest himself, but gave it for his use and service. He gave you yourselves to yourselves, as a man gives an estate to a factor to trade with, or as a husbandman scatters his seed upon the ground, not to bury it there, but expecting a crop from thence. So God scatters his gifts abroad in the world, gives life and all things; not to establish a dominion in thy person, but only a stewardship and a course of service. Hast thou life? Man is not custos—not lord of his life, but only the guardian and keeper for God. Now

what is said of life is true of estates and all things else; there is no proper dominion we have.

2. God offers himself to thee, and therefore it is but reasonable thou give up thyself to God. In the covenant there is a mutual engaging between God and the creature to be each other's, according to their several capacities; 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' The great God, *Quantus quantus est, totus noster est*, as great as he is, he becomes ours; all in him ours, his wisdom, power, strength; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are our everlasting portion. God the Father will be our portion for ever, he will give his Son to be our redeemer, and his Spirit to be our guide; all the persons, with all their power and strength, are engaged for our use. Look, as when Jehoshaphat made a league with the king of Israel, this was the manner of it: 1 Kings 22:4, 'I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses.' They mutually made over their strength one to another. So when God offereth to make over himself to us, this is the tenor, 'I will be for thee, and thou shalt be for me,' as Hosea 3. He makes over himself with all that is his. Now, when God offers to make over himself to us, and all that belongs to him to our use, his strength, power, and love, shall we stand demurring upon so blessed a contract, and not give up ourselves to the Lord? God, that needs us not, will engage himself to us to be for us, if we will be for him. Oh, then, let us resign up ourselves, and put ourselves under the power and sovereignty of God!

3. You never enjoy yourselves so much as when you give up yourselves to God; it is not your loss, but your gain; it is a kind of receiving: for you give up yourselves to become his people, to be sanctified, to be preserved by his grace, and governed by his Spirit; and all these are privileges, they are rather a gift for us. For a beggar to give up herself to match with a prince, she gets by giving; you give

up your hearts to God to be better. Other things that are dedicated to God are only altered in their use, as gold and silver dedicated to the sanctuary; but when a man is given to God, he is altered in his nature, he is governed and fitted for God's use. If there be any pretence of loss, it is this, a right or power to live according to your own will. Ay! but that you never had by virtue of your creation. You are bound to live according to the will of God; God's precepts bind as a law where they are not received as a covenant; and therefore you have no power to dispose yourselves; you are God's, whether you give up yourselves to him or no. When you consider how much you gain, you are interested in all the privileges of the Lord's grace; it not only establisheth your duty, but your comfort and encouragement. If there were nothing but this free leave to go to God in all our straits and dangers, 'I am thine, save me,' this were a benefit not to be valued. If God be yours, you may expect salvation, temporal, eternal; therefore the benefit of this gift is not God's, but ours; you give up yourselves, not to bring aught to God, but receive from God.

4. You cannot give other things to him unless you give up yourselves to him. 2 Cor. 8:4, it is rendered as a reason of their forwardness in a good work, 'They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.' When a man hath given himself to God, all things else will succeed more easily in the spiritual life; as a woman and man in the conjugal relation, they are easily kind one to another when they have bestowed themselves one upon another. As Quintus Fabius Maximus, answering to the ambassador that offered him gold, that it was not the fashion of the Romans to have gold under their power, but they were under a power that were owners and possessors of their gold. Apply it; the first thing God looks after is the person.



5. It is your honour to be in relation to God, therefore give up yourselves: Ps. 116:16, 'O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid.' He repeats it thrice, as if he were wonderfully pleased with the relation. Mean offices about a prince are accounted honourable in the world; so to be in the meanest degree of service about God is a great honour; therefore give up yourselves to God.

Secondly, Live as those that are God's. The first thing we should do is to determine whose we are, then to make good that relation. You are not your own, that is clear, 1 Cor. 6:19; therefore not to live to your own will, your own ends, your own interest. All the disorder that is in the world comes from a man's looking upon himself as his own: Ps. 12:4, 'Our tongues are our own;' and therefore they take liberty to speak what they please. And saith Nabal, 'My bread and my wine.' When we are so eager to establish our own dominion and propriety, then we miscarry. As Bernard saith, *Horreo quicunque de meo ut sim meus*—we should be in utter detestation of living to ourselves, and rather be God's bondmen than our own freemen. And as they are not their own, so not the world's: John 15:19, 'Because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hates you.' The world hates the godly because they have other principles and other ends. You should not conform to the world in judgment or practices, for you are not of the world; you are not of the flesh: Rom. 8:12, 'We are not debtors to the flesh;' therefore this should not be your care and study to pamper and please the flesh. You are not Satan's, for you are taken out of his power, Col. 1:13. Whose are you? You are the Lord's; therefore your business should be to please God and honour God. It is easy to say, I am thine; do we make it good in our practice? This may be known two ways:—

1. When we make his glory to be the scope of our lives: Phil. 1:21, 'To me to live is Christ;' that is my business and employment, not to seek my own things, but the things of Christ Jesus. Do you give up yourselves to be governed and ordered by his Spirit, acting and living for his glory?

2. When we walk so as God may own us with honour; take his law for our rule, as well as to fix his glory for our scope. Exod. 32:7, saith God to Moses, 'Thy people whom thou hast brought up out of Egypt:' thy people; God would not own them when they had corrupted their ways. We would say to God, Lord, I am thine; but alas! we act not as the Lord's, but as if we were of the flesh, as if we belonged to Satan, to lust, and passion, and anger; by those cursed influences are we acted and swayed in our conversations. It is as sweet an argument and as forcible a reason as you can use to God in prayer to say, Lord, I am thine, if we could use it in good conscience, saith Chrysostom. All men are so, but how few can thus speak to God; for, saith he, his servants you are whom you obey; and the servant of sin lieth when he saith, I am thine. Alas! most every kind of sin may say, Thou art mine; lust and covetousness and ambition may challenge us. It is not words, but affections and actions that must prove us to be the Lord's; then we are his when we seek to please him in all things. Judas was Christ's in profession, but the devil's in affection. David saith, 'I am thine,' but presently adds, 'I seek thy precepts,' I endeavour to do thy will. Oh! then, live not as your own, as of Satan and the flesh, but as the Lord's.

Let us come to the ground of his plea, 'Save me.' David doth not say, 'Thou art mine, save me,' but, 'I am thine.' These two are correlates; he that speaks the one speaks both; if we be God's, God is ours: 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine;' and yet David saith, 'I am thine,' but doth not say, Thou art mine, for four reasons:—

1. Because this is first in our apprehension. We know God to be ours by giving up ourselves to be his. His choice and election of us is a secret till it be evidenced by our choice of him, till we choose him for our portion. Well, then, a believer cannot always say God is his, but a believer is always resolved to be the Lord's by his own choice and dedication; they resolve to be his, and not their own. Though you cannot discern your election, that God hath chosen you, yet it is comfortable to renew your resignation of yourselves to God. Resignation, that is our act, and is more sensible to conscience than God's election: 'Lord, I have none in heaven but thee, and whom do I desire in comparison of thee?' God will not refuse such a soul that is thus willing to tack himself upon God, will not be put off: 'I am thine.' As the Campani, when they begged the Romans to help them, and they refused, they came and gave themselves and their whole estates to be vassals to the Romans, with this plea, If you will not defend us as your allies, defend us as your subjects. Thus a gracious soul will tack himself upon God, and will not be put off: I will not be my own, but thine.

2. 'I am thine;' he saith so, because this was the best check to the present temptation. David was then in fear of his life when he spoke this, when the wicked lay in wait to destroy him, ver. 95; they wanted neither malice nor power to do it; then saith David, 'I am thine.' In afflictions God seems to break down the hedge, and lay his people open, in common with others, to the fury of the judgment that is then upon them. In regard of God's outward dealings, little appearance different between us and them; but then we must say, Lord, I am thine; though involved in the same judgment, yet, Lord, thou canst put a difference, 'I am thine.' 2 Peter 2:9: 'The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation,' how to put a distinction and difference between his own and others; so that our distinct interest, 'I am thine,' is a relief to the soul.

3. Saints observe a difference when they speak to God and when they plead with their own hearts; when they speak to God, then they mention their own resignation, Lord, I am thine; but when they would revive their own drooping souls, then they say, God is mine. Compare the text with Ps. 42:11, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul?' &c. He is my God; God is mine, and wilt thou be troubled? But when they speak to God, 'I am thine;' so they raise their hearts in a holy confidence. The interest is mutual. In dealing with our own unbelief, it is best to urge our interest in God: He is mine; but when in prayer, God's interest in us: Lord, I am thine.

4. This is the more humbling way, to urge our own resignation. See Ps. 116:15, 16, 'Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints;' then presently, 'Ah, Lord, truly I am thy servant,' &c. God's children may be exposed to hazards alike, but their blood is precious to God. Now though the world thinketh lightly of their death, yet God doth not think so. How doth David apply this comfort, 'Precious in the sight,' &c. He doth not say, as the force of the words would seem to carry it, Lord, I am one of thy saints; but, Lord, I am thy servant; he takes a more humble title. There is many a man fears and doubts to apply the privileges of God's children under some higher title, yet they should apply them in a title suitable to their condition and measure. So did David; he presumeth not to say, Thou art mine; that were a higher challenge, but yet such as God's condescension will warrant him; but he doth aver and assert his own resignation, which is a more dutiful and humble way of confidence. Again, he doth not say, I am thus and thus, but, I am thine. He doth not plead property or good qualification, but he pleads God's property in him; Lord, I cannot say I am perfect and upright as I should be, yet I am thine. It is good to own God in the humbling way, and take hold of promises on the dark side; so doth Paul, 1 Tim. 1:15, 'This is a faithful saying,' &c.; as if he had said, Nay, if that be a faithful saying, then I can put

in a plea, I am sinner enough for Christ to save. Thus by these lower ways of application we may derive and take out to ourselves the comfort of the promises.

Doct. 2. God's interest in his people is the ground of his care for their safety.

It may be pleaded as a ground of his care for their safety, Lord, I am thine, and therefore save me; this is David's plea in a time of danger. And so Christ, when he was to leave his disciples to the troubles of a furious opposite world, how doth he plead for them! John 17:6, 'Thine they were, and thou gavest them me; therefore keep them through thine own name.' We may pray to God with more confidence for our safety in a time of danger when we can plead his interest in us.

How doth his interest prove a ground of confidence and plea for prayer in a time of danger?

1. God's knowledge of them: 2 Tim. 2:19, 'The Lord knows those that are his.' He hath a particular exact knowledge of all the elect, and who they are that shall be saved; they are engraven as it were upon the palms of his hands; he takes notice of them, and of the condition in which they are: John 10:3, 'He calleth his own sheep by name.' Christ knows them by head and poll.

2. His care over them and his affection to them. Interest in general is a very endearing thing. That which is mine doth more affect me than that which is another man's: 1 Tim. 5:8, 'He that careth not, and provideth not for his own, is worse than an infidel.' It is an unnatural thing for a man not to affect his own; and will God suffer that which is his own to be snatched out of his hands, and used by evil men according to their pleasure? A man is careful of his own children, to

dispose of them in a safe place, and careful of his own jewels: the saints are not as God's lumber, but as his jewels; they are dearer to God than all things else: Isa. 43:3, 4, 'I am the Lord thy God, thy saviour; I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee; since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life;' that is, if the sword must drink blood, let it go to Seba and Ethiopia, to Arabia, and to Egypt; he strikes the king of Assyria in his wrath, and the sword shall be diverted that way, rather than they should be given up to be destroyed. But this is not all. The way how we come to be his own doth exceedingly endear us to him; as, for instance, we come to be God's by eternal election; now this must needs endear us to God. A woman that carries her child in her womb but nine months, what a tender affection hath she to it! Isa. 49:14, 15, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child?' &c.; Eph. 1:4, 'He chose us from the foundation of the world.' We lay in the womb of his decree from all eternity, and therefore we are very dear to God, namely, as we are his by election. Again, as we are his by redemption; they were bought with a dear price, therefore they are a precious people; God hath a high esteem and value for them. That which cost dear, we will not lose it lightly. The saints are valuable, not so much in themselves, as in Christ, by whose precious blood they are purchased with God, 1 Peter 1:18. Adam sold us for a trifle, but Christ did not redeem us at a cheap rate. Then the work of the Spirit, who hath drawn the image of God upon us; God will not suffer his own work to be destroyed, Ps. 74:6. They came to God, and complained of the defacing of the material temple, that the carved work, the curious work which was wrought by the special direction of God's own Spirit, was destroyed (for the Spirit of God directed Bezaleel to work in brass and all manner of curious works); certainly the temples of the Holy Ghost, which are formed for God's praise, God will not suffer them to be destroyed and never look after them. Again, as they are God's by

dedication, so they are dear to him. Common gold and silver was not so valued as consecrated gold and silver. Goat's-hair that was consecrated to the uses of the temple was more excellent than all other things that was for common use. We are dedicated, consecrated to God, set apart for himself: Ps. 4:3, 'The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself.'

3. He hath a peculiar eye to his own. Why? Because he expects more work from them than from others, therefore they have more protection; God is known, glorified and owned among them. His revenues to the crown of heaven from the world come to little in regard of what he hath from his people and his church: Ps. 145:10, 'All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord, and thy saints shall bless thee.' God hath most of his praise from his saints. His creatures show forth his glory, but his saints bless him. The common sort of people smother the glory of God in their atheism, security, and unbelief; but those only are the people that keep up his praise in the world, therefore he preserves them.

4. Because by covenant all that is God's is theirs, for their use. His strength is theirs: Eph. 6:10, 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.' And his salvation is theirs: Ps. 68:20, 'He that is our God is the God of salvation.' If God be a God of salvation, he is our God. If he hath salvation to bestow, it is ours. A believer hath full right to make use of all that God hath.

Use 1. To press you to get this interest in times of danger. We should now be more careful than at other times to get and clear up our interest in God. Oh, it will be no advantage to say, This and that is mine, but a great advantage to say, God is mine. When desolations are on the earth, there is great havoc made of great estates, and outward supplies will come to nothing; but this will be an everlasting

comfort to say, God is mine. See 1 Sam. 30:6, 'But David comforted himself in the Lord his God;' Hab. 3:18, 'I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation.'

2. It presseth you to make your interest more evident by fruits of obedience; as David, 'I am thine.' How makes he it good? 'I sought thy precepts.' We would have mercy, but neglect duty. Therefore saith David, 'I sought thy precepts.' It is an emphatical expression. To seek God's precepts is more than barely to do them; to seek them, that is, with all diligence. We labour after the knowledge of them, and grace to practise them; it is to give up our minds and hearts; it notes earnest study and affection to them, will, and care, and all to the practice of God's will. Where there is an honest and earnest endeavour to obey God's command in all things, this proves a believer's interest. In times of trouble you must expect your confidence will be assaulted. Now when Satan or conscience represent God as putting thee off thus, What! come you to me? thou art a grievous sinner; but, Lord, I am thine. How prove you that? I seek to know thy will. 'How to perform that which is good, I find not,' Rom. 7. We cannot always find it; that is, serve God with exactness of care; but if this be the bent of our hearts, if we seek it, we may come with confidence, and look God in the face, and say, Lord, I am thine.

3. We may improve it with confidence in prayer, I am thine, save me. God saves man and beast, Ps. 36:6, therefore will save his own, he that is our father and our God: 'I know that my God will save me,' saith David, Ps. 20:6–8. There are some God will not save: 'They are not mine, therefore I will break down their bulwarks.' In the Book of Chronicles it is said, 'Why transgress you the commandment of God, that you cannot prosper?' There is an utter incapacity when men will be sinning away their protection. Here is your great plea in time of danger, in adversity, go to God and say, I am thine; Lord, save me.



## SERMON C

**I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.—  
VER. 96.**

IN this verse the scripture, as the charter of our hopes, and the seed and principle of our spiritual being, is recommended above all things in the world as that which doth chiefly deserve our respect and care. Consider the word by itself, and you will find it excellent; but consider it by way of comparison with the vanity and insufficiency of other things, and the excellency thereof will much more appear. As in a pair of balances, when things come to be weighed together, you will soon see the difference, and which is heaviest; so here in the text both scales are filled; on the one side there is the world and the perfections thereof, and on the other side the word of God and the benefit that we have thereby, and sensibly the beam breaketh on the word's side; in the one scale there is limited perfection, which will soon have an end; in the other, a happiness that hath length and breadth, 'I have seen an end,' &c.

In the words there is a thesis or proposition, and then an antithesis, or something said by way of opposition to that position. The thesis, 'I have seen an end of all perfection;' and the antithesis, 'But thy commandment is exceeding broad.' Both together will yield us this point:—

Doct. That the serious consideration of the frailty and fadingness of all natural and earthly perfections should excite and quicken us to look after that better and eternal estate which is offered to us in the word of God.

I shall make good this proposition by going over the circumstances of the text as they are offered to us.

First, I begin with the thesis or proposition, I have seen an end of all perfection; and there you may take notice—

1. Of the subject or matter here spoken of, it is perfection; understand it in a natural and worldly sense, the most excellent of all the creatures, and the greatest glory of all natural accomplishments.
2. The extent, all perfection, whatever it be.
3. The predicate, hath an end.
4. The confirmation from sense, I have seen. It is either dictum experientiæ, I have often seen it fall out before my eyes; or dictum fidei, I could by faith easily see to the bottom of the creature, see vanity in it whilst in its greatest glory. Let us open these things.

Mark, it is not said in the concrete, I have seen an end of perfect things; but in the abstract, I have seen an end of all perfection itself. The most perfect of worldly things are but imperfect; man, in his best estate, is altogether vanity, Ps. 39:11.

And then mark the extent of it, it is 'all perfection;' not only some but all perfection; wisdom and learning, as well as beauty and strength, wit and wealth, honour and greatness; I have seen an end of all of it. Many will readily grant that some kind of perfections are slight; but all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Here is a meditation fit for persons of all sort and conditions. For great ones that they presume not; for mean ones, that they repine not; for the old, whose vigour and strength is gone, in whom it is verified; and for the young, or those that are in the vigour and freshness of youth, in whom within a little

while it will be verified; for the rich, that they trust not in uncertain riches; for the poor, that they be not over-dejected; for the honoured, that they please not themselves overmuch with the blasts of popular breath and vain applause; the disgraced, that they may make a sanctified use of their afflictions. All perfection, first or last, will wither and decay.

And then here is the predicate, hath an end; the word also signifieth limit or bound; there is an end in regard of length, duration, and continuance, and an end in regard of breadth and use; that also must be taken in; for the narrowness of worldly comforts and the breadth of the commandments are often opposed one to the other. I will show you—

First, That all earthly perfections have their bounds and limits as to their use and service; they are good for this and that, but not for all things; but 'godliness is profitable for all things,' 1 Tim. 4:8. They are not able to bear full contentment to the mind, or give full satisfaction to the heart, at least in all conditions and sorts of afflictions; riches will help against poverty, and health against sickness, but 'godliness is profitable to all things.' There are many difficulties and dangers in which the limited power of the creatures cannot help us; but the word of God, applied and obeyed, and followed with his mighty Spirit, will yield us relief and comfort in all cases and conditions. All the pleasures and profits, and honours of the world are nothing to this. As, for instance, all these perfections cannot—

1. Give us any solid peace of conscience and rest to our souls; in the midst of all our fulness there is something wanting; carnal affections must be mortified before they can be satisfied. Grace must do that for you; it is godliness that brings contentment to the heart of man: 1 Tim. 6:6, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain.' Alas! wealth can

never do it; our desires are increased the more we have; and the way to contentment is not to increase our substance, but to limit our desires; as in a dropsy, the way to cure the man is not to satisfy him with drink, but to open a vein to take away his thirst. We expect too much from the creature, and then the disappointment breedeth trouble; and therefore, Eccles. 1:14, why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Outward things do not bear a thorough proportion with all the wants and desires and capacities of the soul, and therefore cannot give solid peace to our souls.

2. It cannot make you acceptable to God, neither wealth nor beauty, nor honour, nor strength; it is grace that is of great price in the sight of God: 1 Peter 3:4, 'The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price.' This is a beauty that doth never fade nor wax old: 'Since thou wert precious in my sight, thou wast honourable, and I have loved thee,' Isa. 43:4. God loveth his people for the grace he putteth into them, not for the outward gifts he bestoweth upon them. It is grace that makes us amiable to God, and fit objects of the divine complacency; you are not a jot the more pleasing to God when rich than when poor. No; but the more hateful to him, if you are not rich towards God, Luke 12:21.

3. It cannot stead you in your greatest and deepest necessities, and therefore they are but limited. There are two great necessities wherein all creature comforts will fail:—

[1.] In troubles of conscience. Men do pretty well with their worldly portion and happiness till God sets their consciences awork, and begins to rebuke man for sin, and reviveth the sense of their own guilt and liableness to the curse. In such a case, all the glory and profit and pleasure of the creature will do no good; it cannot allay the

sense of God's wrath scorching the soul for sin: Ps. 39:11, 'When thou with rebukes doth chasten man for sin, thou makest his beauty to consume like a moth.' Tell him of honours, friends, estates, pleasures, all is nothing; the virtue of that opium wherewith he laid his soul asleep is now quite spent. Trouble of conscience arrests the stoutest and most jovial sinners, and layeth them under sadness and horror. Judas threw away his thirty pieces of silver when his guilt stared him in the face: 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood,' Mat. 27:4. When God is angry the creatures cannot pacify him and make you friends. As when a man is going to execution with a drooping and heavy heart, bring him a posy of flowers, bid him smell them, and comfort himself with them, he will think you upbraid his misery; so in troubles of conscience, what good will it be to tell a man of riches and honours. The remedy must be according to the grief; so that if outward things could satisfy the heart, they cannot satisfy the conscience; our sore will run, among all the creatures, and there is no salve for it.

[2.] They will not stead us at the hour of death, when a man must launch out into eternity, and set sail for an unknown world. Can a man comfort himself then with outward things, that a man is great, rich, and honourable, beautiful or strong, or that he hath wallowed in all manner of sensualities? If men would look to the end of things, they would sooner discern their mistake: Deut. 32:29, 'Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!' So Jer. 17:9, 'At his latter end he shall be a fool.' He was a fool before, all his life-long, but now he is so in the account of his own heart. So Job 27:8, 'What hope hath the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God cometh to take away his soul?' The poor man would fain keep his soul a little longer; no, but God will take it now, and he doth not resign it, but God takes it by force. And 1 Cor. 15:56, 'The sting of death is sin.' The dolours and horrors of a guilty

conscience are revived by death, and then the weakness of worldly things doth best appear; our wealth and honour and pleasure will leave us in the dirt. When the soul is to be turned out of doors, our vain conceits are blown away, and we begin to be sensible of our ill choice. If conscience did not do its office before, death will undeceive them: Ps. 49:17, 'When a man dieth he shall carry nothing away with him, his glory shall not descend after him.' He shall be eaten out by worms as others are, when he cometh to go the way of all the earth; then for one evidence for heaven, one drachm of the favour of God, as Severus the emperor cried out, I have been all things, but now it profits me nothing.

4. It is of no use to you in the world to come. Gold and silver, the great instruments of commerce in this world, are of no value there. All civil distinctions last but to the grave. Some are high and others low, some are rich and others poor; these distinctions will last but a while, but the distinction of good and bad lasts for ever. Their works follow them, but not their wealth; outward things cannot save your souls, or bring you to heaven.

5. In this world it will not prevent a sickness or remove it. The honourable and the rich have their diseases as well as the poor; yea, more, they are bred upon them by their intemperance. All your houses and lands and honours and estates cannot ease you of a fit of the gout, or stone, nor an aching tooth, nor keep off judgments when they are epidemical. There were frogs in Pharaoh's bed-chamber as well as among the meaner Egyptians, and all the king's guard could not keep them out.

Well, then, all these things show it is of a limited use; indeed they serve to make our pilgrimage comfortable, and to support us during our service—that is the best use we can put them to; but the use the

most put them to is to satisfy a sensual appetite or please a fleshly mind, Ps. 17:14. The utmost that these things can procure is a back well clothed, and a belly well filled. This is but a sorry happiness, to feed a little better than others, to provide a richer feast for the worms, yea, a prey for hell. Take all created perfections, not as subordinate to grace, but separate from it, it serveth but to please the appetite or the fancy, make the most or best of it.

Secondly, by their time and period as to continuance. All these things perish in the using; like flowers, they wither in our hands while we smell at them: 'The fashion of this world passeth away,' 1 Cor. 7:31; and whosoever liveth here for a while must look for clianges, and reckon to act several parts in the world. Whatsoever was wonderful in former ages is lost and past with age; things that now are are not what they once were; Ps. 102:26, 27, 'They shall perish, but thou shalt endure for ever,' saith the Psalmist, speaking to God; 'yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment: as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shalt be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years have no end.' Christ, he hath no end, but men will soon see the end of all perfection. The world and all things were made *ea lege ut aliquando pereant*—that they might at length fail and come to an end. That which you now have you cannot say it shall be yours this time twelvemonth, or it may be a month hence; we hold all things by an uncertain tenure. God may take away these things from us; for man is compared to grass, and the glory of man to the flower of grass, 1 Peter 1:24. What is the glory of man? Riches, wisdom, strength, beauty, credit, all these things are called the flower. Now the flower fadeth before the grass, and withers; the neglected stalk remaineth. When the leaves of the flower ace shed, you may be gone and they gone. If they continue with you till death, then you must take your final farewell of all your comforts. Thus you see all perfection will have an end.

And then, here is the confirmation from sense, I have seen. Consider it—(1.) As it is matter of sense or experience; (2.) As it is an observation upon experience.

1. The vanity of the creature is matter of sense and plain experience. We have seen, and others have seen, all outward things come to their final period; goodly cities levelled with the earth, mighty empires destroyed, worldly glory blasted, honours vanished, credit and esteem shrunk into nothing, beauty shrivelled with age, or defaced by sickness; yea, all manner of greatness laid in the dust. We trample upon the graves of others, and within a little while others will do the same over ours. All things have their times and turns, their rise and ruin; there is no man that converseth with the world, but he will soon see the vanity of it. David found it not only by clear reason, but by his own experience, 'I have seen,' saith he; and so will you say too within a while; these things will fail when you have most need of them. Credit and honour before the world; what is more uncertain than the people's affections? They that cry, 'Hosannah,' to-day, will cry 'Crucify him,' to-morrow. Pleasures are gone as soon as they come; and when they are gone, they are as a thing of nought, but that they leave a sting in the conscience, and a sadness in the heart: 'Riches take wings and flee away,' Prov. 23:5. You can be no more confident of them than of a flock of wild fowl that pitcheth in your field. Honour is soon gone. Haman is one day high in favour, the next day high upon the gallows. Strength and beauty are soon assaulted by diseases. It will be matter of sense; better believe it than try it; then it will prevent a great deal of vexation, and the shame of disappointment. Seldom doth a man act the same part in the world for a year together; now joyful, anon sad; now children, then none; now married, anon in a widowhood condition. It is much in the desire and thoughts of natural men to have a perpetual enjoyment of this life and the comforts of it; but it will never be. They perish, and



we must die; and when we are gone, our glory will not be remembered. Solomon recordeth his experience of the vanity of all earthly things. Oh, that we would believe it, without trying conclusions! You that are so eager after the world, what will you think of it when it is parting from you, or you from it? Will they then be found to be such excellent things as you once deemed them to be? Oh, no! At last you must come to this, 'I have seen an end of all perfection;' and then you will say, Oh, how hath the world deceived me! I have laboured for nought!

2. 'I have seen;' that is, with a spiritual eye; this should be observed and improved by faith. Many are sensible of the vanity of the creature, but are not a jot the wiser: Ps. 49:13, 'This their way is their folly, yet their posterity approve their sayings.' They are sensible of the folly of their ancestors, but yet do not mend by it. We should not only see with our eyes, but understand with our hearts. When the wise man went by the field of the sluggard, he saw it overgrown with thorns and nettles, and the stone wall thereof broken down: Prov. 24:32, 'I saw it, and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received instruction.' We should profit by everything. In this sense we may gather figs off thistles and grapes off thorns. Especially should we observe the vanity of all sublunary things: Eccles. 7:2, 'It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting; for this is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart.' We should make a good use of these occasions; a man seeth his own end in the end of others, and by their death is admonished of his own frailty and mortality. It is a sad sign when this is not considered: Isa. 42:25, 'Yet he laid it not to heart;' Isa. 26:11, 'Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see, but they shall see.' They shall be forced to take notice of what now they will not, when God's hand is upon them to their utter confusion.

3. 'I have seen.' Happy they that have such eyes! But alas! there is a great deal of difference between the sight of the senses and the sight of the understanding. When we see things with our eyes, there is a natural blindness or brutishness, or a veil upon our hearts, that we mind them not. Men have eyes to see, but they have not a heart to see. So God complains, Jer. 5:21, 'They have eyes and see not, ears and hear not.' So Deut. 29:3, 4, 'The great temptations which thine eyes have seen, and the signs and those great miracles: yet the Lord hath not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear unto this day.' So Isa. 6:9, 10, 'And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, but perceive not: make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears.' Though things be never so plainly delivered, so powerfully pressed, so apparently verified; and so they see and hear, and receive no more benefit than if they had never heard nor seen it, God withholding and withdrawing the efficacy of his Spirit, whereby it might be beneficial to them for good. So Isa. 42:20, 'Seeing things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but thou hearest not.' They see the wonderful works of God, but do not consider them as wise people ought to do: Isa. 1:3, 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider;' Ezek. 12:2, 'Thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not, they have ears to hear, and hear not;' that is, they make no use of them, but strive and endeavour to put it out of their minds. So John 9:39–41, 'And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and they that see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say we see, your sin remaineth.' There is a great deal of difference between the sight of believers and

unbelievers; the one sees with an understanding heart, the other without it. In the one there is a free, ready, and sincere use of their disciplinable senses, that they may learn his word and walk in his ways, that they may profit in the knowledge of God, and so get understanding and spiritual prudence. The other are brutish, ignorant, or idle, negligent, and forgetful; they shut their eyes, and their ears are uncircumcised, and so they know not what they know. The causes of this are, first, non-attendancy or inadvertency, prejudicate opinions and rooted lusts, hinder their profiting. Look, as the sun, moon, and stars, though they move with a most swift and rapid motion, seem to a vulgar eye to stand still, or at least to move very slowly, so these sublunary things, though they are always passing, yet the inward thought of worldlings is that they shall endure for ever. Oh, labour then for this spiritual and heart-affecting sight! If a man could behold this world in the light of a divine knowledge, he would find it to be but a vanishing shadow. Though the vanity of the creature be a plain truth, and taught by daily experience, and is easily and commonly acknowledged, yet it is not easy to make this truth have a deep impression upon the hearts of men. They are naturally unwilling to admit thoughts of a change, Amos 6:2, because they are unable to sanctify themselves and look after a better and spiritual estate. But let us not grieve the Spirit of God by our unteachableness in so plain a point. When we are told of the frailty and slipperiness of worldly comforts, we shake our heads and confess it to be true, but improve it not, at best conceive some weak and faint resolutions, but they soon vanish, and we are as worldly and carnal as ever we were; and therefore pray as David, Ps. 90:12, 'So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.' You have seen the first part of the text—here is perfection, all perfection; then all perfection hath an end; and this is to be seen, it is liable to sense; and it should be improved by grace. If all creature perfection hath an end:—

Use 1. Let it moderate our desires; for who would court a flying shadow, especially when these pursuits hinder us from looking after better and eternal things? Jonah 2:8, 'They that seek lying vanities forsake their own mercies;' that is, they might have been their own, if they had chosen them. Within a while the world will be but a stale jest, and the laughing fit is over, and then our sorrow cometh; the feast will be at an end, and then we begin to feel the gripes of a surfeit.

Use 2. Let it moderate our sorrows and fears. Our sorrows; when these things befall us, it is no strange thing, 1 Peter 4:12; it is no more strange than to see the night succeed the day, or to see a shower come after sunshine; it is no wonder to see a light thing move upward, nor a heavy thing to move downward. So our fears; when the power and strength of the world is turned upon us, there will be an end of all our evils, but not of the word of God. We shall everlastingly find the effects of his truth and promise, though our enemies excel in worldly pomp, and seem to be grounded upon an immutable foundation; but as powerful as they seem to be, they shall at length come to an end: Job 5:3, 'I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation;' when the foolish, that is, the wicked, seemed to get rooting, then I cursed, not by way of imprecation, but by way of prediction.

Use 3. It serves to moderate our delights. No day so pleasant but the night puts an end to it, no summer so fruitful but a barren winter overtaketh it. The Philistines were sporting on their holiday, but their banqueting-house became their grave and place of burial; and Jonah's gourd was soon withered and dried up. Worldly riches serve men as long as they live, and after death do some service in conveying their bodies to the grave by a pompous funeral; but there it leaves them. But the word of God supports us against all

temptations while we live, and conveys us to death with comfort, and the fruit of it abideth with us; after we are dissolved the soul immediately hath benefit band afterwards, at the resurrection, the body. We do not hold worldly things durante vita—during our life, nor quamdiu bene se gesserint—as long as we shall behave ourselves well in our places; but only durante beneplacito—as long as God pleaseth. How often is the most shining glory burned into a snuff, turned into ignominy, and honour into contempt, and our fulness into the want of all things! A cobweb that has been long a-spinning is soon swept down. Yea, the time will come when the lust of these things shall be gone, 1 John 2:17, and the time will come when we shall take no pleasure in them. As soon as we have the creatures, many times we are weary of them, 2 Sam. 13:8; as Amnon hated Tamar when he had satisfied his lusts; and David longed for the waters of Bethlehem, and when he had it, he would not drink it. When we come to consider these things, the imperfections that before lay hid are discovered by fruition.

Secondly, Let us now come to the antithesis, but thy commandments are exceeding broad.

Before I come to discuss the words in particular, I observe—

First, that the stability of the word of God is often opposed to the vanity of the creature: Isa. 46:8, 'The flower fadeth and the grass withereth, but the word of God abideth for ever.' So 1 Peter 1:25, 'All flesh is grass, and the glory of man is as the flower of grass; but the word of God liveth and abideth for ever;' and 1 John 2:17, 'The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof; but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever.' So Luke 10:41, 42, 'Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall never be taken away from her.'

Now, what doth this teach us, but that when we see the vanity of earthly things, we should be informed what better things to set our hearts upon? The hearts of men cannot be idle, their oblectation must be upon something; when pleasures, and riches, and honours are found vain and perishing, there is a more enduring substance to be looked after.

Secondly, That these better things are discovered by the word of God, now 'life and immortality is brought to light through the gospel,' 2 Tim. 1:10, and he that doth the will of God shall increase his knowledge, he that doth the will of God shall know what doctrine is of God. This doth direct us in making our choice; the independent heart of man will choose something to adhere to. Now, in the word of God we have direction what to choose. The use of all things present is temporal, but the use and benefit of the word is everlasting; this will do us good another day. All things visible have their own perfection in their kind, and do extend, some of them to one temporal use and some to another; but the word of God extendeth in its kind to all uses; as godliness is profitable to all things; it bringeth blessedness in this life and in the world to come, 1 Tim. 4:8. A man may satisfy himself in the contemplation of any truth and virtue that is visible; but here are unsearchable riches, such deep wisdom, such rich comforts, perfect directions, that we cannot see to the bottom of them. Every perfect thing in the world hath an end, but the word endureth for ever.

More particularly in this antithesis I observe—

1. The subject, or thing spoken of, thy commandment; that is, the whole word of God.
2. The predicate or attribute, what is said of it; it is broad.

3. The amplification of this attribute, it is exceeding broad; you cannot easily understand the use and benefit of it.

1. The subject, or thing spoken of, 'Thy commandment is exceeding broad.' This breadth must be spoken of with respect to the former clause; it is broad for its use, and then it is broad for its duration and continuance.

[1.] It is broad for use. A man may soon see to the bottom of the creatures, but the wisdom and purity and utility of the word of God, and the mysteries therein contained, and the spiritual estate that we have thereby, you cannot see to the end of that; it extendeth to all times, places, persons, actions, and circumstances of actions; it hath an inconceivable vastness of purity and spirituality. But you will say, There is a set number of precepts, how say you then 'it is exceeding broad'? Their use is large; and it is here put for the whole word of God. *Adoro plenitudinem scripturarum tuarum*, saith Tertullian. Here are remedies for every malady, and a plentiful storehouse of all comforts, satisfaction to every doubt; nothing pertaining to the holiness and happiness of man is wanting; nothing more requisite to direct, comfort, and support men in all conditions, prosperity, adversity, health, sickness, life, death. What shall I say? It is the word that sanctifies all our comforts, 1 Tim. 4:5; it is the word that maintaineth our lives, Mat. 4:4; it is the word that fitteth us to an immortal being, 1 Peter 1:23. We cannot easily express the comprehensiveness of it, and the benefit we have by it. When all earthly things fail, the word will be a sure comforter and counsellor to us; it doth not only tell us what we should do, but what we shall be. In short, the word of God describeth the whole state of the church and the world, and what shall become of it in the world to come. There is a foolish curiosity that possesseth many in the world, who desire to know their destiny, and what is in the womb of futurity; as

the king of Babylon stood upon the headways to make divination. Now, let this curiosity be turned to some profitable use; nothing deserves to be known so much as this, What shall become of us to all eternity? If the question were, Shall I be rich or poor, happy or miserable in this world? it were not of such great moment, for these distinctions do not outlive time; but the question is of great moment, whether I shall be eternally miserable or eternally happy? It is a foolish curiosity to know our earthly state, the misery of which cannot be prevented by our prudence or foresight; but it concerneth us much to know whether we are in a damnable or saveable condition, while we have time to remedy our case; and this the word of God will inform you of assuredly. Well, 'the commandment is exceeding broad.' This is the word that discovereth to you the nature of God and the holy angels, the souls of men, the state of the world to come. Who is the author of scripture? God; 'thy commandments.' The matter of scripture? God; it was not fit that any should write of God but God himself. What is the end of this word? God. Why was this word written but that we might everlastingly enjoy the blessed God? As Caesar wrote his own commentaries, so God, when there was none above him of whom he could write, he wrote of himself; by histories, laws, prophecies and promises, and many other doctrines, hath he set himself forth to be the creator, preserver, deliverer, and glorifier of mankind; and all this is done in a perfect manner. Men mingle their imperfections with their writings; though holy and laudable for their names, yet they discover themselves in all they do; their words and speeches are never so perfect but there is something wanting, and here you can find nothing but God; here God hath written a book whose words are perfect, nothing can be added, nothing taken away. To say there is an idle word in scripture, is great blasphemy, saith Basil. We have no reason to run to human inventions, for the word prescribeth every duty, everything that is to be believed and done in order to salvation. Open the gap once, and



there is no end; one brings in one thing, and then another, and from hence comes all the ceremonies that do abound in the church. It is not only most perfect, but most profitable, and containeth all kinds of learning. Common crafts will teach us how to get our bread, but this how to get the kingdom of heaven. Law preserveth estates, the testament of men; this the testament of God, the charter of our inheritance. Physic cureth diseases of the body; this afflicted minds and distempered hearts. Natural philosophy raiseth men to the contemplation of the stars, but this to the contemplation of God their maker. By history we come to know of the rise and ruin of kingdoms, states, and cities; by this, the creation and consummation of the world. Rhetoric serves to move affection; this to kindle divine love. Poetry causeth natural delight; this delight in God: no writing like this.

[2.] As it hath a breadth for use, so for duration and continuance; it is the eternal truth of God, that shall live for ever: Mat. 5:18, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of the law shall fail.' So Mat. 24:35, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but thy word shall not pass away.' But how doth the word continue for ever? Not the word itself, but—

(1.) The obligation and authority of the word continueth for ever. It is an eternal rule of faith and righteousness to the church, that is more stable than heaven and earth. Let me show you how the doctrine is perpetual. The original draught is in God himself. The substance and matter of the moral law is perpetual, namely, the perfect love of God and of our neighbour; but the form is not; we shall have no need of precepts, and prohibitions, and promises, and threatenings in the light of glory, which we have need of in the light of grace. Fierce horses need a bridle, and there is other kind of discipline for children when grown up than when young. When they are young, we correct

their bodies; but when they are grown up, we correct and punish them by disinheritance. The prop is removed when the thing standeth fast upon its own basis. When we come to heaven, we have intuitive apprehensive knowledge; we shall have no other bible but the Lamb's face. Many things that are necessary by the way are not necessary when faith is changed into vision and hope into fruition. Scripture is necessary, as letters to the spouse from her beloved while absent, when present there is no such need. We need not a bond when payment is made; so scripture is the indenture between us and God here; but when that is past, we shall not need scripture.

(2.) It is eternal in the fruit; it bringeth forth the blessing of eternal life to them that keep it and obey it: 2 John 2, 'For the truth's sake that dwelleth in us, and shall be in us for ever.' So John 8:51, 'He that believeth in me shall never see death.' Why! holy men die as well as others; but they have a being in the world to come; and therefore the word of God is called 'the word of eternal life,' John 6:68; that is the end and use of it, it maketh them capable of eternal life that obey it. So 1 Peter 1:25, 'The word of God abideth and continueth for ever.' It is the seed and principle of eternal life; it is the charter of their everlasting privileges they shall enjoy in the world to come. But how doth the word endure for ever? It is not meant subjectively, but effectively, because it assures us of eternal life upon obeying it, and threatens eternal death to all that reject it.

Use 1. Oh! then, let us be much in hearing, reading, studying, and obeying this word, that makes us everlastingly happy. If the commandment be so exceeding broad, why do we make no more use of it?

1. Let our hearts be more taken up about it; that should be our main care wherein to busy ourselves day and night, Ps. 1:1. Our delight

should not be in vain books and empty histories, but in the law of God: we should often look into the charter of our great hopes.

2. Be directed by the word of God, it will direct you in every business: Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.' Here is direction for you in prosperity and adversity.

3. Study it that you may be sanctified by it: John 17:17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.' This is the great benefit that we have by the word, it is the instrument of sanctification.

4. Be much in the study of the word, that you may be assured by it, that you may make out your own qualification to the kingdom of heaven: Acts 13:46, 'Since you put away the word of God from you, you judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.' When you let God's book lie by neglected, and never hear it, nor read it, nor meditate on it, the thing is past all question, you judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.

Use 2. Let this commend the word of God to us, that eternal life is in it. Other writings and discourses may tickle the ears with some pleasing eloquence, but that is vanishing, like a musician's voice. Other writings may represent some petty and momentary advantage, but how soon shall an end be put to all that? so that within a little time the advantage of all these books shall be gone. The statutes and laws of kings and parliaments can reach no further than some temporal reward or punishment; their highest pain is killing of the body, their highest reward is some vanishing and fading honour, or perishing riches. But God's word concerning our everlasting estate, our eternal well or ill being, eternal life and death, is wrapt up in these laws and commandments; these are rewards and punishments suitable to the eternal majesty of the lawgiver. Here is life and immortality brought to light, and offered to them who have so

miserably lost it, and involved their souls in an eternal death; therefore let us have a precious esteem of the scripture, which shows us the way of escaping that misery into which we have plunged ourselves, and a way of obtaining eternal blessedness. Do not, then, go to a wrong guide and rule; nothing more necessary to be known than what our end is, and the way that leadeth to that end. The most part of men walk at random, and run an uncertain race; they have neither a certain scope nor a sure way. Men's particular inclinations and humours are an ill guide, for they incline us to please the flesh, and so we shall miss of everlasting blessedness, and wander in a by-path that leadeth to destruction. Naturally man is more addicted to temporal things than spiritual, and to worldly vanities than to spiritual enjoyments; and it is in vain to persuade men to look after better things till the carnal affections be mortified; and one way and great means to mortify carnal affections and inclinations is to consider the vanity of the creature; and when our affections are weaned from the world, we must look after some better things to set our hearts upon. That good which satisfieth all the desires and capacities of man had need to be an infinite and an eternal good. Now, these better things are only discovered in the word of God. The word of God discovers that there is such an estate as everlasting glory and blessedness. The word telleth us plainly and peremptorily who shall go to heaven and who to hell. Well, then, if you would have this comfort, you must see whether you have embraced it with that reverence, faith, and obedience which the importance of it doth require.

## SERMON CI

**Oh, how love I thy law! it is my meditation  
all the day.—VER. 97.**

IN this psalm you have a perfect character of a regenerate man, what he is, and what he ought to be, in his meditations, his exercises, his affections; and all this recommended to us from the frame of David's heart and example, and course of his way. Men of spiritual experience can best judge of these affections; for 'as face answereth face in a glass,' so doth the heart of one believer to another.

In these words you have—(1.) His love asserted; (2.) Demonstrated from the effect.

1. His love asserted, oh, how love I thy law!
2. Demonstrated from the effect of it, it is my meditation all the day.

This is an effect, for we are wont to muse upon what we love; therefore David, loving the law of God, is always thinking of it.

First, For the assertion. Observe the matter asserted, and the vehemency of the assertion. The matter asserted is love to the law; the vehemency of the assertion, 'Oh, how I love thy law!' It is an admiration with an exclamation. David is not contented with a naked affirmation, 'I love thy law;' but useth a pathological protestation of it, 'How love I thy law!' The interrogation expresseth wonder, 'How I love thy law!' And the exclamation, 'oh, how!' that gives vent to strong affection, as if he had said, It is more than I am able to express. The law is taken for the whole scripture, as often in this psalm.

Secondly, For the demonstration of this affection, 'It is my meditation all the day;' that is, I do often meditate thereof, and can spend whole days therein. The words may signify frequency of such thoughts; they were not such as did come now and then, but all the day his heart was working on holy things, as the blessed man is

described, Ps. 1:2; that is, every day he is working something out of the word of God. Or, 'it is my meditation all the day,' may note the depth and ponderousness of these thoughts; his mind did not run out upon the law with flighty sallies, but he had such thoughts as were solid and serious, and did abide with him.

The points from hence are two:—

1. That God's people have a great love to his word; yea, such a hearty affection as cannot easily be expressed.
2. They that love the word will be meditating therein continually, 'It is my meditation all the day.'

Doct. 1. That God's people have a great love to his word; yea, such a hearty affection as cannot easily be expressed.

I will evidence that by two considerations—(1.) The word deserves this love; (2.) The saints are ready to yield it.

First, The word deserves it in respect of the author, the matter, and the use; in all these respects is the word of God lovely.

First, For the author; it is God's word, and they love it for the author's sake, the signification of his mind, as a letter from a beloved friend is very welcome to us. Aristotle, in his Rhetorics, mentioning the cause of delight, saith thus, They that love much, when they are speaking of what they love, or when they hear anything of the party beloved, or receive anything from them, it is a mighty delight and pleasure to them. So it is in this spiritual love. The word is God's epistle and love-letter to our souls, therefore for his sake it is the more welcome to us. And upon this ground God complains of it that when he had 'written the great things of his law' to a people, they

were neglected and slighted and 'counted a strange thing,' Hosea 8:12. I have written; God is the author, whosoever is the penman. The scriptures are a writing from him to us. Now for us to be strangers to it, and little conversant about it, argues some contempt of God; as to slight a letter of a friend shows little esteem of the writer. The saints they put it into their bosoms, and it gains upon their hearts. Why? It is God's epistle, it is my best friend's letter. This is certain, love God and you love his law; for the author's sake it will be dear and precious to you.

Secondly, The saints have such a strong love to the word of God, because of the matter in it revealed, for it hath all the properties of a thing to be beloved; it is true, good, profound, and full of depth and mysteries. What would you desire in a doctrine to draw your hearts to it? Truth, goodness, and profoundness of knowledge.

1. If certainty of truth will draw love, it is to be found in the holy scriptures, for they are vouched by God himself to be true: Ps. 19:9, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' And the gospel is called 'the word of truth,' Eph. 1:13, 'After ye had received the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation;' and John 17:17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.' To improve these places thus. Truth is the good of the understanding, and without the knowledge of which we can have no tranquillity of mind. Now of all truths this is the chiefest; it is not human, natural, or inferior truth, but a supreme divine truth, ratified by God's authority, such as nature could never have found out; yea, such a truth as carries its own evidence with it, and shows how it comes from God, and discovers itself to be of God. As the sun is seen by its own beams, so the word of God needs no other testimony than itself to commend it to the consciences of men. Certainly it is such a truth as doth sufficiently evidence itself to be of God; all God's works discover their

author, and carry about with them their own demonstration; not only his greater works, upon which he hath impressed most of his wisdom and power, but even his lesser works: every worm and pile of grass shows who made it. To an attentive and discerning eye, a man cannot look upon a worm, or consider a gnat or any contemptible creature, but he shall see this was made by a wise God. God hath left his stamp upon every one of his works, and certainly upon his word much more; for 'he hath magnified his word above all his name,' Ps. 138:2. There is a more clear discovery of the goodness, wisdom, and power of God than can be in any of his works; for upon this he hath laid forth all the riches of his wisdom and goodness. Therefore, if there be in all creatures and works of God a self-evidencing light to discover their author, and that invisible Godhead and power by which they were made, certainly there is somewhat in the word of God to discover its author; because of this objective evidence which it hath in itself it is more sure than an oracle or voice from heaven: 2 Peter 1:19, 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy.' More sure than what? Than that voice which he heard from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' This was a confirmation indeed, you will think; and yet Peter, that heard that voice, telleth us that comparatively we have greater security from and by the word of God; not more sure in itself, but as it is given in evidence to us; so we have a more sure word of prophecy. A transient voice is more easily mistaken and forgotten than a standing authentic record; therefore we have a more sure ground to rest upon than ever hath been or can be given to sinners, subject to forgetfulness, jealousies, and mistakes. A voice from heaven speaking to us by name might more easily be suspected to be another's than the Lord's voice; as when God called Samuel, he suspected that it was the voice of Eli. Therefore an oracle cannot be so sure, safe, and self-evidencing as this word of God that he hath commended to us. For if God should speak to us still from heaven, how should we be able to distinguish it from delusion, or to



know it was a voice from God? Might not Satan cause a voice to be heard in the air, and deceive us? Indeed the holy men of God that immediately received those voices and oracles were certified that it was of God, because there was some divine evidence which did accompany the revelation; and if there be the same impressions of God upon the written word, we have as much certainty as they; yea, more, as we view the whole revelation of God together, and more deliberately consider the character and signature of God that is stamped upon it. In short, the word when preached by Christ himself in person came in upon the hearts of men chiefly by this self-evidencing light; therefore it is said of Christ, Mat. 7:29, that 'he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.' His hearers were convinced of a sovereign majesty in his speech, proper to the divinity of his person; and when the officers were sent to apprehend him, there was such an evidence in his doctrine, that they cried out, 'Never man spake like this man,' John 7:46. And still there is the same evidence in his doctrine written, for the voice could add nothing to it, and the writing can take nothing from it. The voice is but a circumstance, the word written not a dead letter, but can sufficiently evidence itself to be of God de jure; it hath the same power still, though de facto not always so received and so owned by the sons of men, but only by those that are enlightened by the Spirit to see this evidence. You find by daily experience every ingenious author leaves an image and impress of his own spirit, the mark of his genius upon every work that he doth. We can say of an exquisite painting, by some secret art in it, this is the hand of such a great master. Now, can it be imagined that God should put his hand to any work, and leave no signature or impress of it upon that work? It cannot be imagined, for it must be either because he could not, or he would not. That God could not, cannot be said without blasphemy. Can men show the wisdom and learning they have attained to in every work, and cannot God, who is the father of lights and the

fountain of wisdom, insinuate such secret marks and notes of his wisdom and divine authority into that writing he took care should be penned for the use and comfort of the world, that it might be known to be his? And that he would not, that cannot be believed neither. He that is so willing to 'show man what is good,' so willing to reveal himself to the reasonable creature, can we imagine he would so wholly conceal himself that there should be no stamp of himself upon that doctrine, to move our reverence and obedience, but receive it from the testimony of such a church? Therefore surely there is enough in the word to discover God to be the author. The apostles, when they went abroad to work faith, all the fruit that they expected from their preaching was from this self-evidencing light which was discovered in their doctrine; therefore doth the apostle say, 2 Cor. 4:2, 'Not handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.' They did not commend themselves to the consciences of men merely by the miracles which they wrought, though that also was some seal of their commission, and that they were authorised and sent by God to preach those things to the world, but 'by the manifestation of the truth commending themselves to every man's conscience.' So the apostle reckons up many things, 'approving ourselves as the ministers of God by the word of truth,' 2 Cor. 6:4. Therefore certainly there is somewhat in the truth delivered that will sufficiently make out itself to be of God. And when they render the reason why this word was not received, it was not for want of evidence, as if this truth could not sufficiently be known to be of God, but because men were blinded with their lusts and carnal affections; for so he saith, 2 Cor. 4:3, 4, 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not,' &c. Which shows there is a light in the gospel by which it can discover itself, and if this light be hidden from the eyes of men, it is because their minds are blinded by their own

lusts and carnal affections. Now, if the certainty of truth will draw affection, certainly those truths which are conveyed in the word of God should gain upon our hearts and draw affection. Why? Because these are sublime, supreme, and weighty truths, and come in with a great deal of evidence upon the hearts of men.

2. If goodness can gain the hearts and affections of men, the word of God is good as well as true. There is a double desire in man—a desire of truth and a desire of immortality; to know the truth, and to enjoy the chiefest good; the happiness of the intellect, of the understanding, that lies in the contemplation of truth; and the happiness of the will, in the enjoyment of good. In the state of innocency, this was represented by the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, to suit these two capacities and desires that were in the heart of man: the tree of life, to suit his desires of happiness; and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, to suit his desires of truth. Under the law, this is set forth by the candlestick and the table of shewbread; and in the gospel by the sacrament of baptism, which is called an enlightening—Heb. 10:32, 'After you were enlightened;' that is, after you were baptized—and the Lord's supper. Light and life are the two great things man looks after as a reasonable creature; to get more light, and then life, that he may enjoy God. Now, we are still at a loss for satisfaction of these desires until we meet with the word of God, where there is *primum verum*, the supreme truth, and *summum bonum*, the chiefest good; and therefore the directions of the word are called 'true laws' and 'good statutes,' Neh. 9:13: true laws, all words of truth, so to perfect the understandings of men; and good laws, very suitable to their will and inclination, and so bear a full proportion with the desires of a reasonable creature. So 1 Tim. 1:15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance.' The gospel is a faithful saying; there is truth to perfect the understanding, and then worthy of the chiefest

embraces of our wills and affections. As there is plain, certain, clear truth in the word of God, a satisfaction to the understanding in the view of truth, so there is also a full compliance with the motions of the will which the scripture offereth. Now two things there are the scriptures do reveal which are good for men, and cannot be found elsewhere, and all the world have been puzzled about them how to find them out:—(1.) Reconciliation with God; (2) Salvation, or eternal happiness.

[1.] Reconciliation with God: this is the grand inquiry of the guilty creature, Wherewith shall God be appeased, satisfied, and we reconciled to him, he being offended by our sin? Micah 6:8. How justice shall be satisfied, and men, that are obnoxious to the wrath of God, may come to have delightful communion with him, this is the great scruple that troubleth the creature, and all the false religions in the world were invented for the removing and assailing this doubt and scruple, and appeasing the hearts of men as to these fears of divine justice. Now, we can nowhere be satisfied but in the way of reconciliation and peace which is tendered by God himself to repenting sinners, through the mediation of Christ Jesus. Natural conscience will make us sensible of sin and wrath, and we have no ransom to pay it; and all other creatures cannot help us, for they are debtors to God for all they have and can do. How then shall God be satisfied? How shall we escape this vengeance? This fear would have remained upon us to all eternity, but that we have relief from the word of God: 2 Cor. 5:19, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses.' There is more glory in these few words, and more of God discovered in them, than there is in all the world. Oh, what a deal of comfort, and what a foundation for the rejoicing of our faith, is there laid in this reconciliation in and by Christ Jesus our Lord! That short sentence discovers more of God's intentions and good-will to man than all the bounty of his

providence in and by all the creatures put together. Here was a secret which could never enter into man's heart, nor do we find a syllable of it written in any heathen book as to the way of it, how it shall be brought about; a truth so incredible to flesh and blood, that the prophet, when he speaketh of this wonder, asketh, 'Who hath believed our report?' Isa. 53:1; who hath believed that he should bear our sorrows, and be wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, and that the chastisements of our peace should be upon him, and by his stripes we should be healed? Here is the great secret God hath revealed to you in his word. This must needs be a secret in nature, for this was a work which merely proceeded from the free motion of God's will; and therefore, being not *opus naturæ divinæ*, but *opus liberi consilii*, that work which God did not do by any necessity of nature, but by the free motion of his own will, will never be found out unless God will discover it himself; for how could any man divine what God purposed in his heart before he brought it to purpose, until he himself had revealed it? Therefore it is a good word, because it reveals reconciliation by Christ.

[2.] There is something more to draw our hearts to the word—that is, eternal salvation. We grope and feel about for an immortal good. Nature will give us some presages of a state after this world, some kind of guesses; and we are groping and feeling about for an eternal good, Acts 17:27. Man, who hath a soul that will not perish, must have some happiness that will last as long as his soul shall last; he would fain be eternally happy. Now, it is the word of God only reveals both the thing and the way to God; the thing itself, that there is such a state, and what it is: 2 Tim. 1:10, 'Christ hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.' It lay in darkness before, hidden under some guesses and representations to the old people of God, but now it is brought to light in the gospel. Heathens in their dark notions did stumble upon the immortality of the soul, which

they did rather dream of than understand distinctly; but now all is open and clear, and God hath manifested to you that 'there is a rest for the children of God,' and a happiness after this life. And also God hath revealed the way how to seek it, and how to attain and get this eternal happiness; therefore the holy scriptures are said to be 'able to make wise to salvation,' 2 Tim. 3:15: it doth direct you in this way; that is wisdom indeed, to be wise to salvation. To be able to turn and wind in the world, to be wise only in the present generation, as the children of this world are, it is folly rather than wisdom; as when children can set forth their toys, we do not look upon it as any piece of wisdom, but folly. Wisdom lies in fixing a right end, in a choice of fit means, and in a dexterous prosecution of those means for the attainment of this end. Now the holy scriptures make you wise to salvation—that is, to fix upon a right end, for they discover that there is a happiness that we may fix upon, and they direct us in the way; and then by mighty and potent methods of reasoning they quicken and awaken us to look after this business, that we may dexterously pursue it as the great care that lies upon us; therefore the children of God delight in the word, because this makes them wise to salvation. Here they have a perfect blessedness, and a powerful way of argumentation, and the soul is quickened to look after these great and everlasting hopes.

3. The doctrines of the word are profound truths: 'Thy testimonies are wonderful, therefore doth my soul keep them,' Ps. 119:129. They are remote from vulgar and ordinary knowledge. The word of God is not only called 'a doctrine according to godliness,' 1 Tim. 6:3, but a 'mystery of godliness,' 1 Tim. 3:16. Since the fall there is a curiosity of knowledge, a desire whereby man not only seeks what is true and good, but what is rare and profound; we have no need to run to other books. True depth and true profoundness are to be found in the word of God. There are wonders in God's law, if we had eyes to see them:

Ps. 119:18, 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law;' things indeed so profound and so mysterious that the angels desire to pry into them, 1 Peter 1:12. Those spirits that live in the blessed vision and constant fruition of God, yet they did find a depth of wisdom in salvation by Christ, such a ravishing mystery, that they curiously are taken up in the study of it, and they delight in the view of those things which are commended to us for our study: Eph. 3:10, 'To the intent that now, unto the principalities in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.' God's word is a glass wherein those glorious creatures do, as in a mirror, behold his wisdom, and are in some sort bettered by it. The state of angels is a happy state, but it is finite, capable of being improved and bettered, and that by the doctrine of the holy scriptures. Well, then, such are the depths and various excellences of the word of God, that the saints know not how more pleasantly and contentedly to spend their thoughts and time than in the search and view of those truths, where such notable mysteries are revealed about the nature of God, creation, providence, the story of man's fall, redemption by Christ, the way to true happiness, and the like. Both the grounds of faith and rules of practice are all such as are above the pitch of human understanding; natural reason cannot find them out, and now they are revealed by God, the mind doth not fully apprehend them.

Thirdly, The use of scripture the ends for which God hath appointed it, and the uses for which it was given.

1. To increase the knowledge of God. Now, the saints would know more of God, and better their notions of him; as Moses, his great request to God is, 'Tell me thy name;' when he learned that, 'Show me thy glory;' he would fain know more of God. So the saints would fain know more of God; therefore the word is dear and precious to

them, because it discovers so much of God, Hosea 6:3. This is their property, they 'follow on to know the Lord.' They do not content themselves with their first and infant notions, but aspire to know him more and more; for their love, fear, and trust, and all, doth depend upon the knowledge of God. If we had more knowledge of God, we should love him more and trust him more: Ps. 9:10, 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.' We know God but as men born blind know the fire; they know there is such a thing as fire, for they feel it warm them, but what it is they know not; so that there is a God we know, but what he is we know little, and indeed we can never search him out to perfection; a finite creature can never fully comprehend that which is infinite. The saints are following on to know the Lord; they desire to know more and more, and there is no such means to discover God to them as this way.

2. The use of the word is to convert the soul and to bring it home to God: Ps. 19:7, 'The law of God is perfect, converting the soul.' There is the perfection of God's word, it is God's instrument for converting of souls, or turning of them back to him again. For conversion, take it in its whole latitude, compriseth this, to humble us, to cleanse us, to bind up our broken hearts. Because of all these uses, the children of God love his word. It serves—

[1.] To humble us for sin: Jer. 23:29, 'Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?' He appeals to it as things that we may find by experience, that the word of God is not only a hammer to break, but a fire to melt. As a battered vessel, when it is to be new formed, must be melted, that it may be capable of this new form, so no such way to melt the heart, and make it capable of God's purpose, as the word of God; no such thing to break the heart, no such terrors and agonies like those the word works; and to melt the heart, to make it pliable to God's use, no



such thing as the word of God to affect us for sin, for sin as it is a breach of God's law, or an offence to God.

[2.] It hath this use, to cleanse the heart, and subdue it to the obedience of Christ: Ps. 119:9, 'Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereunto according to thy word.' Young men, who more stubborn and boisterous than they, that are carried on with great strength and fervour in the very heat of their rebellion against God? Well, the word of God can cleanse the heart of a young man. As Plato saith of youth, that it is such a beast as will not easily come to hand. Now for cicurating and taming this beast, for the captivating those rebellious affections in youth, and cleansing and working out the filthiness that is in us, nothing like the word. And it is by these spiritual weapons that every thought is brought into captivity to Christ, 2 Cor. 10; and then, as it is obstinate, the power of the word breaks the force of our lusts.

[3.] For comforting and binding up the broken-hearted. Human wisdom and eloquence can do nothing to purpose this way; but when God by the word reveals to a man his righteousness, then 'his flesh shall come again as a child's, he shall return to the days of his youth,' Job 33:25. Though a man before did walk up and down as a ghost, was, as it were, a walking skeleton, and his marrow was sucked out of his bones by the terrors of the Lord that were upon him, yet when he hath God's word to show, under God's hand, for his pardon, this brings his comfort; his flesh shall revive, he shall return fresher than a child, and shall return to the days of his youth; his strength, joy, and comfort shall come again. Therefore, oh, how they love the law! because they have felt in their heart it must be God's word; for that which wounds must also heal.

3. To make us perfect as well as to begin the work: 2 Tim. 3:17, it is said, 'The word of God is able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works;' so that in this perfection there are three uses for which the word serves:—

[1.] For building up in faith, or increasing in internal grace. The word of God is not only for novices, but for grown persons, that there may be a continual dropping into the lamps, as it was in the vision of Zechariah: Acts 20:32, 'I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.' It is not enough to lay a foundation, but there must be a building up. Now, what is that which builds us up? 'The word of his grace;' that is, God's blessing upon the reading and hearing the word; for the apostle speaks it when he was taking leave of the Ephesians: 'I commend you to God, and the word of his grace;' that is, the word of grace sent among them, by their ordinary officers continued to them, blessing the reading and hearing the word by their ordinary officers; there would be no need of Paul, the room should be supplied. Habits of grace must still be maintained by fresh influences, and they always come into us by the word of God; therefore, after we are converted and born again, the word is useful, 'that we may grow thereby,' 2 Peter 2:2.

[2.] To direct our practice; that is one use the word serves for; so it is said, 2 Peter 1:19, 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place;' in this state of ignorance wherein we are, for that is figured by those words, 'in a dark place.' Sure it is a great blessing to have a light shining to us that we may not wander, and fall into the snares wherewith we are encompassed. We are apt to forget and mistake our way; we are very forgetful, and our way is narrow, hardly

found and hardly kept; and Satan is full of wiles and deceits, like an ignis fatuus, ready to lead us out of the way; therefore we had need have a sure guide and a sure light: Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths.' It is a light not only to our paths, for the choice of our general way, but for all our steps, to direct us in all our ways.

[3.] To comfort us in all conditions, under our crosses, confusions, and difficulties; we have all from the word of God: Ps. 119:50, 'This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me.' Oh! when a child of God is even dead, and hath many damps and discouragements upon his heart, when he goes to the word, there he hath quickening, reviving, and is encouraged to wait upon God again. All our discomfort comes from forgetting what God hath spoken in his word: Heb. 12:5, 'Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children.' There is abundant consolation in the word, but we forget it, and do not carry it always in our mind, and then we lie under much dejection of heart; if we do not study it, discomfort will come upon us. In the word there is a remedy for every malady and an ease for every smart; and therefore this is that which makes it precious to the children of God.

Secondly, The saints readily yield this love to the word. Why?

1. Because their hearts are suited to the word. The word is every way suited to the sanctified nature, and the sanctified nature is suited to it; for that which is written in God's book is written over again upon their hearts by the finger of the Spirit. While we are in our natural state there is an enmity to the law of God: 'For we are not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be,' Rom. 8:7. Ay! but when they come to be written upon the heart and mind, then our affections are suited to the word. Carnal men do not love the word. Why? Because

it is contrary to them; as Micaiah to Ahab, 'He prophesieth nothing but evil to me.' It only rubs their sores and discovers their spots to them, and that is grievous; and proud spirits think it to be a simple, plain doctrine. Worldly spirits love it not, for it draweth them off wholly to think of things to come; but they whose hearts are suited to it, they have a mighty love to it.

2. They have tasted the goodness of the word, therefore they love it: 2 Peter 2:3, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word.' Why? 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious;' if you have felt any benefit: Jer. 15:16, 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.' When they come to taste, digest, and have experience of the benefit in comforting, changing, supporting their own hearts, then they love the word of God that hath been the instrument of it: James 1:18, 'He hath begotten us by the word of truth.' Then what follows? 'Be swift to hear.' If a man be begotten, if he hath felt the benefit of the word, then he will be taking all occasions to delight himself, and refresh his soul in the word of God, in reading, hearing, meditating, because he hath found sensible benefit.

Use 1. To shame and humble us that we are so cold in our love. It is an admirable and an incredible affection David here speaks. Consider who it was that speaks thus. David, he that was encumbered with the employments of a kingdom, he that had so many courtly pleasures, so many great businesses to divert and draw him aside; yet all his employment could not withhold him from delighting himself in the word of God. It was David, that was a king, and mark how he doth express himself; he doth not say, I endeavour to keep thy word, but 'I love thy word.' Nay, he saith more, he speaks of it as a thing he could not express, 'How I love thy law!' No great wonder that we cannot express the excellency of the word; but that

our affections, which are so finite, that these should not be expressed, this is wonderful. Then he speaks of it with exclamation too, 'Oh, how I love thy law!' and he speaks this to God. The Septuagint reads it, 'Lord, how have I loved thy law!' He makes God himself to be, judge not only of the truth of his love (as Peter makes Christ the judge of the truth of his love: I have many failings, I have fallen foully of late; but, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest I love thee') but he makes God the judge of the strength of his love, 'Lord, how do I love thy law!' Have we anything answerable? Heart should answer heart. Are there such affections wrought in us as David expresseth to be in himself? This should shame us, for we have more reason, there is more of the word of God revealed to us, more of the counsel of God discovered, the canon of scripture being enlarged, more discovered than ever was to David, yet our affections so cold.

## **SERMON CII**

## Oh, how love I thy law! &c.—VER. 97.

I COME now to a second use, to press us to get this love. Take three arguments:—

1. This will wean us from sinful delights, that are apt to insinuate with us and take our hearts; it will draw us off from carnal pastimes, curious studies, vain pamphlets: if you had this love, here would be your recreation in the word of God. *Castæ deliciæ meæ sunt scripturæ tuæ*, saith Austin—here are my chaste delights, thy holy scripture, to be ruminating and meditating there. Here you will be employing your time and strength of your thoughts. There are two things mightily concern us—to make religion our business and recreation; our business in regard of the seriousness, and our recreation and delight in regard of the sweetness. Now, if you have a word from God, here will be your delight; you will be exercising yourselves contemplating the height, depth, and breadth of God's love in Christ Jesus, and turning over this blessed book: Job 23:12, 'I have esteemed the words of thy mouth more than my necessary food.' Your very food for sustentation of your bodies will not be so sweet to you as the word of God for the comfort and refreshing of the soul. When the promises are as dry breasts and withered flowers, when men have little or no feeling of the power of it upon their hearts, no wonder they are besotted with the pleasures of sin. Men's minds must have some pleasure and oblectation, but their hearts are chained to carnal delights, so that they cannot mind the business of their souls.

2. Your hearts will be more stable and upright with God, more constant in the profession of godliness, when you come to love the word and love the truth for the truth's sake: 2 Thes. 2:12, 'Because

they received not the truth in the love of it, therefore God gave them up to strong delusions, that they might believe lies.' The Lord hath seen it fit ever to continue this dispensation in the course of his providence, to suffer seducing spirits to go forth to try how we have received the truth, whether only in the bare profession of it, or received it in the love of it. Many have received the truth in the light of it; that is, compelled by conscience, human tradition, current opinions, and custom of the country to profess it; but they do not love it, therefore they are easily carried away. There may be knowledge where there is not assent; there may be assent where there is not love; there may be some slight persuasion of the truth of evangelical doctrine, but if the heart be biassed with lust and sin, a man doth but lie open to temptations to apostasy. Therefore, until the heart be drawn out unto love to the truth it can never be stable with God.

3. This is that which will give you a clearer understanding in the mysteries of godliness. The more we love the word the more we study it, and the deeper insight and more spiritual discerning we have in the mysteries thereof. It is not acute parts, but strong affections to divine things, that maketh us to understand them in a spiritual manner. If a man hath acute parts, but yet hath vile affections and carnal passions, these will becloud the mind and fill us with prejudicate opinions, so that we cannot discern the mind of God in many cases, nor spiritually discern it in any. Men are darkened with their own lusts, their minds are darkened with carnal lusts; then 'in seeing they see not, in hearing they hear not;' they do not hear what they hear. Let me set it forth by this similitude. A blunt iron, if it be thoroughly heated in the fire, will sooner pierce through a thick board than a sharper tool that is cold; so in the order of the affections; when a man's heart is heated and warmed with love to divine things, then it pierceth through; he hath such a sight of divine

things as they shall affect and change his heart more than he that hath great parts. It is not acuteness of parts, so much as entireness of affection, which gives us a spiritual discerning of the mysteries of godliness; for when the heart is wedded to carnal lusts, the judgment is corrupted and partial, but when we have an affection to holiness we shall sooner discern the mind of God. Knowledge breeds love, and love increaseth knowledge, for it fortifieth and strengtheneth the other faculties of the soul, that they may be more ready in operation. Let this persuade you to get this love to the word of God.

Ay! but how shall we do to get this love?

Direct. 1. I told you before it is the fruit of regeneration; yet a little to quicken you hereunto, consider all the arguments which are brought. As whose word it is; it is God's word, and if you love God, will you not love the word of God? Surely your best affections are duo to him, and if you bear any affections to him you will bear an affection to his word: Isa. 26:8, 'Our desires are to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name.' First to thee, and then to the remembrance of thy name; or, as it is in the original, to thy memorial. If you have desires to God, then you will love that blessed book wherein you shall read and hear of God, where God hath displayed his name to you. And then consider what benefits you have by the word. It serves—

1. To enlighten us and to direct us. This is our light in a dark place, and to guide us on all occasions. Solomon saith, Eccles. 11:7, 'Light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.' If light natural be so pleasant, what is light spiritual? And therefore the Psalmist compares the word of God to the sun, Ps. 19. First he speaks of the sun when he displayeth his beams upon the earth, then presently he comes to speak of the word of God. The world can no more be without the one than the other, without the word of God no



more than without the sun; for as one doth revive the drooping plants, and cheer and refresh nature by his comfortable beams, so the word of God doth rejoice, refresh, and revive the hearts of God's people by its light and influence, Ps. 19:7, 8. Oh! it is a comfort to have light to see our way. When men begin to have a conscience about heavenly things they will judge so. Paul and his companions in the great storm at sea, when they saw no sun for many days, and when they were afraid to fall upon rocks and shelves, with what longing did they expect to see the sun! So a poor bewildered soul doth experiment such another case, when his way is dark, and hath no direction from the word of God what course to take; but when he can get a little light from the testimonies of the Lord to guide him in his way, how sweet, refreshing, and reviving is this to his heart!

2. It serves to comfort us in all straits. The word of God is, as Basil saith, a common shop of medicaments, where there is a salve for every sore, and a remedy for every malady, a promise for every condition. God hath plentifully opened his good-will and heart to sinners; whatever the burden and distress be, still there is some remedy from the word of God. Look, as David, Ps. 48:2, 3, bids them to view Zion on all sides, to see if there were anything wanting necessary for ornament and defence, so we may say of the word of God, Go round about, see if there be anything wanting for the comfort of a Christian. There are promises of wisdom to manage our business, James 1:5; promises of defence in the midst of all calamities, Heb. 3:5; promises of sustentation and support in God's storehouse, blessings enough for every poor soul. Then the word of God serves to support and strengthen us in our conflicts, either with sins or with afflictions, to strengthen us against corruptions, and quicken us to duties; the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, the choicest weapon in the spiritual warfare, Eph. 6:18. Here a Christian fetcheth his all from hence. Therefore, if you would have

these affections to the word, think what a great deal of benefit is to be had by it, light, comfort, and strength.

Direct. 2. Be in a capacity to love the word. If you would have this strong affection David speaks of, you must be renewed and reconciled.

1. Renewed, for this love is an affection proper to the new nature: Rom. 8:5, 'They that are after the spirit do mind the things of the spirit.' It is in vain to think of any such love to God's word until we be renewed by God's grace. A man, as a man, may delight in the knowledge of the word; but to receive the word of God as the word of God, there must be somewhat of the divine nature, or you will not have such a relish and savour to spiritual things.

2. Be reconciled to God. A guilty creature, what comfort can he take in the word of God, where he can see nothing but his accusation and his doom? When he looks into it, it shows him his natural face. A natural man cannot delight in the word of God, for it only revives his fears, and offers to his mind a sense of his misery. Therefore God's witnesses are said to 'torment them that dwell on the earth,' Rev. 11:10. God's word is a torment to them; to come to the word, and study the word of God, and consider his mind revealed therein, this nothing but increaseth fears. It is a vexation to them, when they would sleep securely, to have their consciences rubbing up and reviving their fears. Therefore they are not in a capacity to delight in the word of God.

Direct. 3. If you would delight in the word of God, you must get an esteem of spiritual enjoyments. Why are wicked men so greedily carried out after worldly comforts? These are the only things which they value. But until a man learns to value knowledge, and spiritual comforts, and subjection to God, and conversion of his heart to God,

he will not love the word, which is the instrument of all these benefits. When he counts these as the greatest blessings, then his heart will be carried on to them, for the word only hath a subserviency to these things. Poor low creatures value themselves by plentifulness of worldly accommodations; they will not be so much longing after them. But when they value instruction above silver, and knowledge more than their gold, as Prov. 8:10, when the heart is set upon spiritual things, then they love the word by which they might be made partakers of it.

Direct. 4. Let a man live in awe of the word, and make it his business to maintain communion with God; for this will show him the necessity of his word to comfort and to strengthen him upon all occasions. A lively Christian, that in good earnest minds his work, must have the word by him for his strength and support, as he that labours must have his meals, otherwise he will faint. Painted fire needs no fuel, and when we content ourselves with a loose and careless profession, then we will not so delight ourselves in God's book and in his statutes, and run to those things for the support of our souls. But when we make it our business, then naturally we will be carried out in love to the word.

Use 3. For trial. Have we this love to God's word? God's people love his word exceedingly. There are many do not hate it, do not oppose it, or have some cold affections this way; but have you that order of affection which the children of God do express?

1. If you have a true love to the word of God, you will much exercise yourselves therein in reading, hearing, praying, conferring, and meditating; these will be constant exercises of your souls. You will be much in reading the word, as the eunuch returning from public worship was reading a portion of scripture, Acts 8:28. It is good to

see with our own eyes, and drink out of the fountain; not barely to attend upon deductions from the word, and discourses built thereupon, but to read the book itself; and if it seem dark, God will send you an interpreter. Then you will be delighted in hearing the word. Certainly the saints will take all meet occasions for this. If he hath begotten you by the word of truth, you will be swift to hear, James 1:19. They which have experimented the power of it, there needs not much ado to press them to come and wait upon the dispensation of the word: Ps. 122:1, 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go up unto the house of the Lord.' You should be glad of these occasions of hearing God's word. Look, as in heaven all our comforts and all grace comes in there by vision, by sight, so now it comes in here in the church by hearing. Hearing is the sense exercised in the church, and therefore God's children will be much in hearing the word. Then much in conferring of it; what a man delights in he will be talking of, and so should you at home and abroad: Deut. 6:7, 'Thou shalt be talking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest in the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.' When you are at home you should be conferring of these holy things, and abroad seasoning your journey and business with gracious conference.

2. If you have this love to the word of God, you will delight to get it into your hearts. There is the great business of a Christian, that it may not only be in the Bible, but may be impressed on the heart, and expressed by a sincere, uniform, impartial obedience, when we study conformity thereto in heart and life. Hypocrites may delight in speculation, but a child of God is delighted in the obedience and in conformity to his word: Ps. 119:14, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches.' Not only in the testimonies themselves, in the naked contemplation of these blessed truths, reconciliation with God, and the way to true happiness, but in the

way and practice of these things. He that loves his rule will study an exact conformity thereunto. The love a child of God hath to the word differs from the love of a hypocrite or a temporary believer thus, by this similitude: in a rare piece of painting, an ordinary beholder takes a great deal of comfort when he seeth it or looks upon it, but this is nothing to that contentment which an artist takes in imitating and copying it out, in expressing it, when he can by his own pencil copy it out to the life; so that which a child of God delights in is when he can copy out this word of God, get it into his heart, and hold it forth in his conversation, for the scripture speaks of both. Of the word got into the heart: James 1:21, 'Receive with meekness the ingrafted word;' when it is not only an external rule, but an ingrafted word. So Ps. 37:31, 'The law of God is in his heart,' and Ps. 40:8, 'Thy law is in my heart.' Here is the great testimony of our love to God's law, when we strive to have it impressed on the heart and expressed in the conversation: Phil. 3:16, 'Let us walk by the same rule.' This is a double contentment when it comes to that, not only to the view of truth, but when the heart is a ready transcript of the word of God, when these things are not only revealed to him, but revealed in him: Gal. 1:16, 'It pleased God to reveal his Son in me.' There is a revealing things to us and a revealing things in us. Now, when this is our business, that all this may be revealed in us, and we may be cast into the mould of this doctrine, then indeed do we love the law of God: Rom. 6:17, 'Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you,' or 'whereto ye were delivered.'

3. They which love the word of God, love the whole word, even that which thwarts their natural desires, and discovers their sin to them. Paul saith, Rom. 7:12, 'The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.' What is the meaning of this disjunctive, the law and the commandment? By the commandment he means that particular law which had so strangely affected him, that had wrought

such tragical effects upon his heart, made sin revive, disturbed him, discovered himself to himself; he loves that law which broke in upon his heart with so much power and evidence, and stirred up his affections. Carnal men love the comfortable part of the word, to be feasted with privileges; but that part which urgeth them to unpleasing duties, or discovers their sins, they love not: 1 Kings 22:8, 'He doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil;' therefore I will not hear him. Though he was a prophet of the Lord, and came with the word of the Lord, yet, He never prophesied good to me; that is, such things as did please him. Do you think that was the temper of that wicked king alone? No; it is the temper of every wicked man's heart: Amos 5:10, 'They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.' All wicked men have such a disposition; they hate that part of the word which doth stir up their fears, revive their doubts, and is contrary to their lusts. It is their general disposition: John 3:20, 'Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.' They shun that part of the word whereby they might come to know themselves; either they could wish such things were not sins, or that they did not know them to be sins: 2 Peter 3:5, 'For this they willingly are ignorant of.' A guilty soul hath a secret enmity to the word of God, being loath to read his own doom there, and be much occupied and employed in that which condemns and accuseth him; as a man that hath light ware is loath to come to the balance, or a man that hath counterfeit coin is loath to come to the touchstone; so they are loath to come too close and near the word of God, that their whole course may be discovered to themselves. None but a pure sincere heart can have such a universal love to God's law.

4. If you love the word, you will ever love the word; for the same reasons that drew your heart at first continue still: Ps. 119:20, 'My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all

times.' By judgments is meant the word of God, which is the rule of God's proceeding with sinners. It was not for a pang only that he had that strong and vehement affection, but it was a constant thing at all times, it was the ordinary frame of his heart. Many men have good affections for a while, but they abide not with them; for some have an adulterous affection only; they may love the word of God while it is new, for novelty sake: John 5:35, 'Ye rejoiced for a season in his light;' and Acts 17:20, they flocked about Paul, because he seemed to be a 'setter forth of new doctrine.' This is but carnal love, that is soon altered. Or else it may be they have some love to the word during some qualm of conscience, and they may find some savour in it when they have a little trouble upon them, as we desire strong water in a pang, not as a constant diet. When they are under some working of conscience, then they run to the word; but as soon as they can lick themselves whole again, they slight it, and their love to the word is gone. As their trouble wears off, so their affection is worn off. These are driven by fearing the word, and not by the love of it. For a great while men are carried on pleasingly in their love to the word, but when it grates hard, bears hard upon conscience, and meets with their lusts, then they go away in discontent; as Herod 'heard John gladly' for a while, Mark 6:20, until his Herodias was touched, and then follows his darling sin again. Their love is to the word if carnal credit accompany it, as John was welcome to the Jews until he fell under Herod's displeasure. The stony ground received the word with much joy, 'until the sun arose with a burning heat,' Mat. 13. There are certain times when it is a credit to be religious, and when the gospel is befriended in the world; then men will have some seeming affection, but it dies away. God's children love the word for its own sake, therefore they ever love it. They which love the truth for foreign reasons, because of novelty, merely out of present necessity, public countenance, because it is in fashion and repute, or because they

thought the word would flatter them more in their sins than it doth, these do not love the word. Thus David's affection is asserted.

Secondly, We have David's assertion demonstrated, 'It is my meditation all the day.'

Doct. 2. They that love the word will be meditating therein continually.

There are two grounds for this—love causeth it, and love is increased by it.

1. Love causeth it. We are continually thinking of whatsoever we love. Rich men, that affect worldly things, are always thinking of gathering substance and increasing their worldly portion; as that man, Luke 12:17, 18, was dialogising and discoursing with himself. Carnal lovers are thinking of that they love, and ambitious men are feasting their souls with imaginations and suppositions of worldly greatness, pleasing themselves by framing images in their minds; and warriors are thinking of battles and wars, and voluptuaries are thinking of sports and pastimes, and a child of God is thinking of holy things. Love causes the soul to be more where it loves than where it lives; it is the best entertainment they can find for themselves to frame images of things loved in their minds.

2. As love begets meditation, so meditation cherishes love. Meditation is the life of all the means of grace, and that which makes them fruitful to our souls. What is the reason there is so much preaching and so little practice? For want of meditation. Constant thoughts are operative. If a hen straggleth out from her nest, she brings forth nothing, her eggs chill; so when we do not sit abroad upon holy thoughts, if we content ourselves with some few transient thoughts and glances about divine things, and do not dwell upon



them, the truth is suddenly put off, and doth no good. All actions require time and space for their operation; if hastily slubbered over, they cool; if we give them time and space we shall feel their effects. So if we hold truths in our mind, and dwell upon them, there will be an answerable impression; but when they come like a flash of lightning, then they are gone, and we run them over cursorily. That truth may work there is required three things—sound belief, serious consideration, and close application: Job 5:27, 'Lo, this we have searched it; so it is, hear it, and know thou it for thy good.'

[1.] A sound belief, for it is reality that will work upon us. Affection is always according to the strength of the persuasion.

[2.] There must be application. Every kind of operation is by the touch. The nearer the touch the greater the virtue; so the more close they are upon the heart, and touch, and concern us, the more they work upon us.

[3.] There must be consideration: we must seriously revolve these things in our mind, and debate with ourselves; as, for instance, what a strict and precise account we are to give at the day of judgment, the inexpressible pains of hell and ineffable joys of heaven. Generally we do not believe these things. If we were persuaded there is a heaven and hell, if we did think of them with application, and say, Soul, thou must one day go either to heaven or hell, thou must one day appear before God, and be put under a sentence of everlasting death, or receive a sentence of everlasting life; if we did consider them with serious and with inculcative thoughts: Is it indeed so? then let me consider what I must do; this reasoning and debating, and whetting these truths upon the heart, would work upon us, and we should sooner see the fruit. As Elisha stretched himself often upon the Shunamite's son, and kept stretching himself till the child began to

wax warm and sneezed, and then he opened his eyes, so we should spread truth upon the heart till affection begin to quicken it.

Use 1. Reproof, and that of three sorts of persons:—

1. Those that go musing of vanity all the day, and never can find a thought for God, for Christ, for the covenant, or for the great truths of the word. They have thoughts and to spare for other things. Do those love the word of God, and never spend a thought about it? Prov. 6:21. If the word were bound upon us as a jewel and chain, then when thou goest it would lead thee, when thou sleepest it would keep thee, and when thou awakest it would talk with thee. The word would ever be running upon our minds if we had any hearty affections to it. Christians, think with yourselves; have you thoughts for other things, and none for God, Christ, heaven, and everlasting glory? Would you count him to be a charitable man that should throw away his meat and drink into the kennel, rather than give to him that needs and asks it? So, would you count him to be a godly man, one that hath a sincere love to God, that hath thoughts he knows not what to do with, but casts them away upon every idle toy and base inconsiderable thing, and not a thought for God? to suffer his thoughts to run waste; yea, run riot in envious ripenings, or unclean glances, or revengeful or proud imaginations; that can have thoughts for such trifles, and never a thought for God, and forget him days without number? Jer. 2:32. Have these affections to the word of God?

2. It reproveth those persons to whom good thoughts are looked upon as a burden and melancholy interruption, and when they rush into their minds, are thrown out again like unwelcome guests. These seem to be described by those words, Rom. 1:28, 'They did not like to retain God in their knowledge;' when men like not to entertain

thoughts of God. If they fasten upon our hearts we soon grow weary of them. Christians, to a gracious heart, one that loves God and his word, thoughts of God and holy things are very comfortable and sweet: Ps. 104:34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet.' But when they are so unwelcome, and seem so troublesome to your souls, have you a love to them? To be weary of the thoughts of God is to degenerate into devils; for it is part of the devils' torment to think of God: they believe and tremble; the more explicit thoughts they have of God, the more is their horror increased. If it be so with you, judge whether you have this affection.

3. Those that read and hear, but do not meditate in order to affection and practice. This duty must have its turn too. If you will ever manifest affection, and increase affection, you must take some time to meditate and season your thoughts: James 1:24, 'For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.' They lay aside thoughts of what they hear and read, and so go into their old course again. When you hear or read anything of the word of God, the greatest part of the task is yet behind; you are to meditate, to exercise your thoughts therein. When men hear and do not meditate, it is like the seed which fell upon the pathway: Mat. 13, 'The fowls of the air came and picked it up.' When you do not labour to cover it, to get it into your heart by deep and ponderous thoughts, the devil comes and takes it away again, when you work it not into your souls. Bare hearing leaves but little impression, unless we debate and revolve it in our minds. 'God spake once, and I heard it twice,' saith Job. He had it not only at the first delivery, but at the rebound; he went it over again in his thoughts.

Use 2. Information. It informs us why we are so backward to meditate; it is for want of love: 'Oh, how love I thy law!' and then, 'It is my meditation all the day.' You think it is want of time, and want

of parts and abilities. I tell you, it is want of love. It is but a vain boasting, and the greatest hypocrisy, to say we love the law of God, and never exercise our minds therein; for where there is love it will command our thoughts; and if once you have found a heart, you will find time, abilities, and thoughts to bestow upon holy things. Love sets all the wheels of the soul awork; and therefore the great reason why meditation is so difficult is we have not such strength and such ardour of affections to the things of God. The difficulty doth not lie in the duty itself, but in the awkwardness of our hearts to the duty. You can muse upon other things, why not muse upon that which is holy?

Use 3. To press you to show love to the word of God this way by often meditating upon it; meditate upon the doctrines, promises, threatenings, man's misery, deliverance by Christ, necessity of regeneration, then of a holy life, the day of judgment. Fill the mind with such kind of thoughts, and continually dwell upon them. A good man should do so, and will do so. He should do so, Josh. 1:8; and he will do so, Ps. 1:2. Oh, do not begrudge a little time spent this way! for hereby we both evidence our love to the word and increase it.

But to quicken you hereunto:—

1. The more the heart is replenished with holy meditation, the less will it be pestered with worldly and carnal thoughts. The mind of man is restless, and cannot lie idle, therefore it is good to set it awork upon holy things. It will be working upon somewhat, and if you do not feed it with holy thoughts, what then? 'All the imaginations of the heart will be evil, only evil, and that continually,' Gen. 6:5. These are the natural products and births of our spirits. And Mat. 15:19, 'Out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts,' &c. When the heart is left to run loose, then we shall go musing of vanity and sin; therefore by frequent meditation this evil is prevented, because the mind is pre-

occupied, and possessed already by better things; nay, the mind is seasoned, and vain and carnal thoughts grow distasteful to us when the heart is stored with good matter.

2. The more these thoughts abide with us, the more the heart is seasoned and fitted for all worldly comforts and affairs. It is hard to touch pitch and not be defiled, to go up and down with a serious heart in the midst of such temptations. Nothing makes you awful and serious so much as inuring your minds with holy thoughts, so that you may go about worldly businesses in a heavenly manner. God's children are sensible of this, therefore they make it their practice to begin the day with God: Ps. 139:18, 'When I awake, I am still with thee.' As soon as they are awake they are seasoning their minds with somewhat of God. And they not only begin with God, but take God along with them in all their comfort and business: Prov. 23:17, 'They are in the fear of the Lord all the day long.' Why do vain thoughts haunt us in duty? Because it is our use to be vainly occupied. A carnal man goes about heavenly business with an earthly mind, and a godly man goes about earthly business with a heavenly mind. A carnal man's thoughts are so used to these things that he cannot take them off; but a godly man hath inured his mind to better thoughts.

3. Thoughts will inflame and enkindle your affections after heavenly things. It is beating the steel upon the flint makes the sparks fly out. So by serious inculcative thoughts we beat out affections; these are the bellows to blow up the coals. It is a very deadening thing to be always musing on vanity: Cant. 1:3, 'Thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.' When a box is broken, and the ointment poured out, when the name of God is taken in by serious thoughts, that stirs up affection.

4. By holy thoughts we do most resemble the purity and simplicity of God. We do not resemble God so much by speech and course of our actions as we do by our serious and holy thoughts, for his spiritual nature and being is best expressed by these operations of our own spirits. You can conceive of God as a spirit, always beholding himself, and loving himself; and so you come nearer as to the being of God, the more your thoughts are exercised and drawn out after holy things.

5. By these holy meditations the soul is present with God, and can solace itself with him. The apostle saith, We are absent from him in the body, but present with him by the spirit; present with him by the workings of our thoughts. This is the way to get into the company of the Spirit, to be with him, Ps. 139:18. How with him? By our thoughts, and by serious calling him to mind. God is not far from us, but we are far from him. God is not far from us in the effects of his power and goodness, but we are far from God, because our thoughts are so seldom set a work upon him. This is the way to solace ourselves with God, to be much in these holy things.

## SERMON CIII

**Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me.—VER. 98.**

IN the former verse you shall find the man of God had expressed his affections to the word, 'Oh, how I love thy law!' Now he renders the reason of his great affection, because he got wisdom thereby; a benefit of great value, as being the perfection of the reasonable nature, and a benefit highly esteemed in the world. Those which care

not for the reality of wisdom yet affect a reputation of it: Job 11:12, 'Vain man would be accounted wise, though he be born like the wild ass's colt;' though he be rude and brutish, yet he would fain be accounted wise. Knowledge was the great bait laid for our first parents; and so much of that desire is still left with us, that we had rather be accounted wicked than weak, and will sooner entitle ourselves to the guilt of a vice in morals than own any weakness in intellectuals. No man would be accounted a fool. Well, then, David's affection is justified; he might well say, 'Oh, how I love thy law!' because he got wisdom thereby, and such wisdom as carried him through all his trouble, though he had to do with crafty adversaries, as Doeg, Achitophel, and others, that excelled for worldly policy; yet, 'Oh, how I love thy law!' For, 'through thy commandments,' &c.

In which words you have—

1. The benefit gotten by the word, wisdom.
2. The original author of this benefit, thou.
3. The means, through thy commandments.
4. The benefit amplified, by comparing it with the wisdom and craft of his enemies, the politicians of Saul's court, men advanced for their great wisdom and subtlety, Thou hast made me wiser than mine enemies.
5. The manner how he came to obtain this benefit, for they are ever with me.

Doct. That God, through his commands, doth make his people wiser than their enemies.

It is but David's experience resolved into a proposition. I shall—

1. Illustrate the point by explaining the circumstances of it.

2. Then prosecute it.

First, The benefit obtained is wisdom. Mark—

1. It is not craft, or wisdom to do evil—that is to be learned in the devil's school—but divine wisdom, such as is gotten by study and obedience of God's laws: Gen. 3:1, 'The serpent was the subtlest of all the beasts in the field.' Satan's instruments are very acute in mischief, 'wise to do evil, but to do good have no knowledge,' Jer. 4:22; cunning enough in a way of sin, but to seek in every point of duty; your souls must not enter into their secrets. This wisdom should rather be unlearned; better be fools and bunglers in a way of sin, than wise to do evil: 1 Cor. 14:22, 'Brethren, in malice by ye children, but in understanding be ye men;' and Rom. 16:19, 'I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.' Simplicity here is the best wisdom.

2. It is not worldly policy, or a dexterous sagacity in and about the concernments of this life. There are some which have 'the spirit of the world,' 1 Cor. 2:12, and a genius or disposition of soul which wholly carrieth them out to riches, honours, and pleasures, and are notable in this kind of skill, in promoting their secular ends in these things. A child of God may be a fool to them for this kind of wisdom; for it is our Saviour's observation, Luke 16:8, 'The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.' Though David was wiser than his enemies, yet the children of this world are wiser in their generation, that is, as to carnal fetches and devices to accomplish their worldly purposes; in their generation, that is, about the course of their affairs. Thus David is not wiser than his enemies.



3. It is not great skill in arts and civil discipline. This is indeed a gift of God, but given promiscuously, sometimes to the good and sometimes to the bad; sometimes to the good, for Solomon could unravel all the secrets of nature, and dispute of everything from the cedar to the hyssop, 1 Kings 4:23, 29–31; and sometimes to the bad, as the heathen philosophers, many of whom knew all things almost within the circuit of the world. Yet how little this wisdom is to be valued in regard of that wisdom which we get by God's commandments, God hath in some short shown, in that he hath suffered those books which Solomon wrote concerning trees, plants, beasts, to be lost; whereas to this day the writings of the heathens are preserved, as Aristotle's book *De Animalibus*, &c. But now those books in which Solomon taught the fear of God and true wisdom, which is godliness, are, by the singular care of God's providence, conserved for our use and benefit. God hath herein shown that we might want those other books without the loss of true wisdom, but those books that indeed make us wise to salvation, these are kept. Learning is a glorious endowment indeed, but God would give us that gift by the writings of heathens; but grace, which is true wisdom, he would give us that by the holy scripture. A man may excel in learning, yet, after all the profound researches and inquiries of his high-flown reason into the mysteries of nature, he may be a very fool, and be damned for ever; for Paul saith of the philosophers: Rom. 1:22, 'Professing to be wise, they became fools;' since they had not the true knowledge of God and the way of salvation.

4. It is not a bare knowledge of God's will, but wisdom. Knowledge is one thing, and wisdom another: 'I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,' Prov. 8:12. Many are knowing men, well skilled with notions, but they want prudence or practical direction for the governing of their hearts and ordering of their ways. In the scripture you shall find faith is not only opposed to ignorance, but to folly: Luke 24:25, 'O ye fools,

and slow of heart to believe.' Every natural man is a fool, Titus 3:3, though never so notionally wise and skilled in the theory of divine knowledge: Prov. 14:8, 'The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way;' not to soar aloft in speculation, abstract from practice, and remote from spiritual influence, but to direct his course so as he may attain to the chiefest good; not only to know what is to be done, but to do what is to be known. Carnal men have great knowledge, and yet are spiritual fools for all that; they may lick the glass, and never taste the honey; or, like negroes, dig in mines of knowledge while others enjoy the gold; they may search out the mysteries of that religion which the godly man lives upon, dispute of heaven while others surprise it and take it by force; or, like the lark, soar high, but fall into the net of the fowler. A careful strict walking, that is the true wisdom; and thus we have stated the benefit.

Secondly, Here is the author of this benefit, which is God, 'Thou, through thy commandments;' which I note, not only to show to whom we must go for this wisdom: 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God,' James 1:5; nor to show to whom we must ascribe the glory of it; if we get any benefit by the word, praise belongeth to God, who is 'the father of lights, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift,' James 1:17. All candles are lighted at his torch, and all the stars owe their brightness to this sun; to the father of lights we owe all the light, wisdom, and direction that we have. I say, not only for these ends do I note it, but to show the main and principal reason why a child of God is far more safe by his godly wisdom than his enemies by all their worldly policy. Why? God is of his side, counselling, directing, and instructing him what to do; whereas they are acted and influenced by Satan: Ps. 37:12, 13, 'The wicked plotteth against the just; the Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth that his day is coming.' The wicked plotteth against him, but there is a wise God that acts for him. He doth not say the just counter-mineth the

wicked, and strains himself to match his enemy with policy and craft, but God watcheth for him. If it were only this policy against piety, it were not so much, but it is men's craft against God's wisdom: Prov. 21:30, 'There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord.' These three words express the sum and height of all natural abilities: wisdom notes a quick apprehension; understanding, a wise foresight grounded upon experience; counsel, a designation of some rare artifice and device. Now neither wisdom nor understanding nor counsel, none of these can stand against the Lord. God's children are sometimes dismayed when they consider the advantages of their enemies, their wisdom, learning, malice, experience. But here is their comfort, that they may set God against all these—God, who is the fountain of wisdom; for he is interested in their cause, his wisdom against their craft; and so, having the direction of the mighty counsellor, they are safe.

Thirdly, Here is the means, 'Through thy commandments,' or through the directions of the word. You will say, What can we learn from the word to match our enemies in policy? what wisdom will that teach us for our safety and preservation against the malice of our wicked enemies? There is our rule, and the more close and punctual we are in the observance of it, the more safe we are. A double wisdom we learn from the word of God, which is our security against the malice and craft of our enemies.

1. This wisdom we get by the commandment; it directs us how to keep in with God, which is our great wisdom; this is to stop danger at the fountain-head: Prov. 16:7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.' The way to get peace and safety in evil times is not to comply with enemies, but to comply with God. All our danger lies in his anger, not in their wrath and rage; for God can bridle them or let them loose upon us as he

sees good. He hath the hearts of all men in his hands as the rivers of water; the creature is but God's instrument, and wholly at his dispose. We have no need to fear the sword, if we do not fear him that wears the sword; nor need we fear the creature if we do not break with God. Many are troubled with the ill-will of men, or about the rage of men, and are full of fears when they meet with any opposition in their profession of godliness, and how soon men may be let loose upon them in time of danger, but look not to the cause of it, which is their offending God; therefore our chief wisdom is to serve him and study to please him. When a war is begun between two nations, the way to end it is not by a treaty with this or that private soldier, or to seek their favour, but to treat with those that employ them; so it is not to fawn and crouch and court the favour of men, but to be reconciled to God, and get him made a friend, then we need not fear man's enmity. Now this wisdom the word of God teacheth us, how to walk with all-pleasing before God, and then the creature cannot meddle with us without his leave. Another place is, Prov. 10:9, 'He that walketh uprightly walketh safely; but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.' There is no one seems to be more exposed to danger than he that is sincere, that is, strictly severe to a godly purpose, that walks uprightly, that stands strictly and precisely upon his duty to God; and yet there is no man usually more safe. But he that turneth and windeth to avoid dangers, and runs to his shifts and studied arts to provide for his own security, usually is left in the mire, and comes off with some notable blemish; he is cast from God's protection. There are but two sorts of men in the world that usually do carry their purpose; they are either those that are perfectly honest throughout, without daubing and warping, or those that are perfectly dishonest, that wholly give up themselves to a course of fraud and sin, that are resolved to boggle at nothing, neither checks of conscience nor rules of honesty or equity will stop them; these, in judgment, are permitted to carry their purpose in

worldly things. So the plain, downright, upright man, that will not for fear or favour step a jot out of God's way, but keeps close to God's direction, is the truest and most perfect politician in the world. They that are thus severe to their purpose will be found the wisest men at length, not only in the world to come, but in this world; for it is our warping and going out of God's way that causeth our trouble and confusion of thoughts.

2. The word teacheth us how to give the enemy no advantage and needless provocation. It is not enough to do good, but we must do it well, well timed and well ordered for every circumstance. Now God by his word teacheth his people so to do: Eccles. 8:5, 6, 'Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing; and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment. Because to every purpose there is time and judgment; therefore the misery of man is great upon him.' To open this: The case there spoken of is provoking rulers and men that have power in their hand. Now a man that desires to keep the commandments of God shall be taught to walk so circumspectly that he shall not needlessly provoke the wrath of men to his own ruin, nor draw down the displeasure of God upon his head. God will show him the season when to act and when to forbear, a right time and a right manner, when to oppose by way of reproof and admonition, and when to hold his peace; he will find the fit time for doing of every business which God hath stated, and the ignorance of this time costs a man a great deal of misery; for he goes on, 'To every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him.' When men are self-confident, or distempered with passion and prejudice, and consult not with God, they are carried on by headlong counsels, or moved with the impulsion of their own interest and corrupt affection into the mouth of danger. But he that makes conscience of his duty, and comes to the word of God without any private affection, he shall find time and

judgment, those important circumstances, stated and determined, when to act and when not; they shall find a fair opportunity of providence either checking or leading them on to complete their resolutions. Many a good action miscarrieth for want of observing time and judgment, or consulting with God and his word about it; when to speak, when to hold our peace, to do or not do. Another scripture that speaks to this purpose, Eccles. 7:16–18, Be not over-wise, over-foolish, over-just, over-wicked, that is the sum of what is spoken there; 'But he that feareth the Lord shall come forth of them all.' A man may many times do a thing couscientiously and upon an opinion of duty, and thereby involve himself in trouble and danger when indeed there is no necessity so to do (that is it which Solomon means); therefore, to moderate zeal with prudence, that he may neither be remiss in his own interest nor passionately violent in the concernments of God; to preserve his heart from faulty and imprudent extremes, that we may sincerely keep unto duty, yet wisely decline danger. The word of God will teach us, if, in the fear of God, without being biassed and prepossessed with any corrupt aims, we come to take the direction of it, how to walk without offence. Well, then, you see this is the wisdom God teacheth those that give up themselves to the direction of the word; they are wiser than their enemies, and this is policy enough for a Christian. It teacheth us how to please God, and how to govern and order all our affairs, that we need not needlessly exasperate and provoke men to our own ruin. So that the word of God hath more wisdom to guide him than his enemies have subtle craft to ruin and ensnare him.

Fourthly, The manner how we come to receive this benefit by the word, in that clause, 'They are ever with me.' These words may be interpreted as implying frequency of meditation, or presentness of counsel and direction, the one as the fruit of the other.

1. Frequency of meditation, 'They are ever with me;' that is, often thought of by me, for my comfort and direction. A man that exerciseth himself in the commandments of God, there is his study and business. The king of Israel, for his comfort and direction, was to have the book of the law ever before him, Deut. 17; and Josh. 1:8, 'Thou shalt meditate therein day and night.' 'They are ever with me,' the law is always in my eye and heart. It is not a slight looking into them that will give us this wisdom, but an intimate constant acquaintance, when we are much in studying out God's mind.

2. 'They are ever with me.' This may imply also that they should be a ready help. Such as derive their wisdom from without, they cannot have their counsellors always with them to give advice. But when a man hath gotten the word in his heart, he finds a ready help; he hath a seasonable word to direct him in all difficulties, in all straits, and in all temptations, to teach him what to do against the burden of the present exigence, to teach him what to do and what to hope for.

Having illustrated the words of the text, I now address myself to make good the proposition, that a child of God is wiser than his enemies. I shall do it in a twofold consideration:—

1 They are wiser in their general choice.

2. Wiser as to the particular controversy or enmity that is carried on against them by their enemies, as to those contests they have with their carnal enemies about the things of God; for I suppose these enemies here are not only such as had a private grudge, or carnal quarrels, but upon a public account; they have more wisdom by God to guide them than their enemies have craft to ruin them.

First, Supposing these enemies to be carnal men (for such are the enemies of God's people), they are wiser than their enemies in their

general choice and course of life. To determine this, let us see what is wisdom and what is folly. Saith Solomon, Eccles. 7:25, 'I gave my heart to seek out wisdom, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.' Wisdom lies in three things—(1.) In fixing a right end; (2.) In the choice of apt and proper means; (3.) In the accurateness and diligence of our prosecution. And as to degrees of comparison, he is wiser than another that hath a better end, a better way, and is more dexterous and vigorous in pursuing the means that he may accomplish his ends. For instance, if we speak of worldly wisdom, the wisdom of the world is to fix the world for our scope: 'He that will be rich,' saith the apostle, and accordingly he that busieth himself with such means as will conduce to that purpose, that wholly gives up himself to worldly pursuits, and that with all his heart and vigour makes haste to be rich; this is the wisdom of the world: 'He shall not be innocent,' saith Solomon. Then there is heavenly wisdom when we make the enjoyment of God to be our scope, take the law of God for our rule, and make religion to be our business, avoiding evils, improving all occasions, sparing no cost nor trouble to compass such a holy end, that we may come to the enjoyment of the blessed God; this is spiritual wisdom. Then, among the children of God one is wiser than another as his intention is more fixed, as his means are more regular, or as his prosecution is more exact, uniform, and industrious. He that keeps close to his purpose of glorifying God and enjoying God, and he that understands more of his rule, he is the wiser man; and he that is more accurate and industrious, and with greater self-denial doth give himself up to God; as there are some that are more heavenly, more watchful, more diligent in the spiritual life than others. Well, then, if wisdom be to be determined by these things, the children of God, that are taught by the word of God, will be found to be wiser than their enemies and all carnal men.



1. They are wiser as they have a nobler end, even the great end for which they were created, which is the enjoyment of God. Surely the higher ends any man hath, the wiser he is. Now there is none higher than God, for that which is the chiefest good that should be our utmost end. There is nothing good in itself and for itself, but only God. When we have God, we need not consider what further good to get by him, for to get him is enough. To look at anything as good in itself, without looking further what it is good for, is to put it in the place of God. Of all other things besides God we may say, What doth it serve for? what use may I put it to? what am I the better for it? But now, beyond God there is nothing to be sought; food and raiment, that is for health; and health, that is for service; and service for the glory of God. Everything riseth higher and higher, till it terminate in God. Certainly he is a wise man that lives up to the highest end, and makes this his scope to enjoy God. Well, now, he is a wise man that doth not mind trifles, but doth promote his proper, necessary, and great interest. This is our proper, great, and necessary interest, to make God our friend and heaven our portion; beyond these there is nothing more, for God is the chiefest good. Let me pursue it by another medium. Certainly a higher end is to be preferred before a subordinate, a general good before a particular, that which will yield all things, before that which will only yield us a limited or particular comfort. So he is the wiser man that chooseth God for his portion, for he that hath God 'shall inherit all things,' Rev. 21:7; and Mat. 6:33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all things shall be added;' that is a more universal good. Again, a profitable good is to be preferred before a pleasing. He that prefers a little pleasure before a solid good, you count him a fool; as Esau, that sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. And to part with all for a little temporal satisfaction, certainly that is a main folly. In short, a spiritual good is to be preferred before a corporal. Why? Because a man is more concerned as a soul than a body; therefore that wisdom

that is only 'earthly, sensual, devilish,' as the wisdom is that is not from above, James 3:15, this is all for the body or outward man; and he is called a fool that only provideth for his body, Luke 12. Why a fool? He had provided but for half his self, for the worser and more brutish part, and for that half but for a little while; therefore, 'Thou fool, this night,' &c. Then an eternal good should be preferred before a temporal. Man, that lives for ever, must have a happiness that lasts for ever. We live longer in the other world by far than here, therefore our care should be for that. Indeed, if a man did not live after death, and there were an end of him when he dies, it were the greatest wisdom to make the best use of his time here, to look no further than temporal things. Ay! but now to look after the world and neglect things to come is to be wise for the present, and be fools to all eternity. We cannot count that wisdom. Again, a necessary good is to be preferred before an arbitrary. Now 'one thing is necessary,' Luke 10:42. It is not necessary to be rich, to live in pleasure, to wallow in delights; within a while we shall not be a penny the better for these things. It is not necessary to have so great a plenty of worldly accommodations; it is not necessary to our happiness hereafter, nor to the comfort of our lives for the present to have so much here. Now, see who is the wiser man, he that looks no higher than to some subordinate end, or he that fixeth upon the last end? He that pitcheth upon some limited good, or he that pitcheth upon the most universal good that will yield him all things? He that pleaseth his fancy with toys, or he that looketh after a solid benefit? He that taketh care for his body, or he that minds his soul? He that mindeth that which is accessory or indifferent to his happiness, or he that mindeth that which is mainly necessary? He that looketh after a perishing vanity, or he that mindeth eternal happiness? Certainly if there be a God, and this God can do all things, and our happiness lies in the enjoyment of him, he is the wisest man that takes God for his

portion, and makes it his business to keep in with him; and so doth a child of God. Thus wisdom is seen in fixing our aim.

2. Wisdom lies in the choice of apt and proper means, and that is, to take the word for his rule; first God for his portion, then the word for his rule. To presume of the end, without using the means, is folly; therefore, next to a good end and scope, there must be a good path. Now, that we might not grope blindfold, and wander up and down in fond superstitions, God hath given us his word to instruct us in all things which concern our duty and our danger, and to make us every way wise to salvation, 2 Tim. 3:15. If our happiness lies in the enjoyment of God, it is meet God should appoint the way how we should come to him. We should have been at a great loss if the Lord had given us grace to fix upon him as our end, if he had not given us a rule; we would not find out our way. But now God hath so exactly chalked it out, that 'a fool shall not err therein,' Isa. 35:5; such plain directions as 'make wise the simple,' Ps. 19:7; a plain rule, found out by the wisdom of God, and so stated for all, and peremptorily commanded to all, that the most simple that will give up themselves to God's direction they shall find it. Now who are wise? they that walk in the way of their own hearts, or they that will take God's direction in his word? those that will live according to the counsel of God's word, or those that will fashion their lives according to the course of this world, or according to the customs and examples of carnal men like themselves? Who is wiser? they that will inquire after the mind of God, who is wisdom itself, and can best judge of wisdom and folly? or they which shape their course according to the secular wisdom that prevails in the world, and which hath often failed in its end? Who the wiser man? he that hath taken God's counsel, and can never be deceived, or those that walk according to the course of this world, and find themselves wholly to be deceived? Ps. 49:13, 'This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve

their sayings.' They will imitate that folly which hath been so fatal and so mischievous to others, and think themselves happy. Many carnal men when they died, they all-to-be-fooled themselves, and lamented it that they had taken no more care to please God, and walked no more closely with him; that they had been more busy about worldly things than they had been for their precious and immortal souls. Therefore surely the children of God are wiser than their opposites, that give up themselves to the vanity of carnal pursuits.

3. Wisdom lies in a vigorous prosecution of fit means to the best end, without which all is nothing. It is in vain to be sensible of our end and to be convinced of our way unless we mind to walk in it. Many carnal men will say that their happiness lies in the enjoyment of God, that the scriptures are the word of God, and his directions to attain that happiness; but their folly lies in this, that they have not a hearty consent to take this word for their rule, and give up themselves to the directions thereof: Prov. 17:16, 'Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?' that is, such means and such opportunities given them to be happy, but that is a price in the hands of a fool, his heart hangs off from the way; and therefore here is the great effect of wisdom, when we do with all our hearts give up ourselves to God, that he may take his own way with us to make us happy for ever. Wisdom lies in obedience: Deut. 4:6, 7, 'Keep, therefore, and do them; for this is your wisdom,' &c. The world will say it is a simple course to be so nice, scrupulous, and precise; but God tells you it is your wisdom; and they that keep his statutes are a wise and understanding people. The devil fills us with all kind of prejudices against religion. To such as love ease, he represents difficulty, and the yoke of Christ to be a tedious yoke. If they love honour, he tells them of reproaches and disgrace. If they affect wisdom, he telleth them it is a low doctrine, beneath the

sublimity of their parts and abilities. Now God assureth you this is your wisdom and understanding. So Job 28:28, 'And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.' There is an inquiry there in that chapter where wisdom is to be found; and it is resolved that it is nowhere to be found but in a strict obedience; not in the knowledge of the secrets of nature, not in the crafts and policies of the world, not in the plots and contrivances of the wicked, not in dexterity to get wealth, but in keeping God's commandments with all preciseness and care. Briefly, this dexterous and effectual prosecution of the means which lead to our end lies in three things, and so accordingly we may know wisdom: all these are called wisdom in scripture.

[1.] In diligence and constant labour in the spiritual life. When a man makes religion his work, then he is a wise man, true to his end. There are a company of notional fools in the world that make religion their talk but do not make it their work, that can talk at as high a rate as others; they have a naked approbation of the things of God, but do not lie under the power and dominion of them: Eccles. 10:2, 'A wise man's heart is at his right hand.' A speech which seems to be contrary to the natural posture of the heart in the body, for the heart both of the one and the other is towards his left, but a wise man's heart is at his right hand. The right hand is that which is ready for action, so a wise man is ready and prepared to obey every good work. When men are diligent, serious, and hard at work for God, 'working out their salvation with fear and trembling,' then are they thoroughly wise.

[2.] It lies in circumspection and watchfulness, when we are very heedful lest we be turned out of the way, and that we do not anything that is contrary to the will of God; therefore it is said, Eph. 5:15, 'See that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.' When is a man

a fool and when a wise man? When we are careful in all things to practise according to our light, to walk exactly according to the rules of God's word; these are the only true wise, whatever the world thinks of them. The more circumspect men are the more the world counts them fools, crazy brains, and judge it to be a fond scrupulosity to expose themselves to scorning and trouble, for that which they call a nicety; but the less circumspect, the more foolish; and the more wary and more desirous to see God's word, this is wisdom. That is the reason why it is said, 'The fear of the Lord prolongeth days,' Prov. 10:27. When men once come to stand in awe of God, when they are afraid to do anything that may displease God, and look for a warrant and rule, and desire to know the mind of God in every action, these are wise men.

[3.] This wisdom lies in self-denial, or being at some cost or charge to compass our end. A godly man knows his end will recompense him sufficiently at last, the enjoyment of God will pay for all. It is a part of folly, not wisdom, to have great aims and designs, and loath to be at charges. He that will not be at the cost will never bring any weighty matter to pass. So he is called a wise merchant that sold all for the pearl of price, Mat. 13:46. Surely heaven is worth something; therefore, if you are called to despise the delights of the flesh, the honours of the world, to part with them, to be dead to temporal interests, it seems the greatest folly in the world, but indeed it is the truest wisdom. Saith Lactantius, Usually wisdom dwells at the sign of folly. Why? Because all wisdom puts men upon some self-denial. Carnal men count it folly for a man to be dead to his conveniences and worldly concernments, and that upon the pursuit of invisible things that lie in another world: but this indeed is the greatest wisdom. There is no wisdom without some self-denial. Carnal men have a self-denial, a cursed one; none deny themselves so much as they; they part with heaven, Christ, peace, and serenity of

conscience, all the hopes, all the comforts of the Spirit, merely to please the flesh and gratify their interest in the world; all is to compass the pleasure, profits, and honours of the world, and so to dig for iron with mattocks of gold, waste precious things to compass them that are vile and contemptible.

Well, then, let us see who are wise, they that are working out their salvation, or those that are pleasing the flesh? they that are wary and circumspect, and loath to break with God, or those that run blindfold upon the greatest dangers, and go 'like an ox to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks'? Prov. 7:22. Who are wise? those that sell all for the pearl of price, or those that part with their birthright, all their hopes in God, and present sense of his love, for a little temporal convenience?

Thus I have proved the first thing, namely, that the children of God are wiser than their general choice.

## SERMON CIV

**Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me.—VER. 98**

I COME now to the second consideration, they are wiser than their enemies as to security against their attempts, and that enmity and opposition that they carry on against them; they are far more safe by walking under the covert of God's protection, than their enemies can possibly be, to have all manner of worldly advantages. I shall prove it

by this argument, because they are more prepared and furnished as to all events. A godly wise man is careful to keep in with God; he is more prepared and furnished, can have a higher hope, more expectation of success, than others have; or if not, he is well enough provided for, though things fall out never so cross to his desires.

1. As to success. Who hath made wiser provision, think you, he that hath made God his friend, or he that is borne up with worldly props and dependences? they that are guided by the Spirit of God, or they that are guided by Satan? those that make it their business to walk with God step by step, or those that not only forsake him, but provoke him to his face? those that break with men and keep in with God, or those that break with God? Surely a child of God hath more security from piety than his enemies can have by secular policy, whereby they think to overreach and ruin him. The safety of a child of God lieth in two things—(1.) God is his friend; (2.) As long as God hath work for him to do, he will maintain him and bear him out in it.

[1.] God is his friend; and that must needs be a man's wisdom when he complies with the will of him upon whom he depends. All things do absolutely depend upon the providence of God; he hath wisdom, strength and dominion over all events. The wisdom of God is on his side, and therefore it is but the wisdom of men against him. If the difference only lay between men and men, the craft and policy of their enemies and their own craft and policy, the scales would soon break of their enemies' side, for they are wiser in their generation, Luke 16. They have great abilities and great malice, which sharpens men's understandings; they have a large conscience, and more liberty to do what they will; so that a child of God is gone if it were to oppose craft with craft; and usually they carry their matters more subtilly, laying hidden snares and profound counsels; whereas the children of God carry it simply and plainly. But then there is a wise



God to act for a foolish people, and sometimes God may give his people great abilities; as Joseph was wiser than his brethren, Moses wiser than the Egyptians, Daniel than all the magicians of Babylon. But yet usually parts and secular wisdom are given to the enemies. Only a child of God hath this point of wisdom above the enemies, he taketh in with the wise God, which is the ready and compendious way to success; whereas secular wisdom takes a long way about, and must work through many mediums and subordinate causes before the intended effect can be brought about: Ps. 37:12, 13, 'The wicked plotteth against the just.' God is the other party: 'The Lord shall laugh at him; for he seeth that his day is coming.' He doth not say the just counterbalance the wicked, or strains his wit to match his enemy with craft, but God hath a providence and love, ever waking on his behalf; therefore it lies not between policy and piety, but between men's craft and God's wisdom. Then he hath the power of God on his side, and therefore he is wiser than his enemies, he is of the stronger side: Gen. 17:1, 'I am God all-sufficient; walk before me and be thou perfect.' All warping comes from doubting of God's all-sufficiency, evidenced by our carnal fear, and our distrustful care what shall become of us and how we shall do to live. Certainly, if God be able, we need not doubt, or run to indirect courses. Again, he hath him of his side who hath dominion over all events. Carnal policy is full of jealousies; they know not what will succeed, they have no sure bottom to stand upon; they are not sure of events, when their business is never so well laid. But now a child of God is wiser, and hath much the more comfortable course, as well as successful; he can do his duty, and leave the event to God. When a business is never so well and cunningly laid, yet God loves to dispose of events, and to 'take the wise in their own craft,' Job 5:12, 13. They are outwitted, and they outreach themselves, that so Christ may, as it were, get upon the devil's shoulders, and even be beholden to his enemies. Never are they such fools as when they seem to say things wisely

against God and his people. Carnal wisdom is the greatest folly: it brought Moses to the flags, but Pharaoh to the bottom of the sea. The devil was the first fool of all the creation, and ever since his first attempts against his God he hath been playing the fool for these thousands of years. The tempting our first parents seemed a masterpiece of wit, but it was indeed the ruin of his kingdom. So in the attempts of wicked men against his people, God still disposeth of the event contrary to their aim.

[2.] As long as God hath work for him to do, he will maintain him and bear him out in the midst of all dangers; that is certain; as he did David in the very face of Saul. There is an invisible guard set upon plain-hearted and zealous Christians; every day they do, as it were by their pleading against the corruptions of wicked men, exasperate them; they are in the secret of God's presence, and are kept none know how; none so nigh to dangers, yet none so free from them; in the lion's mouth, yet preserved, as Christ lived in the midst of his enemies, yet they could not touch him till his hour was come, John 11:8–10. Christ had work to do in Judea: 'Master,' say the disciples, 'the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again? And Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world; but if a man walk in the night he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.' In the disciples' question is bewrayed the true genius of carnal fear. Oh, men say, why will you go run yourself into the mouth of danger? They think the discharge of duty will cost them their utter ruin: 'Master, the Jews sought to kill thee.' Now Christ's answer showeth that men should not choose their way according to their apprehensions of danger and safety, but as God cleareth a call to them; he answers by a similitude taken from God's order in the course of nature. God made the day for work, and the night for rest and sleep; now as long as men have daylight they will not stumble,

but if they set forth in the night, then they would stumble. The meaning is, as long as a man hath a clear call from God (for a call from God is compared to the day), and can say, This is a duty God hath put upon me, he hath daylight, he shall not stumble; though he doth come and go in the face and teeth of enemies on God's cause, and plead against their corruptions and base miscarriages, he shall not stumble. Indeed, when a man is in the dark, and knows not what God's mind is, then he is ever and anon stumbling. A Christian is to study his duty rather than his danger, and then leave the care of all events to God; he is in a safe course when he is in God's way, and shall not be interrupted till he have finished his work: Luke 13:31, 32, 'The Pharisees said unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence, for Herod will kill thee. And he said, Go tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.' If he cast himself into troubles, he is sure they are not sinfully procured; but men that run on danger without a calling may meet with many a snare, or he that doth not observe his call meet with more difficulties than ever he thought of: 1 Peter 3:13, 'And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?' The best way to eschew trouble is to adhere closely to what is right in the sight of God; he can allay their fury, putting convictions upon their conscience. A man would think to stand nicely upon terms of duty is to run in harm's way; and there are none so much harmed, maligned, and opposed in the world as those that follow that which is good, as those that will have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but will reprove them rather; possibly they may hate and malign you if you keep to that which is good, but they cannot harm your consciences. God can allay the rage of men, by putting convictions upon their consciences, evidencing your sincerity; as the history saith, when the Arians persecuted the orthodox Christians, they durst not meddle with Paulinus out of reverence. Therefore who will harm you if you be followers of that which is good?

2. In case things succeed ill with him, and contrary to his expectation, yet they are wiser than their enemies can be, because they have provided for the worst. Carnal policy is but wisdom in opinion for a time, not always, while they have matter to work upon in the world; but these always, in prosperity and adversity.

[1.] Because he hath secured his great interest, which lies in the favour of God and in hopes of eternal life. God, by his commandment, hath taught him this wisdom, to make sure of the kingdom of God, and then a man is safe; whatever happens, nothing can befall him that doth endanger his hopes, or endamage his interest in Christ; if they kill him, they do but put him there where he would be; he hath secured his great interest; persecutors cannot reach the better part: Luke 12:4, they 'kill the body, after that they can do no more.' A good man, let them do what they can, can come to no hurt; he is indeed like a die; cast him high or low, still he falls upon his square; he hath a bottom to stand upon, hopes to support him.

[2.] Because he hath fitted his spirit for all kind of conditions. A man that is to go a long journey must prepare for all weathers; so a Christian must learn to be abased as well as to abound, Phil. 4. Now a mortified man hath the advantage of all the world; a man that is dead to worldly interests hath the advantage of all others for doing and suffering for God, and in noble and generous actions. It is our affections that increase our afflictions, that make us so base and pusillanimous: 1 Cor. 7:31, 'Rejoice as if you rejoiced not, weep as though ye wept not,' If our hearts did not rejoice so much in the creature, if we were in a greater indifferency to worldly things, the loss and miscarriage of them would not surprise us with so great terror. A mortified man is wiser than other men, because he hath plucked out the root of all trouble, which is an inordinate affection;

and then let his condition be never so bad, he is fortified. Temperance makes way for patience: 2 Peter 1:6, 'Add to temperance, patience.' Temperance, or a moderation in the enjoyment of all things, tends to patience in the loss of them. A man that possesseth them without love can lose them without grief. They may lessen his estate, but cannot lessen his comfort. Therefore this is the man that can 'pray always, rejoice evermore, in everything give thanks,' for giving and taking, for the word of God hath taught him this holy weanedness from worldly things.

[3.] He can look to the end of all things, not only to the present, but the future: Heb. 11:1, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' He can see victories in a downfall; and this is a wisdom proper to faith, to see the overthrow of the church's enemies when they rise up and prosper. A natural man may look above his condition as long as he seeth any probability in second causes, but 'faith is the evidence of things not seen.' When there is no probable way, then it can look above them. Reason usually is shortsighted, it 'cannot see afar off,' 2 Peter 1:9; it cannot look beyond the cloud and veil of present discouragement. But now faith can see one contrary in another, see a good end in bad means, and those things that make against them to make for them; and what in itself is hurtful, is altogether tempered by God's hand, and to the greatest good, Rom. 8:28; Ps. 37:37, 38, 'Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace; but the end of the wicked shall be cut off;' and Ps. 73:17, 'I went into the sanctuary, and there I understood their end.' Those that are governed by sense, will, and passion, cannot be wise, for they do not see to the end; but he that lives by faith looks not to appearances, but seeth the end; therefore this man can bear up with hope and courage in the midst of all difficulties and troubles.

Use 1. Caution against two things—carnal fear and carnal policy.

1. Against carnal fear. Many are troubled when they consider the power and cunning of the enemies of God's people. Ay! but you need not be dismayed when you do, in the simplicity of your hearts, give up yourselves to the direction of God's word; you need not fear all their craft; when they are confounded and broken to pieces by their own devices, you shall stand firm. It seemeth to be the greatest folly in the world to keep at a distance from the rising side; in time it will be found to be the greatest wisdom. You think they carry their matters with a great deal of cunning, whilst they slight God and tread the unquestionable interests of Christ under foot, and that the cause of God will never get up again. Since they reject the word of God, what wisdom have they? Jer. 8:9. When you fail, will you believe the word of God, or the doubtful face of outward things? Be sure once you are in God's way, and then you cannot miscarry finally. Will not Christ uphold the ministry in despite of the devil and evil men? Have we not the word of God to secure these hopes for us? Therefore what need we fear what wicked wretches attempt against us? Doth not God love righteousness? Will he not take vengeance? And in their highest prosperity, may not we see their downfall? Therefore why should we be afraid?

2. Then take heed of carnal policy; for we are made wiser than our enemies through the commandment. We must not oppose craft with craft, for so Satan will be too hard for us in the use of his own weapons. That is not wisdom to run to shifts, and to carnal and sinful devices. There is a wisdom that is necessary for the children of God: Mat. 10:16, 'I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be wise as serpents, simple as doves.' Ever it was so with God's people; they are sheep in the midst of wolves, destitute of all outward support: 'Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves.' Carry

yourselves prudently and holily in my service. That wisdom and knowledge which doth not agree with justice, but puts upon doing things that are unjust, that is craft, not wisdom. Now though Christ hath bid us be wise, yet he hath forbidden us to be crafty. When you run to carnal shifts, you think to be wiser than God. All the mischiefs of the present age have merely been occasioned by unbelief. We durst not trust God in his own way, but will run to carnal practices merely to prevent evil, and you see how we are entangled in all manner of confusion. Jeroboam would be wiser than God; God would have settled the kingdom upon him, but he ran to a way of his own, and that was his undoing. Take heed of this fleshly wisdom: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'Not in fleshly wisdom, but in simplicity and godly wisdom.' The more simple and plain a Christian walks according to the direct letter of the scripture, the more safe he is; but when he doth run to those baser courses, merely out of distrust to God, all things come to ruin. Carnal policy never succeeds well with the children of God; never did a Christian thrive by carnal policy, or using carnal fetches for carnal ends; God crosseth them. A man that will walk by the light of his own fire is sure to be led out of the way of peace and happiness. When they forsake the light of God's word and Spirit, and follow a false light, they run into sorrow and inconvenience; and therefore weaker Christians are sometimes safer than those of stronger parts, that lean to their own understandings and trust to carnal policy.

Use 2. To prize the scriptures, because of this wisdom that is to be gotten in them. A very poor creature that walks in the fear of God is wise to avoid the chiefest danger, to secure the greatest interest, to avoid hell beneath, Prov. 15:24; that wisdom hath escaped the greatest danger, the wrath of God, and made sure of heaven, Christ, and salvation, his great interest. He that gives up himself to be governed by God's word, though never so plain and simple, will be

found to be the wisest in the issue: Ps. 119:24, 'Thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors.' When God's testimonies are the men of our counsel, this is that which will give true wisdom. All things in this world are mutable and uncertain, they continue not long; we cannot foresee all changes, therefore a wise man may be mistaken sometimes, and do things he could wish were never done if he had consulted with God. Therefore now be wise; this will tell you when to act and when to forbear, not to be over-wise nor over-foolish.

Use 3. To get this wisdom from the word of God that will make you wiser than your adversaries: Prov. 4:7, 'Get wisdom, that is the principal thing, and with all thy gettings get understanding.' There are some maxims (if we would have this wisdom so as to be wiser than our enemies) and some graces.

First, Some maxims:—

1. Season the heart with this principle, that it concerns you to secure your interest in Christ rather than the world, Mat. 6:34; Luke 14:26.
2. That we should not be solicitous about events so much as duty, or about dangers so much as sin, 1 Chron. 19:13; 2 Tim. 4:17, 18.
3. That a way of duty it is better to depend upon Christ's care over us, without using any carnal reaches to secure ourselves, 1 Peter 5:7, 4:19.
4. All that befalls the people of God is either good, or tends to good, Rom. 8:28.
5. That when deliverance is more for our turn than bondage, yokes, and oppression, we shall be sure to have it. God hath engaged himself by covenant that 'he will withhold no good thing,' Ps. 84:11.



6. Close adherence to God, and constancy in obedience, is the surest way to present ease and future deliverance, Ps. 125:3.

7. It is better to attend God's leisure than to get out of trouble by any carnal means of our own, Isa. 38:15.

8. No man can be a loser by God, though he suffers never so much for him, Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17.

9. Then is our adversary wiser than we, when his opposition draws us to sin; then and then only are we foiled by our adversary.

Secondly, There are some graces also make us wise.

1. To this wisdom faith is necessary. If we could but depend upon God in a good, plain, and downright course, we would not run to shifts, nor change ourselves into all shapes and colours, cameleon-like (unless it be white); but you would support yourselves with this, that he would maintain you and bear you out.

2. Fear of God, which makes us tender of spirit, that we dare not offend God nor break a rule for all the world; he fears a commandment more than a thousand dangers: Prov. 13:13, 'He that fears the commandment shall be safe from fear of danger.' If a commandment stand in his way, he dares not go through; it is more than if all the terrors of the world stand in his way; he will endure all hazards rather than break through a command.

## **SERMON CV**

**I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my**

## **meditation.—VER. 99**

DAVID had spoken of his affection to the word of God, and then mentioned one special ground thereof, which was the wisdom that he got thereby; now this wisdom is amplified, by comparing it with the wisdom of others. Three sorts of men he mentioneth—enemies, teachers, ancients. The enemies excel in policy, teachers in doctrine, and ancients in counsel; and yet by the word was David made wiser than all these. Malice sharpens the wit of enemies, and teacheth them the arts of opposition; teachers are furnished with learning; but ancients, they grow wise by experience: yet David, by the study of the word, excelled all these. In the text we may observe two things:—

1. David's assertion concerning his profiting by the word of God, I have more understanding than all my teachers.
2. The reason, taken from his diligent use of the means, for thy testimonies are my meditation.

For the first of these, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers,' to clear the words:—

1. It is certain that he speaks not this of his extraordinary revelations as a prophet, but of that wisdom which he got by ordinary means. The holy men of God in the Old Testament, considered as prophets, so they had extraordinary visions and revelations. Now David speaks of that kind of knowledge got by the ordinary means, not those special revelations made to the prophets; for he renders the reason of it, 'Thy testimonies are my meditation.'
2. It is certain he speaks not this by way of boasting; for this is a psalm of instruction, not a history or narrative. Now the children of

God would not commend their failings to the imitation of others, and this which David speaks is rendered as a reason of his respect; by the word he got wisdom above his teachers, enemies, and ancients.

Briefly, the intent and use of this assertion will be known by considering the quality of these teachers here mentioned. You may look upon them either—(1.) As faulty or defective in their duty; (2.) As performing their duty. In both these notions David was wiser than they, or a man of a better understanding.

1. If you look upon them under a diminishing notion; so some would understand it thus, that those which instructed him in human learning and civil discipline had not understanding as he that meditated in God's testimonies. If this were the sense, there is no boasting, but only comparing knowledge with knowledge, the knowledge of the word with the knowledge of ordinary sciences; and it gives us this lesson, that the great sages of the world that do excel in secular wisdom are but fools to a child of God; they know the secrets of nature, and he knows the God of nature; they dispute about the chiefest good, and he enjoys it; they know the use of natural things, and he knoweth the use of spiritual. This wisdom and skill in outward things, compared with the fear of God, is but vanity; and the wisest man must 'become a fool that he may be wise' with this kind of wisdom, 1 Cor. 3:18.

2. You may look upon them as corrupt and sinful. In those days of Saul, the teachers might be corrupt as well as other ranks and orders of men; and then it only implies this, that God gives greater understanding to his people than to their corrupt guides: Luke 11:52, 'Woe unto you lawyers; for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.' The expounders of the law were corrupt, and hindered

others from entering into the kingdom of God. It is a great evil when the church of God is given up to such kind of guides. But now, in such a case, they that make conscience of God's ordinances, use private means with diligence, have more understanding than their teachers: Mat. 23:2, 3, 'The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not.' Though they were naught and corrupt themselves, yet if they bring God's message, it should not be slighted, because of the office and lawful authority with which they are invested, though not every way qualified for their station; and in this sense a child of God may be wiser than his teachers.

3. We may look upon them as contenting themselves with the naked theory of God's law, without making conscience of practice; that they were such kind of guides that never tasted themselves what they commended to others, or practised what they taught; then 'I have more understanding than my teachers.' He that excels in practice hath the best understanding. Practical knowledge is to be preferred before speculative, as much as the end is to be preferred before the means; the end is more noble than the means. Now speculative knowledge is the means to the end: Ps. 111:10, 'A good understanding have all they that do his commandments.' Not only know what is to be done, but do what is to be known. As for others, whatever light they seem to have, they have not wisdom and understanding: Jer. 8:9, 'Lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord, and what wisdom is in them?' They were boasting of the knowledge of the law, yet there was no wisdom in them. A mean Christian, that fears God, is a man of more understanding than he that hath a great deal of head-light; and in this sense may it be well said, the children of God are wiser than their teachers. Many times those that are unlearned rise up and take heaven by violence, when others, by all their literal and speculative knowledge, are thrust down to hell.

Suppose it spoken no way in diminution to these teachers, but that they did their duty.

4. Some comment thus; that David had more understanding than all his teachers who taught him the first rudiments of religion, that he transcended them by far, by God's blessing, in making further progress in this kind of knowledge. If this were the sense, it would teach us not always to keep to our milk and to the first principles of religion, but to wade further and further into these mysteries, Heb. 5:12, 13. We should go on still, and grow up to a greater fulness in knowledge according as we have more means and advantages. But this is not the sense, for he saith, 'than all my teachers.' Why then, secondly, take it for his godly teachers that were every way qualified; and it is no new thing for a scholar to exceed his master, and Christians of a private station many times to excel those that are in office. Look, as in secular things among the heathens, Aristotle was wiser than Plato his master, and opposed him in many things, and therefore is called an ass's colt, that as soon as he was full with the dam's milk, he kicks her; he forgot that he was his father. We should, if we can, exceed our teachers, but not despise them; and Daniel, chap. 1:20, was wiser in civil arts than all his teachers, so also it is true as to holy things. Jesus Christ at twelve years of age puzzled the doctors. Eli brought up Samuel in the fear of God, but he proved wiser than Eli; Paul, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, Acts 22:3, proved a more notable instrument of God's glory; and Austin was taught by Ambrose, but grew afterwards more eminent than he. Thus David was wiser than his teachers, and yet they might be faithful and holy. Now he mentions this partly to commend the Lord's grace, 'Thou hast made me wiser than my teachers;' and partly to commend meditation in the word, the means by which he got it; not to boast of his own attainments, but to commend grace, and commend the means of grace to others.

What may we observe from this assertion of David, 'I am wiser than my teachers'?

Obs. 1. The freeness of God's grace in making a difference between men and men as to measures and degrees of knowledge: 1 Cor. 4:7, 'Who made thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou hast not received?' some have more and some less understanding, and all is as God gives out. There is not only a difference between men and men as to their great distinction of election and reprobation, but within the sphere of election as to measures of grace. God manifests himself to some more than to others; they are admitted to this favour, to see more than others into the mind of God, though they have the same teacher, God's Spirit; the same rule and direction, God's word; the same principles of grace; yet they have greater measures of knowledge: the reasons lie in God's bosom and grace. Now this should be noted, that those which excel should be kept humble, as being more indebted to grace than others are, and surely none should be proud because more in debt; and that those who are excelled might submit, and be contented to be outshined: John 3:30, 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' It should be a rejoicing to them that God is likely to be glorified more by others; especially teachers should rejoice that God should give such a blessing to the ministry, that they which seem to be under them should see more than they. When those two quarrelling pronouns, *meum et tuum*, mine and thine, have no more use, as in heaven, then we shall fully rejoice in one another's gifts and graces, and what they enjoy it will be our comfort: as, in a choir of voices, one sings the treble, another the bass; they are refreshed, and every one delights not only in his own part and performance, but in the part of each other; all concurs to the harmony; so one hath this measure of grace, another another, and all concur to the glory of God.

Obs. 2. Not only the freeness of God's grace in giving wisdom to one more than to another, but observe also the sovereignty of God's distribution. The treasures of grace are at his free disposing, and he will not be tied to any order; he gives to every one that measure of understanding which he sees fit. Indeed his ordinary course is to bless the teachers of his people with an increase of knowledge, for he hath promised a more especial presence with the public gift than with private: Mat. 28:20, 'I am with you to the end of the world.' Yet many times private believers excel their godly teachers in wisdom and piety. Wisdom is not so tied to the teachers but that God is free to the giving as much, nay, more, to those that are taught. Though the general course is, in the ordinary way, that teachers should know more than the taught, yet God sometimes doth work extraordinarily, to show his prerogative, and absolute sovereignty; and things revealed to babes may be hid from the wise and prudent, to show that it is at his disposing, to hide and manifest as he pleaseth.

Obs. 3. The equity and proportion that he observes in the dispensation of his sovereignty, for David ascribes it to God, but observes that this came to him as a blessing upon the use of means, 'For thy testimonies are my meditation.' God gives knowledge to whom he pleaseth, but those that meditate most thrive most.

There are three sorts of meditation—(1.) Of observation; (2.) Of study and search; (3.) Of consideration or inculcative application; and all these conduce to make us wise.

1. There is a meditation of observation, when a man compares the word and providence, and is still taking notice how such a promise is accomplished, such a threatening made good; this man will grow more wise and more understanding than others: Ps. 107:43, 'Whoso is wise, and will observe those things, even they shall understand the

loving-kindness of the Lord.' That is, he that is comparing the prediction and event, God's proceedings either in justice or mercy according to his word, how he doth punish and reward his people, and what visible comments his works are upon his word, he hath a clearer discerning than others, and they will see more cause to adhere to God, and yield him more faithful obedience than others.

2. There is the meditation of study and search, they that are inquiring into the word of God to find out his mind: Eph. 5:17, 'Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.' They that exercise themselves in the word to find out his mind shall have more of his blessing than those that rest in hearing and reading: 'For with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you; and unto you that hear, shall more be given,' Mark 4:24. It is spoken of measuring to God in ordinances; as we measure to God in the use of means, so the Lord will measure out to us in his blessing and the influences of his grace.

3. There is a meditation of consideration, when we consider that which we read and hear, how it may be for use and practice, and of what moment it is for our eternal weal or woe. The scripture calls it consideration: 2 Tim. 2:7, 'Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things;' Ps. 50:22, 'Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.' The more men consider things with application to their own soul, the more wise will they grow, and the more understanding in the things of God, and able to apply all for their own direction; he will see more than the teacher ever could express when he gives forth the general doctrine of faith and manners. But let any meditate upon it, and urge his own heart, and he shall find something the teacher thought not of; and this principally is the sense spoken of in this place. A man that urgeth his own heart with what is taught, when he hath a



general doctrine applies it to his own soul, and reflects the light of it upon his own heart, meditates upon it by serious and inculcative thoughts, will ever find something either the teacher saw not, or seeing expressed not, see further into this truth than the teacher was aware of. The life and success of all means doth lie in this meditation.

Obs. 4. 'I have more understanding than my teachers.' We learn this, that private means is a duty, and meditation must be joined with public hearing. Many content themselves with public ordinances, but make no conscience of private means, as secret prayer, and debating with themselves by serious inculcative thoughts returning upon their own heart. Oh! make conscience of this private duty. You may prosper and thrive more in a way of grace. When the apostle laid down the privileges of a justified estate, Rom. 8:31, he concludes, 'Now what shall we say to these things?' implying we should urge our own heart upon every general doctrine, or rouse up ourselves with such a smart question, Heb. 2:3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?'

Obs. 5. We learn, again, that it is good to submit to God's institutions; though the persons employed in them be never so mean, yet if they be clothed with lawful authority, by a conscientious attending upon God's ordinance, we may get a great deal of wisdom more than the teacher ever had, as they set your thoughts awork. Surely, if teachers be corrupt, as they sit in Moses' chair, though they are corrupt, yet as far as they do God's message they are to be regarded. Certainly we are not to turn back upon one meaner gifted if godly, or be a discouragement to those that are weak, though they are not so able, and have not so strong a gift. God may make a mean teacher a means for the increasing of knowledge.

Obs. 6. We learn the glory of all profiting; it must not be given to the instruments, but to God, for the scholar may become wiser than the teacher; that is, God may give more grace by an instrument than the instrument hath in himself, to show that all is of him, that it doth not lie in the teacher's gift. All profiting must be ascribed to God; therefore the glory of all must redound to him, to his grace: 1 Cor. 15:10, 'By the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain: I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.' If never so able, it is still from God.

Secondly, The reason, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.'

Point. That meditation is a great help towards gracious improvement. David grew in such a manner as that he did excel all his teachers, and he giveth this reason of it: 'For thy testimonies are my meditation.' The scripture calleth for this: 1 Tim. 4:15, 'Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all. So consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things;' and Ps. 50:22, 'Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver;' and Luke 2:19, 'Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.' Here I might show—(1.) What this is; (2.) What a notable means this is for spiritual improvement and growth in knowledge; to debate things with himself, Who made him, and for what end he was made. But of this you may see at large, ver. 15.

## **SERMON CVI**

## **I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.—VER. 100**

MAN is a rational being, and should close with things more or less as they do perfect and polish his understanding. Now among all the inventions of mankind to remedy the defects of nature, not one of them can compare with the means which God offers for curing of the blindness and darkness of the mind which is introduced by the fall. Man hath found out grammar to rectify his speech, rhetoric to adorn it and make it more cogent and powerful in persuasion, logic to revive reason, medicine or physic to preserve the health of the body, politics for government of human societies, and for ordering our converse with others in the world, economics for prudent ordering of families, ethics for the tempering of each man's spirit, that it may live under the dominion of natural reason. But mark, for commerce and communion with God, wherein our happiness lies, there all the inventions of man are very short, and only the word of God can guide us, and furnish us with this wisdom; and because of this is the word so desirous and precious to the saints. 'Oh, how they love the law of God!' for it is their wisdom. Well, David having showed how it prevailed with his own heart, 'Oh, how I love thy law!' for thereby I get spiritual wisdom and understanding; to draw in other men to love and study the word, and to make this motive strong and pressing upon them, he doth compare the wisdom that men may get by the word with other things that look like wisdom; he compares it with the sagacity of enemies, the speculation and knowledge of the teacher, and the prudence we get by age and experience.

1. With the sagacity of enemies, whose wit was sharpened with their own malice. There he shows that a man that taketh counsel of the word to secure his great interest, by getting into the favour of God,

and walketh by the plain rule of the word, without consulting with flesh and blood, hath the advantage of all other men, and will be found to be the wisest man at length. He compares this wisdom he got by the word with the speculations and knowledge of teachers. He that doth not content himself with the naked rules delivered by them, but labours with his own conscience to make them profitable to his own soul, he will see more by his own eyes as to the particular duties and concernments of the spiritual life than his teachers could ever direct him unto.

2. He compares it here in the text with the wisdom of the ancients, or men of long experience. By the elders or ancients may be meant either men of former times, or aged men of the same time.

[1.] Men of former times: Heb. 11:2, 'By it the ancients or elders obtained a good report;' that is, the holy patriarchs of their time. If this be meant of men in former times, then thou hast made me wiser than the ancients recommends this observation to us, viz., the church of God is growing always, and one age sees more than another. A dwarf upon a giant's shoulders may see further than he. The ancients had their measures of light, so hath the present age: Joel 2:28–30, 'In the latter days'—meaning the times of the gospel, all that efflux of time which was between Christ's ascension and his second coming, is called 'the latter days'—'I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions,' &c. The knowledge which younger ones shall get under the New Testament is expressed by visions, dreams, and prophecy. These three were the ways of God's revealing himself to the old prophets; therefore it implies that those very truths which the prophets and holy men of God had by visions, dreams, and prophecies, by such extraordinary ways of revelation, will then be commonly known by preaching and

catechising and other means of instruction in the church of God: and thus, 'I have more understanding than the ancients.' Succeeding ages may see more into the mind of God; therefore antiquity should not sway against truth, and former ages should not prescribe to succeeding, which grow up to a further latitude and increase in knowledge.

[2.] Rather let us take it, 'I have more understanding than the ancients;' that is, than many old men of the same age. They that are slow and dull of conceit, yet by long use they grow wise; and having smarted often, they learn by their own harms to become circumspect. But here is the excellency of the word, that it made a young man wiser than those that are men of age and experience. Youths well studied in God's law may exceed men of great experience and knowledge in arts and sciences. True zeal and piety, and the defects of his age and want of experiences, are recompensed by the exactness of his rule that he takes to guide him; if he will but wholly subject and give up himself to the directions of this rule, he will not need much experience; he hath enough to guide him: 'I understand more than the ancients: because I keep thy precepts.' In which words you have—

1. The benefit that we get by God's precepts, that is understanding.
2. This benefit is amplified by comparing it with the understanding that is gotten by age and experience, I understand more than the ancients.
3. The manner of obtaining this more excellent benefit, by a diligent heed and practice, 'I understand more than the ancients.' Why? Because I keep thy precepts. So that from hence three points are to be observed:—

1. That understanding gotten by the precepts of the word is better than understanding gotten by long experience. I observe this, because David doth not speak this so much to commend his own proficiency, as to set forth the exactness of our rule and goodness of the word of God; therefore this point lies couched here.

2. That young ones may sometimes have more of spiritual wisdom than those that are ancient. I observe that, because David instanceth in his own person, though young, that he exceeded many, not only of his equals, but of his seniors.

3. The way to increase in spiritual understanding is to be studious in practical holiness. I observe this, because the reason rendered was his own diligent practice, 'I understand more than the ancients.' Why? 'Because I keep thy precepts.'

Doct. 1. That understanding gotten by the precepts of the word is better than understanding gotten by long experience. It is better in four regards:—

1. It is more exact. Our experience reacheth but to a few things, but the word of God reacheth to all cases that concern true happiness. The word is the result of God's wisdom, who is the Ancient of days, therefore exceeds the wisdom of the ancients, or experience of any man, or all men. God is more ancient than they, sees all things that have been, are, and shall be, at one view and sight; and therefore, if he will give us a rule, certainly that is more than all our experience. Experience will show us the evils of this world, and give us some rules to escape it; but the word of God tells us of evils in the next, and that with more persuasiveness and evidence than if one came from the dead, and had been wallowing in those devouring flames that had been kindled in the other world, Luke 16:30, 31. There is more exactness and completeness in this rule than possibly can be in

experience: 2 Tim. 3:17, 'The word is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.' By the man of God is meant the teacher; the prophets are called men of God, and the public teacher is the man of God. If there be enough to furnish the teacher to every good work, surely there is enough to furnish the practiser. There is enough to furnish the man of God, who is to consult not only for his own private necessity, but the necessities of others.

2. As it is a more exact, so a more sure way of learning wisdom, whereas experience is more uncertain. Many have much experience, yet have not a heart to see and to gather wisdom from what they feel: Deut. 29:2, 3, 'Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt. Yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.' They saw it, that is, had experience of it, yet not a heart to improve it: Ps. 49:13, 'This their way is their folly, yet their posterity approve their sayings.' The father gets an estate; when gotten, he thinks to enjoy it; God takes him off; their posterity live by their carnal maxims, and do not profit by their experience. Though they stand upon the graves of many that made a great bustle in the world to compass their worldly ends, yet they are never the wiser for all this. Therefore it is a great advantage to have a stated fixed rule to our hands, to have a rule of wisdom and principles given us by God himself, wherewith to steer and guide our course.

3. It is a safer and cheap way of learning, to learn by rule, than to come home by Weeping Cross, and to learn wisdom by our own smart. Experience is too expensive a way; and if we had nothing else to guide us, into how many thousand miseries should we run! how would a man's life be exposed to inevitable hazards and soul-

dangers! And if by chance he should get out of the snare (which is uncertain), yet the taint of former practices will remain in him a long time; therefore it is God's mercy he will teach us by precept rather than by experience; that he doth not teach us, as Gideon taught the men of Succoth, by briars and thorns, but that we may learn wisdom at a cheaper rate. If we were only to know (as God saith of his people, Jer. 2:19, 'Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee') when we had smarted for it, this were an expensive costly way; but if we will hearken to God's precepts, all this smart and trouble and bitterness of affliction may be saved. Therefore the precepts of God are better.

4. The way by age and experience is a long way, and so for a long time all a man's younger age must needs be miserable and foolish. Now here you may come betimes to be wise, by studying the word of God: Prov. 1:22, 'How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and ye fools hate knowledge?' It concerns a man not only to be wise at length, but to be wise betimes. The foolish virgins were wise too late, but never any were wise too soon. Therefore surely that is better which will make us wise betimes, as soon as we come to be exposed to dangers. In these respects he that applies himself to God's precepts will get more wisdom than he that gets wisdom by age and experience; he hath it in a shorter way, a safer way, a less expensive way, and in a more certain and exacter way.

Use 1. To reprove the folly of men that will not take God's directions, but will be trying experiments at their own cost; as Solomon gave out his heart to a critical search, he would find where happiness and comfort was, and at length was forced to come home by Weeping Cross, to the fear of God and keeping of his commandments. This is the whole of man, he had tried pleasure, profit, and all things. The prodigal would be running out of his father's house, and we all would



be trying, because we will not take God's word. God hath given his word here to man, we need not search elsewhere; and it is a thousand to one that, when you are trying, that ever you recover yourselves out of the snare. Here or there a man returns; I found them, saith Solomon, but there are very few; and therefore, as the prophet saith, Jer. 31:32, 'How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?' Why do you compass about? There is a shorter way to true happiness, if we had a heart to take it. Oh, but we must have our swing and our scope, and then come home by shame and sorrow: Mat. 11:28, 'Come to me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.' Mark, they that come to Christ, come not only laden with their sins, but weary with vain pursuits. But this is the fashion of man, to be running about, to be wearying himself, and contract weariness and thirst, as the prophet speaks, Jer. 2:13.

Use 2. To recommend the study of the word. O Christians! God hath provided for us better than the heathens, who were forced to hunt up and down to find a spark of wisdom here and there; it is all brought home, and suited to your hands in the word of God; there is more wisdom to be gotten there for the guiding of your affairs and course of life in order to true happiness than by age and long experience you can possibly reach. Two ways doth this appear:—

1. Because the word doth sufficiently instruct us in our duty: Prov. 2:9, 'Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.' Then! when? When you give up yourselves to God's direction, and take the law from his mouth, and walk in the way that is pointed out by his word and Spirit; you shall have enough to direct you in all your ways.

2. It doth warn us of all our dangers. It doth not only in the general call upon us 'to watch,' Mat. 13:37, and 'walk circumspectly,' Eph.

5:15, but it discovers all those deceits particularly whereby we may be surprised, diverted, and turned out of the way. There are snares in prosperity, snares in adversity; temptations you meet with in praying, trading, eating, drinking, in your public undertakings, and in your private converse; it shows your danger in all your ways, before you feel the smart of them. Therefore give up yourselves to God's direction, reading, hearing, meditating, believing, and practising; read, hear it often, then the deceits of Satan will be laid open, and the snares of your own hearts. Christians! an exact rule is of little use if you do not consult it: Gal. 6:16, 'Peace and mercy be upon all them that walk according to this rule;' that order their conversations exactly. The word signifies, that try their work as a carpenter doth by his square; they examine their actions by the word of God, what they are now a-doing, therefore consult with it often; then meditate of it, ponder it seriously: 2 Tim. 2:7, 'Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.' If we would have understanding by the word, there must be consideration. Man hath a discursive faculty to debate things with himself. Why! this is my duty. What would become of me if I step out of God's way? Here is danger and a snare; what if I should run into it now it is laid before me? And then believe it surely: Heb. 4:2, 'The word profited not, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.' Believe God upon his word without making trial. You hear much of living by sense and by faith; living by faith is when we bear up upon the bare word of God, and encourage ourselves in the Lord; but living by sense is a trying whether it be so or no; as they that will not believe hell shall feel hell, and they that will not believe the word of God shall smart for it: Heb. 11:7, 'Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark.' It may be there were no preparations to the accomplishment of the curse and judgment; the word threatened, it is a thing not seen, yet he prepared an ark. When a man is walking in an unjust course, all things prosper for a-while, the misery the

word threatens is unseen. Ay! but if you would grow wiser by the word than men can by experience, you must look to the end of things: Ps. 73:17, 'I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end.' And then practise it diligently. A young practiser hath more understanding than an ancient notionalist: Ps. 111:10, 'A good understanding have all they that do his commandments.' It is not they that are able to speak of things, and savour what the word requires, but they that do what they hear and discourse of, Gregory saith, we know no more than we practise, and we practise as we know; these two always go together. The word doth us no good unless there be a ready obedience; therefore this is wisdom, when we give up ourselves to God's direction, whatever it cost us in the world.

Doct. 2. That young ones may have many times more of this wisdom than those that are ancient.

Divers instances there are. Joseph was very young, sold into Egypt about seventeen years of age; and when he was in Egypt, Ps. 105:22, 'He taught his senators wisdom,' speaking of the senators of Egypt. With how much modesty did he carry himself when his mistress laid that snare! Isaac was young, and permitted himself to be offered to God as a sacrifice. Samuel was wise betimes. 1 Sam. 2:26, it is said, 'The child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord and also with men.' From his infancy he was dedicated to God, and God gives him wisdom to walk so that he was in favour with God and men; yea, God reveals himself to Samuel when he did not to Eli. David, when he was but fifteen years of age, fought with the lion and bear; and somewhile after that with Goliath, when he was a ruddy youth. Josiah, when he was but eight years old, administered the kingdom; before he was twelve, sets upon serious reformation. Jeremiah was sanctified from the womb, Jer. 1:5; and John the Baptist leaped in his mother's womb, Luke 1:35. In the 32d of Job,

the ancients, Job's friends, are spoken of pleading their cause; wise young Elihu brings wiser words and better arguments than those that came to comfort Job. Solomon asked wisdom of God when he was young. Daniel and his companions, those four children as they are called: Dan. 1:17, 18, it is said, 'The Lord filled them with wisdom above all the ancient Chaldeans.' And Timothy, the apostle speaks of his youth, and bids him 'flee youthful lusts;' he was young, yet very knowing, and set over the church of God. Our Lord Jesus at twelve years old puzzled the doctors. In ecclesiastical stories we read of one who at fifteen years of age died with great constancy for religion in the midst of sundry tortures. Ignatius pleads the cause of the bishop when he was but a very youth, but a man powerful in doctrine and of great wisdom; and therefore he saith, he would have them not look to his appearing youth, but to the age of his mind, to his wisdom before God. And he saith, there are many that have nothing to show for their age but wrinkles and grey hairs. So there are many young ones in whom there is an excellent spirit; and in all ages there are instances given of youth of whom it may be said that they are wise beyond their years.

For the reasons, why many times young ones may have more wisdom than those that are aged: God doth so—

1. That he might show the freedom and sovereignty of his grace. He is not bound to years, nor to the ordinary course of nature, but can work according to his own pleasure, and give a greater measure of knowledge and understanding to those that are young, and otherwise green, than he will to those that are of great age and more experience in the world. You have this reason rendered: Job 32:7–9, 'I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.' There is the course: 'But there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding. Great men are not

always wise, neither do the aged understand judgment.' Though all men have reason and a spirit, yet the Spirit of God is a wind that blows where he lists. Those that exceed others in time, may come behind them in grace. He gives a greater measure many times of grace and knowledge, to show his freedom and sovereignty.

2. Sometimes to manifest the power of his grace, both in the person that is endued with it, and the power of his grace upon others. As to the person himself in whom this wisdom is found, when they are young, the Lord doth show he can subdue them by his Spirit, and make their prejudices vanish, enlarge their understanding, and overrule their heart: 1 John 2:14, 'I write to you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.' In that slippery age, when lusts are boisterous, temptations most violent, and they usually uncircumspect and headstrong, and give up themselves to an ungoverned license, yet then can God subdue their hearts, and make them stand out against the snares of the devil. And then with respect to others, when by the foolish he will confound the wisdom of the wise, and blast the pride of man, and cast down all conceit in external privileges, and give young ones a more excellent spirit than the aged, as the apostle intimates such a thing, 1 Cor. 1:26, 'Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty.' And our Lord: Mat. 11:25, 26, 'Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.' Usually God will do so, when he will punish the unfaithfulness of those that are in public place and office: 'The law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancient.' God will

not take the usual way and course, but will give his Spirit and graces of his Spirit to them, and deny it to those that should be builders.

Now what use shall we make of this? There may be an abuse of such a point as this, and there may be a very good use.

To prevent the abuse—

1. This is not to be taken so but that there should be reverence shown to the aged, Job 32:4–6. Elihu had waited till Job's friends had spoken, because they were elder than he. It is an abuse of men of a proud persuasion of their own knowledge and learning to despise the aged, especially when they also have a competent measure of the same spirit. The scripture speaks of 'Paul the aged;' certainly there is a reverence due to grey hairs. And it argues a great disorder when the staff of government is broken, and the established order is overturned; when 'a child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient,' Isa. 3:5, and young men shall peak up to the despising of their elders, Deut. 28.

2. This is not to be applied so as to prejudice the general case of consulting with the ancients, which was Rehoboam's sin. Though God sometimes giveth wisdom to young men, yet the usual course is that, Job 32:7, 'I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.' Certainly those that are old they are freer from passions, bettered by use and experience, and long continuance in study, have more advantages to add to their knowledge; therefore usually, though the bodily eyes be dim, the understanding may be most clear and sharp.

Use 2. The use in general is twofold—that young men should not be discouraged nor despised.

1. Not discouraged. We use to say Youth for strength and age for wisdom: but if they apply their hearts to religion and the study of God's will, and with knowledge join practice, they may profit, and so as they may be a means to shame those that are elder, while they come behind them in many gracious endowments. They are not to be discouraged, as if it were too soon for them to enter into a strict course, or grow eminent therein; for God may glorify himself in their sobriety, temperance, chastity, zeal, courage, and the setting their strong and eager spirits against sin is a mighty honour to God: Ps. 8:2, 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies,' &c. The graces of God in young ones do mightily turn to the praise of his glorious grace, and God is admired in them, and it is an honour and comfort to you also: Eph. 1:12, 'In Christ before me:' it is a just upbraiding to elder people that lie longer in sin.

2. Nor yet should youth be despised: 1 Tim. 4:12, 'Let no man despise thy youth.' God's gifts should not be despised in any, nor stir up rancour. God may speak by them as he spoke by Samuel, and to Samuel when he spoke not to old Eli.

Having premised this, let me come to apply it particularly, though briefly. It conduceth then—

1. To the encouragement of youth to betake themselves to the ways of God. Oh, consider! let us begin with God betimes; do not spend your youth in vanity, but in a serious mortified course. This is your sharp and active time, when your spirits are fresh: therefore, if your watch is set right now, you may understand more than the ancients. Give up your hearts to a religious course; let not the devil feast upon the flower of your youth, and God be put off with the fragments and scraps of Satan's table. While you are young take in with God; it is a

great honour to God, and it will be an honour and an advantage to you. Mat. 21:15, 16, when the children cry 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' and the Pharisees reprov'd him for it, Christ approves of it, saying, 'Have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?' When young ones take kindly, it is a great blessing. Therefore is judgment hanging over this nation, that youth is so degenerated; whereas formerly they were addicted to religion, now they are addicted to all manner of lusts and vanity. Then it would be an honour and comfort to you; the sooner we begin with God, the more we glorify God, and the more praise to God: Eph. 1:12, 'That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.' They that get into Christ above others, they glorify grace above others: Rom. 16:7, 'They were in Christ before me.' He that first gets into Christ, he hath the advantage of others; seniority in grace is a preferment, as well as in nature. And then it is a great advantage: Eccles. 12:1, 'Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth.' When we begin betimes with God, we have more opportunity of serving and enjoying God than others have. A man should 'bear the yoke in his youth,' Lam. 3. If the bent of our inclinations were set right in our youth, it would prevent much, and hinder the growth of sin. Though a man cannot plant grace in his heart—that is the Lord's own work—yet it keeps sin in, and prevents inveterate custom, for they will grow upon us; and therefore it makes for the encouragement of you that they should sooner begin with God.

2. It makes for the encouragement of those that have the education of youth; as masters of families, parents, and the like. Do not say it is too soon for them to learn; no age is too soon for God: 2 Tim. 3:15, 'Thou hast from thy infancy learned the scriptures.' When we suck in religion with our milk, it is a great advantage; those things we keep with us that we learn young: Prov. 22:6, 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.' When



the new vessel is seasoned with this precious liquor, it will keep the taste; tender twigs are bent this way when they are as wax, capable of any impression.

Use. 3. Caution for young ones. If young men should obtain this benefit, to grow wiser than the ancients, notwithstanding this, yet they should learn to show reverence to the aged, Job 32:4–6; and then to ascribe it to God. Saith he, ver. 8, 'There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.' It is not the sharpness of our wit, but the inspiration of his grace; he is the author of all this wisdom that is wrought in us.

Use 4. To humble the aged, that have not made conscience of their time and ways, and therefore are more blockish than many children: Isa. 65:20, 'There shall be no more an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days;' old men that are ignorant of the mysteries of faith, after they have long sat under the word of God, and had many advantages to improve their youth: Heb. 5:12, 'When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.' In this sense God is said to take away the understanding of the aged; that is, by a just judgment for their unfruitfulness and unprofitableness under the means of grace. They that are much younger than you are wise in comparison of you, when they excel you for ripeness in wisdom, for solidness and settledness in manners, in a course of godliness. Those old men that draw near to the grave before they have considered either the end wherefore they came into the world, or the state into which they shall be translated when they go out of it, those are children of one hundred years old, that have nothing to reckon age by, but wrinkles and grey hairs.

Doct. 3. That the way to increase in spiritual understanding is to be studious in practical holiness.

The word, that will give you understanding, will keep you out of all snares, sufficiently direct you to true happiness. But how shall we get it? Refer it to practice; practise what you know, and you shall know more: it must needs be so:—

1. Because these are such as have God's promise: John 7:17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' They that make conscience of their ways, season their course in the fear of God, that take God's direction with them, God will tell them, they shall know what doctrine is of God.

2. They have a greater clearness of mind and understanding, therefore must needs discern holy things. Why? Because they are freed from the clouds of lust and passion, which do insensibly blind and make them stay in generals: Mat. 5:8, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' Saith Nazianzen, Where there is purity there is brightness; where there is a pure heart, there is a great deal more clearness in the understanding. Reason and fancy are dark, unless a man have a command over his passions and affections; over his passions, of anger, fear, grief; and over his affections, of love and joy, and appetite towards sensual delights; unless he be able to govern these things, he will never truly discern the mind of God for the seasoning his course in living a holy life, That of the apostle is notable, 2 Peter 1:5, 'Add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance.' Unless they be able to govern their affections in the use of worldly delights, pleasures, and profits, they will never have this practical knowledge; and therefore the only way to know divine things, as Nazianzen well observes, is

conscientiously to keep the commandments of God.' If you would know the will of God, do not spend your time in heaping up notions, but framing your heart to obedience, governing your affections by the fear of God, and suiting your hearts to the word of God. Alas! those that seek knowledge out of ambition, curiosity, and vain ostentation, and lie under the power of vile affections, get but very little true spiritual light; they may have the understanding of teachers, but not the understanding to season them, and guide them in their communion with God.

3. The more we practise, the more religion is exemplified and made sensible, so that we come to understand more of the sweetness of it; and, on the other hand, the more of difficulty is in it when there is nothing but bare notions and naked apprehensions. There we have a double advantage, an exact rule, and more experience of the sweetness, of religion: Prov. 3:17, 'All her ways are ways of pleasantness.' When we practise what we know, then we come to know the sweetness of entertaining communion with the Lord; and they know more of the difficulty of religion, they know where their hearts are more averse, and more in danger: whereas others that soar aloft in notions, and idle and lofty speculations, have not this experience.

4. They that practise, study things with more affection than others, mightily help the understanding. The more piety and zeal any man hath, the more will the Lord bless his studies. Paul profited in the Jewish religion above many of his equals. Why? Gal. 1:14, 'Being more exceedingly zealous of the tradition of my fathers.' A man that hath a zeal in anything will profit more than others; so he that hath a zeal for the things of God profits above others. A blunt iron, if red hot, will pierce through an inch board sooner than a cold tool, though never so sharp; so those that have blunt parts in comparison

of others, yet if they have zeal and good affections, they will pierce deep into the mysteries of religion; they that have sharper parts, want the fire of zeal.

5. The more fruitful any grace is, the more doth it abound with us; and therefore when your knowledge is fruitful you will find it increased by laying out your talents: Col. 1:10, 'Be fruitful in every good work, always increasing in the knowledge of God.' First he presseth knowledge in order to practice, then he presseth practice in order to knowledge. Saving knowledge is the cause of practice, and it is the effect of it.

Use 1. Learn how much practice exceeds speculation, and whereby a man's understanding is to be valued. Who is to be accounted a spiritual understanding man? Not he that hath finer notions, but he that is most skilful, and 'ready to every good work.' Do not content yourselves with a few fine opinions well dressed and curiously set forth, for all this is nothing to practice. It must needs be so, for practice is the end of knowledge. Now the end is always more worthy than the means; all the means have their loveliness from their end, and all the means have their order and measure from their end; that is, we must so use the means that we may come to such an end. Well, then, knowledge is worthy for practice sake, and only to be sought after in order to practice; not to soar aloft, but we are to be wise to sobriety; nor as wanton fancies, such as affect conceits of wit, and empty frothy notions; all should be suited to practice.

Use 2. Again, I might apply it, how ill they do that sever knowledge and a good conscience. When the age grew more knowing they were less moral in Seneca's time; as it was so with them, so it is with Christianity many times. It was the saying of one, When I compare former times with ours, times of ignorance, darkness, superstition,

they had more zeal, we have more light; where there was less knowledge there was more practice. Now we have notions like a carbuncle, which seems at a distance to be all fire, though it is quite cold; so we seem to have high floating notions concerning godliness; the head is stored with these, but hearts empty of grace, hands idle, less circumspect, more careless and loose, fruitless in good works. It shows us the cause why many, that have great dexterity in wit and excellent gifts in other things, yet are very stupid and blockish in the things of God. There is now a decay of gifts and knowledge. Why? Because professors do not refer all to practice; and then ungodliness and less practice provokes the Lord to withdraw the light. God punished the heathens with spiritual blindness, because they did not improve their knowledge; and we may justly fear it may prove so with us, who are all head, little heart; much in speculations, little, very little in practical holiness.

## **SERMON CVII**

**I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word—VER.**

**101**

THE great work of a fast-day is to put away the evil of our doings; as when a fire is kindled in a house, and begins to rage and burn fiercer, it concerns those that would stop the fury of it to remove the combustible matter. The fire of God's wrath hath been kindled amongst us, and is not yet quenched. I suppose none of you doubt your business is to remove the combustible matter, to put away your sins; this scripture will be of some use to you to that purpose.

David had spoken of that wisdom which he had got by the word of God above enemies, teachers, ancients. It was not such a wisdom as consisted in speculation, but practice; not only such as did enable him to talk high, and set his tongue awork. No; it was such as did enable him to do things worthy of God, as did set his feet awork. Our feet are slow and heavy in God's ways, but very swift to that which is evil; and therefore herein did David's wisdom consist, to bridle himself, to refrain his feet, that he might not run headlong into all manner of evil; and not only so, but that he might be also more ready to that which is good: 'I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.' Where—

1. We have David's practice, I have refrained my feet from every evil way.

2. His end or motive, that I might keep thy word; that he might be exact and punctual with God in a course of obedience.

1. In his practice. You may note the seriousness of it, 'I refrained my feet.' By the feet are meant the affections: Eccles. 5:1, 'Keep thy foot when thou goest into the house of God.' Our affections, which are the vigorous bent of the soul, do engage us to practise, therefore fitly resembled by the feet, by which we walk to any place that we do desire, so that 'I refrained my feet;' the meaning is, I keep a close and strict hand over my affections, that they might not lead me to sin. Then you may note the extent of it. He doth not only say, 'I refrained from evil,' but universally, 'from every evil way.' But how could David say this in truth of heart, because of his offence in the matter of Uriah? Ans. This was the usual frame and temper of his soul, and the course of his life; and such kind of assertions concerning the saints are to be interpreted *voce et conatu, licet non semper eventu*. This

was his errand and drift, his purpose and endeavour, his usual course, though he had his failings.

2. What was his motive and end in this? 'That I might keep thy word;' that I might be exact and punctual with God in a course of obedience, and adhere to his word uniformly, universally, impartially.

Doct. He that would keep the word must refrain his feet; that is, stand at a great distance in heart and practice from all sin.

For the illustration of the point observe—

1. A Christian must do both; he must stand at a distance from sin, and he must keep the word. There is a negative and an affirmative part in every commandment, precepts and prohibitions; we need both the bridle and the spur; the bridle, to refrain the feet from sin; and the spur, to quicken us to walk closely with God, according to the direction of his holy word. A simple abstinence from sin, without exercising ourselves unto godliness, will not serve the turn: Ps. 34:15, 'Depart from evil, and do good.' So Ps. 37:27. There is a double principle in every renewed man, flesh and spirit, Gal. 5:17; and his work is to restrain the one, to keep in the flesh that would fain break out, and range abroad in unseemly actions; and to encourage and put forth the other, the spirit in its necessary operation, with vigour and life. There is a double estate laid before us, heaven and hell; therefore we are not only to forbear sin, which is walking to hell, but we must walk worthy of God in all well-pleasing, and be fruitful in good works, which is our way to heaven, Eph. 2:10, 'Forbearing evil, and doing good.' The Pharisee's religion ran upon negatives: 'I am not an adulterer, an extortioner,' &c., Luke 18:11. Many are not vicious rather than godly, they keep themselves in a middle lukewarm estate; and though they be not defiled with foul sins, yet do not set themselves seriously to serve the Lord.

2. Both must be done with the whole man, or regarded both in heart and practice. It is not enough to leave off evil, but to hate it, nor to do good, but we must do it with a love and an affection. Compare three places: Isa. 1:16, 'Cease to do evil, learn to do well;' Amos 5:15, 'Hate the evil, love the good.' And it is expressed with a further emphasis, Rom. 12:9, 'Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good.' These places compared together will show that the outward act is not only to be regarded, but the frame of the heart. There should not only be an abstinence from the act of sin, but mortifying of the love of it; for there are many that outwardly forbear sin, but yet do not inwardly hate it. On the other side, we are not only to do good, but there must be a love to good; for many may externally do good when the heart abhors it. And on the other side, if there be a love to good, God passeth by many failings; it should not be a bare hatred, or a cold love, but such as hath life and vehemency in it, abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good—the soul of Jonathan cleaved to David—it must be a knitting love. There is Haman's refraining, Esther 5:10, and David's refraining. It is said Haman refrained himself, when his heart boiled with rancour and malice against Mordecai; and there is David's refraining in the text, 'I refrained my heart from every evil way.' His heart is engaged, when the heart cleaves to him, not easily to separate.

3. Both are regarded, and both with the whole man. Now the one is required in order to the other; we must refrain from evil that we may do good, and do good that we may refrain from evil; mortification and vivification do mutually help each other. The more lively grace is the more sin droopeth, the more lively sin is the more is the new nature oppressed. Without refraining our feet from evil there is no doing of good, for vivification is increased according to the degree of mortification: 1 Peter 2:24, 'That we, being dead to sin, might be alive to righteousness.' As long as we are alive to sin, active and



delighting in the commission thereof, we are dead to righteousness. But now, as the love and life of sin is weakened in our hearts, so is grace introduced, and we are quickened and carried on with more strength in holy duties; the strength and fervour of the soul is diverted, and runs in another channel; the same affections that are carried out to sin, the same current and stream of soul that ran out towards ourselves, then is carried in a way of grace, the same affections, but carried out to other objects. And. so on the other side, wherever there is an affection to good, there will be a cordial detestation to evil; the affection to the one will awaken and increase the hatred of the other; for still the soul draws that way which our affections carry them.

4. As the one must be done in order to the other, so our care in the first place must be to avoid evil, or to stand at a distance from every known sin. He begins with that as necessary to the other; first, 'I refrained my feet,' and then, 'that I might keep thy law;' he was to be more exact in a course of obedience. In planting of grace God keeps this method, he roots up the weeds, and then plants us wholly with a right seed, and so far as we are active under God in the work, we first 'put off the old man with his deceitful lusts,' and then, 'put on the new man,' Eph. 4:22. We put off the rags of sin before we put on the garments of salvation. The plants of righteousness will not thrive in an unhumbled, proud, impenitent heart; therefore God's first work is the destruction of sin, and then the introduction of grace. The heart is purified for faith, as well as purified by faith. First, It must be purified for faith, that being the work of the Spirit of God; for John 5:44, 'How can ye believe that seek honour one of another?' As long as any fleshly lust remains unmortified, be it ambition, vainglory, affecting honour, reputation, esteem in the world, the heart is not purified. Secondly, The heart is purified by faith, Acts 15:9; more and more this corruption is wrought out. And then the heart is purified

for fear: 'I will give a new heart,' Jer. 32:40. And then purified by fear, as Job feared God, Job 1:1. So the heart is purified for love and by love; for love: Deut. 30:6, 'And the Lord will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul.' A believer is to be considered in the act of conversion and in the state of conversion; in the act of conversion, so first we turn from evil by a sound remorse: true grace is first planted, first purified for grace, then purified by grace: Job feared God, then eschewed evil. Preparing grace is implanted in us, then it hath an exercise upon us for the weakening of sin more and more.

5. Keeping at a distance from evil; it must be as it is evil and contrary to the holy nature and will of God. I observe this, because David did not refrain his feet from evil upon any foreign and accidental reasons, for fear of men, or any sinister and by respect, but merely out of tender love and respect to the law of God, to testify his obedience to him: 'I refrained my feet from every evil way.' And what was his motive? 'That I might keep thy word.' A child of God hates sin, as it is contrary to his drift and purpose. If we do not love good for good's sake, it is not good we love, but some other thing that cleaves to it, the temporal benefit that we think will come thereby. So if we do not hate evil as evil, but because of the loss and detriment that attends the practice of it, it is not sin that we hate, but inconveniences. As Austin saith of the eternal reward, *There are many non peccare metuunt, sed ardere*—they are not afraid to sin, but are afraid to be damned. So a natural conscience may upon foreign and accidental reasons stand aloof from sin, as a dog may forbear a morsel for fear of the cudgel; convinced men may forbear sin out of horror of conscience, and not out of any serious dislike of heart against it. Briefly, there is custom, education, penalty of law, infamy, shame of the world, difficulty of compassing sin, shame in

practising. These are but accidental reasons, these may make us refrain, they may breed a casual dislike, but not a natural hatred; for a gracious refraining must be upon a religious reason. David gives an account, not only of his practice, but his motive: 'I refrained my feet from every evil way.' And why? 'That I might keep thy word.'

6. This refraining must be from every sinful course. The grace of justification will teach this, and the grace of sanctification; the grace of justification, that pardoneth all sin, will teach us to deny all, Titus 2:12; and the grace of sanctification will teach us to deny not one, but all, for that introduceth a settled hatred against sin in the soul. Now hatred is πρὸς τὰ γένη, to the whole kind; he that hates one sin as sin, hates all sin, as Haman thought scorn to lay his hands upon Mordecai alone, but sought to destroy all the seed of the Jews, Esther 3:6. So this hatred is universally carried out against all sin. Indeed they do not mortify any sin that do not mortify every sin; one lust remaining unmortified keeps the devil's interest afoot in the soul. Pharaoh, when the Israelites would have gone, would fain have a pawn of their return, their flocks, their herds, or their children, that they might be sure to come back again. So Satan, if a man be touched in conscience, and will bethink himself, and look after religion, if he can get but a pawn, a corner of the heart, one sin, he knows his interest is still kept. Herod did many things, but he had his Herodias, and that held him fast and sure to Satan. The young man had a sense of eternal life upon him, Mat. 19:22, and he did many things, 'All these have I kept from my youth,' but he was worldly. There are certain tender parts in the soul that are loath to be touched; but now if we would be sincere with God, we must refrain from every evil way. Any one man entertained besides the husband, it breaks the marriage covenant; any one sin allowed in the soul, be it never so small, it forfeits our privileges by grace.

But now, because particulars are more effective, and do strike upon the soul with the more smart blow than generals, briefly consider:—

1. We must refrain from every evil way; not only notorious sins, but those that are plausible and of more reputation in the world, that are not so rank in the nostrils of men, and expose us to such disgrace and dishonour. There are open sins that are found hateful, that have a turpitude in them, and bring shame: Gal. 5:19, ἔργα τῆς σαρκὸς, 'the works of the flesh are manifest;' such as murder, adultery, gross oppression, these are rank weeds of an ill savour, that stink in nature's nostrils, and are accompanied with shame and disgrace. To refrain from these is little thanks, Luke 18:11. The Pharisee wipes his hand of these, 'I am not an adulterer,' &c. Ay! but he was proud, censorious, and covetous. There are pride, censoriousness, covetousness, and worldliness, cloaked sins that are not of such disgrace in the world, all these should be hated by you. Many times those sins that are majoris infamiæ, of greater infamy, are not always majoris reatus, they do not leave the greatest guilt upon you. Unbelief is not infamous in the world, neglect of the gospel of grace, want of love to Christ Jesus, these are great sins: and therefore you must not only abstain from notorious sins, but those which are more plausible, and are not of such ill fame in the world.

2. You must abstain from sins outward and inward, Isa. 55:7. The sinner must not only forsake his way, but his thought; by his way is meant his outward course and practice, but he must make conscience of his thoughts, and secret workings of heart. Practices may be overruled by by-ends, but thoughts and desires, these are the genuine immediate motions and issues of the soul, that do come immediately out of the fountain, and are restrained only by grace.

3. Sins profitable and pleasant, as well as those that have no such allurements and blandishments in them. There are many sins that have nothing of allurements in them, that are entertained only upon sin's account and evil custom, as rash swearing, blasphemy, malice and the like; but there are other sins that allure and entice the soul by the promise of profit and pleasure, those two bastard goods that do make us often quit the good of honesty and duty. Now, you are to 'deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts,' Titus 2:12; worldly lusts, whatever would endanger the soul, all inordinate inclinations that carry you out to these things of pleasing the flesh and gratifying worldly interests.

4. In refraining the feet from every evil way, that is, from sins against either table, Rom. 1:18. Mark, God hath owned both tables, not only revealed his wrath against ungodliness, breaches of the first table; but against unrighteousness, breaches of the second table. Many indeed will not be unjust, intemperate, unkind to their neighbours; ay! but they express no affection to God by worshipping him in their hearts, by faith, fear, and love, or in their houses by constant prayer morning and evening, and secret and familiar in closet converses with God; they are guilty of ungodliness though not of unrighteousness. And there are many that would be much in worship, in praying, fasting, and hearing, but they forget their neighbours; they are unrighteous, they do not make conscience in their dealings with men, and in the duties of their relations are unfaithful, many times to the great dishonour of God; they do things heathens would boggle at.

5. There are great sins and small sins. Many make not conscience of small offences, count these venial. Certainly he that would have a tender regard to God's law, no sin should seem little to him that is an offence to the great God. It is Satan's custom by small sins to draw us

to greater, as the little sticks do set the great ones on fire, and a wisp of straw enkindles a block of wood; and by small sins we are enticed by Satan. The least sin allowed of is of a deadly and dangerous consequence: Mat. 5:19, 'Whosoever shall break the least of these commandments, and teach men so.' It is treason to coin a penny as well as a pound. To break the least of God's commandments, to make no conscience of them, because it is a small thing, argues a naughty heart. Bodkins may wound and stab as well as swords. Look, as we read of the prophet, he was devoured of lions, so we read of Herod, he was eaten up by lice. Small sins may be a very great mischief to the soul. Little sins are often the mother of great sins, and the grandmother of great punishments and of plagues from God; and therefore these lesser sins we must refrain from: 'I kept myself from every evil way.'

6. We must not commit anything that is evil out of a good intention, if it be an evil, but stand at a distance from it. Do not turn aside to any crooked path upon any pretence soever. Some have a good action but a bad aim. Now these do, as it were, make God serve the devil; they do the action which God hath required, but their aim is that which gratifies Satan. There are others that have a good aim but a bad action. These make the devil serve God, as if God could not provide for his own glory well enough without their sin. Therefore, if it be an evil way, refrain it, though you think you may bring good out of it. Saul would be offering sacrifice, an unwarrantable action for him to invade the priestly office, 1 Sam. 13:13, 14, He was loath to go to battle until he had sacrificed, and would not tarry till Samuel came. What then? See what Samuel saith, 'Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God which he commanded thee.' Here was a good aim, but a bad action, and you see how severe judgment fell upon him. I say, he forfeited his kingdom by doing an undue action, though for a good end. Uzzah he

put forth his hand to stay the ark, which was an undue circumstance; he had a good aim in it, that the ark of God might not be shaken, that it might not fall and be shattered in pieces, and the mysteries of their religion prostituted: 2 Sam. 6:7, 'And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error, and he died.' Many think to bear out themselves by good intentions that are drawn into an evil way; they hope to bring things to a better pass. It is dangerous to step out of God's way; God's ends can best be brought about by God's way. The judgments of the Lord upon these nations have been mainly for unwarrantable actions upon good intentions; and though usually we have committed one sin to help another, yet there hath been a pretence of a good intention, a good aim.

7. We are not only to avoid such sins as seem to lie remote from our temper and course of our business and interest, but our own special sins; those sins which suit better with our condition, constitution, calling, employment: Ps. 18:23, 'I was upright before thee, and kept myself from mine iniquity.' Every man hath his iniquity; as every man hath his particular temper, so he hath his particular sins, and if he belong to God he hath his particular graces. The saints have their particular graces; Timothy for abstinence and temperance, Job for patience, Abraham for faith, therefore stiled the father of the faithful; Moses was eminent for meekness. So there are particular sins; men are passionate, worldly, voluptuous, ambitious, and as the channel is cut, so corrupt nature finds a vent and passage: Isa. 53:6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way.' We are all out of the way, but every man hath a particular way of sin. Look, as in the natural body, every man hath all the faculties of a man, yet some this faculty more vigorous and lively than other, some for memory, judgment, invention, quickness of wit, so it is as to particular sins. Now these should be most resisted and

most opposed by us. The scripture requires of us, Mat. 5:19, 'To cut off our right hand, and pluck out our right eye;' these, if they be not watched, will run into scandal; our particular sins make us dishonour God, dishonour our profession, and become a reproach to the gospel. It is notable, when our Saviour dissuaded from giving scandal, Mat. 18:8, 9, he revives those sentences of cutting off the right hand and plucking out the right eye. These sins will make you a dishonour to the gospel if you do not watch over them.

8. There are the sins of the times wherein we live, *vitium seculi*. Indeed it is hard to keep our ground in a great flood; when a stream is strong it is ready to carry us away; but he that would be punctual with God should keep from the sins of the times. Peter dissembled with the Jews, and the godly Jews fell a-dissembling of their religion, insomuch that Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation, Gal. 2:13. When sin seems to be authorised by a general practice, it concerns you to stand at a distance, to have nothing to do there. Noah was an upright man, feared God, and served him in a corrupt age, Gen. 6:9. They are dead fishes that are carried away with the stream. We are not to walk *κατὰ τὴν αἰῶνα*, 'according to the course of this world,' Eph. 2:2, but 'to walk according to the rule,' Gal. 6:16. In many ages there are certain sins, until light disprove them, and the Lord clears up his will, that men run into, and are carried away by violence of the stream, while the stream runs that way in their age. But this will be no excuse, you are to be upright, and not carried away by *vitium seculi*, the evil way of the times.

9. We are not only to refrain our feet from evil, but from all the occasions and appearances of evil; and not to stand so much as within the scent of a temptation; as crows and ravens, when they are beaten away from the carrion, will stand within the scent. We are to stand at a great distance from all that seems to tend to sin, not only



from evil, but the appearance of it, 1 Thes. 5:22. Sin should be so hateful to us, that the very picture of it should be abhorred. Many times some sins are the occasion of others, as covetousness is occasioned by distrust, there certainly we are to avoid occasions as well as sins themselves. Ay! but if the thing be lawful, and we know our weakness, we should not easily ride into the devil's quarters, and run into the mouth of temptation. Look, as Solomon in that particular sin adviseth the young man, Prov. 5:8, 'Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house.' He would not have the young man venture upon the occasion. And God's strictness to the Nazarite is very notable, Num. 6:3, 4, as he was to drink no wine or strong drink, so no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, nor drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried; and afterwards he was not so much as to eat either the husk or kernel of the grape. Thus God would have us stand at a distance. This was a typical figure, to show at how great a distance we should stand from sin, and refrain ourselves from all evil; as the apostle saith, 'Hate the garments spotted with the flesh,' Jude 23, an allusion to those that touched an unclean thing. Rushing upon snares and occasions of evil, we hazard the surprisal of our souls. As Cæsar said of his wife, *Oportet Cæsaris uxorem non solum castam esse, &c.*—she should not only be chaste, but free from all suspicion; so God will have his people to be void of suspicion, and to be clear and innocent from all kind of transgressions. Thus you see how we are to refrain from every evil way.

The reasons of this are two—(1.) Because sins will weaken our graces; (2.) They will weaken our comfort; both which are necessary to the keeping of God's law. Therefore, if we would keep the law, and be punctual and close with God in a course of obedience, we must stand at a great distance in heart and practice from all sin.

1. Sins will weaken our graces. There are several graces necessary to the keeping of God's law, as faith, fear, love, hope. You know, at conversion God puts a vital principle into us, that is diversified and called by these several names. These graces are planted in us as principles of operation, and as these decay, our acts of obedience will be more or less; a sickly faith can produce but weak operations; as if the root wither and decay, the branches will not long flourish. So when our fear and reverence of God is lessened, as it is by every act of sin, the spiritual life will not be carried on with that exactness and care. So when our love waxeth cold, we will not be so diligent and serious, for these are the principles of operations, Rev. 3:3. When they left their first love, they left their first works. If there be a decay and diminution of our graces, then there will be an intercession of acts and operations; these graces will suffer a shrewd loss; they are qualities, and therefore capable of increase and remission, being more or less. As love may wax cold, Mat. 24:26; fear may be greater or less; so faith; though there be some seed of grace, remains to preserve the interest of the soul, yet things may be ready to die and faint. How do they decay? By sins. Gal. 5:17. These things are contrary—flesh and spirit; that is, always warring upon one another and weakening one another; and here lies the Christian's advantage, to observe which is up and which is down. By every act of deliberate sin the flesh is strengthened and grace weakened; these are up and down in a renewed heart; therefore it is good to see which prevails, that you may not weaken your strength. If you gratify the flesh, you hearten your enemy, and strengthen your clog, and so grace languisheth.

2. It weakens our comfort. Comfort is necessary to make us lively and cheerful in God's service. The Lord knows we drive on heavily when we have not that peace of conscience, serenity of mind, and want the comforts of God's Spirit. The more our hearts are enlarged the more

we run the way of God's commandments, Ps. 119:32. What is an enlarged heart? Chiefly by joy and comfort; it is joy that enlargeth the heart. Now sin weakens this joy, this comfort which is our strength. When Adam sinned, his soul was filled with horror, Gen. 3:10; and David, when he had been tampering with sin, lost his comfort: Ps. 51:8, 'Make me to hear of joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice;' and ver. 12, 'Restore to me the joy of thy salvation.' He that pricks himself with a needle or sharp thing must needs feel pain; so whosoever gives way to sin certainly will have trouble of soul, confusion, grief, fear, sorrow, and loseth his sense of salvation for a time, and sins away his peace. Always the more exact our walking, the more is our peace of conscience: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience,' &c. Well, then, if we would be punctual with God, we see how much it concerns us to stand at a distance from every evil way.

Use 1. To show how far they are from a course of obedience that live under a full power of their sins. Never think you seek after that which is good while your evil scent remains with you, and your former evils are in life and strength to this very day. All those that wallow in brutish sins of drunkenness and adultery, so those that are guilty of common swearing, Sabbath-breaking, and such like gross sins, these have good thoughts of themselves, they have sincerity towards God; but such have a spot that is not the spot of God's people. Twice there is a caution interposed that such should not be deceived, 1 Cor. 6:9; Eph. 6:6. You will say, Where lies the danger of any deceit? The worst are apt to deceive their own hearts. There is a world of these deceivings in the hearts of men; the best of saints have fallen into as great sins. They think these are but petty slips and human infirmities, and God's patience will suffer all; grace will pardon all at length, and no man is perfect; therefore they have some hopes to even those that are drunkards, adulterers, and abusers of themselves

with mankind; though their sins be as Sodom, those that fall into the grossest sins; they are apt to be deceived. Be not deceived; these things are not consistent with grace.

2. It shows how far they are from the temper of God's children that are not punctual with God in a course of obedience, that hate one kind of evil, not another. Many hate prodigality, yet not covetousness; hate covetousness, and are given up to sensuality; hate an epicure, and such a one as squanders away his estate, think as evil of him as can be, but not hard hearts, such as shut up their bowels, and do no good in their places; and some hate sensuality, but not pride, but cherish that; there is some sweet bit under his tongue, as Zophar speaks, Job 20:12. Christians! though we can subdue no sin as we should, yet we are to resist every sin, and especially to bend all the force and strength of your souls against your sins, that sin which is most apt to prevail with you: this is a sign of uprightness, Ps. 18:23. And therefore, if you would know whether you have given up yourselves to walk with God, to keep his word, what labouring hath there been with your own hearts? what pains have you taken to set against your own sins? are you most jealous of it, pray most against it, often turn the edge of the word upon it? are you observing the decays, or do you keep it under the tongue? Reason with yourselves upon the world to come; is it reserved corruption or remaining corruption? Have you never been dealing with your hearts to suppress such a corrupt inclination as you have been often foiled with?

Use 2. To press those that would be exact with God, to stand at a distance in heart and practice from every known sin; whatever urging and solicitations you have within yourselves, though it would break out, yet have you refrained. To this end let me commend two

graces and two duties. The two graces are love to God and his word, and fear to God and his word.

For the graces:—

1. A love to God, a love to the word of God. A love to God: Ps. 97:10, 'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.' It is as natural and as kindly to the new nature to hate the chiefest evil, as it is to love the chiefest good. Do you talk of love and communion with God, and never exercise yourselves in refraining your feet from every evil way? Certainly if you have any love to God, you will hate that which God hates; for *idem velle et nolle*, to will and nill the same things, that is true friendship; therefore if God be your friend, you will hate as he hates, that which makes a breach between you and God, and makes you grow shy of God, and lose your familiarity with him. As love to God, so love to his word: Ps. 119:113, 'I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love.' Certainly if a man hath a love to the law, he will not only hate sin in practice, but vain thoughts, what tends to breaking the law in his thoughts, any lesser contrariety, contradiction, or defiance of God's law; for our hatred is engaged by love. Well, get this love, set it a-work, improve it by reason (for every affection is fed by discourses of the mind). All sins are set a-work by some discourse, so graces are set a-work by discoursings of our minds. Now set this love a-work. Oh! shall I, that have tasted so much of the love of God, or that do pretend to love God and Christ, and enjoy communion with him, yield to follow sin? Ezra 9:13, 'What! after such a deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandment?' When God hath delivered us, not only out of Babylon, but, you may say, out of hell, how should we set love a-work? The great instance of God's love was the giving his Son: 1 John 4:9, 10, 'Herein is love,' &c. Now, then, if God hate and resist sin, reason and argue from this love: What! shall God give his Son for me, and I not spare a lust for God? When God

did not stand upon his Son, that was so dear and precious to him, shall I stand upon my sin? What! shall Christ die for me, to ransom me from hell? is this my kindness to my friend? Cyprian brings in Satan pleading thus, as vaunting against Christ: I never spilt one drop of blood, my back was never mangled with whips and scourges, I never had a heaven to bestow upon them; yet among all thy beneficiaries, show me any so busy, painful, diligent, exact in thy service, as these are in mine. Thou hast shed thy blood, and endured a painful and an accursed death for them; yet they are not so dutiful to thee as to me. You see whereto this tends; and shall Christ do so much for us, and we not deny our lusts for him? Surely if we have any sense of the love of Christ Jesus, it will work this hatred, this abhorrency and refraining ourselves from every evil way. Thus set love a-work.

2. Another grace is a fear of God and his word. A fear of God: Prov. 8:13, 'The fear of the Lord is to depart from evil;' Job 1:1, 'Job feared God, and eschewed evil.' Surely a fear of God will make you refrain yourselves from every evil way. And not only so, but a fear of his word, that is useful: Prov. 13:12, 'He that feareth a commandment shall be rewarded.' It is not said he that fears a judgment, but he that fears a commandment. If the word stands in his way, it is more than if all the inconveniences in the world stand in his way. This also should be improved by holy reasoning and discourse. You may reason as Joseph: The Lord seeth me, and 'how can I do this wickedness and sin against God?' Gen. 39:9. Shall I break the Lord's laws before his face? What! when my heavenly father hath forbidden me? The sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab, Jer. 34:5, 6, they were afraid to drink wine when the prophet brought pots before them. No, we dare not; our father hath commanded us the contrary. Their father was dead, and could not take cognisance of their actions, to call them to account for breaking the rule of the institution; but there

was an awe upon them. But our Father's eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth. Therefore when you are tempted to sin and folly, say, I dare not; God hath commanded me in his word to the contrary. Set fear a-work; here is a commandment stands in my way; the great God he sees all things, and will one day call us to an account.

The two duties into which these graces do run and issue themselves are watchfulness and resistance. Watchfulness; we are poor creatures, in the midst of snares, very easily may miscarry, partly through our constitution; there is flesh as well as spirit, and the flesh doth always stir, and not lie idle. Old sins, that seemed to be laid asleep, may easily waken again. The devil suits the bait to the season and affections we are under, as angels furnish their hook with a proper bait Oh! saith Bernard, here are fears, there snares; that which pleases is apt to tempt me, that which frightens is apt to terrify me. What should a poor creature do? Be watchful, stand upon your guard, that you be not surprised by the craft of Satan, that you may not swallow the hook when he sets the bait to your appetite. And then powerful resistance of evil, that sin may not prevail, and we more and more drawn off from God. Do not yield a little; smaller sins make way for greater; when the gap is once open, it is wider and wider; if sin be not stifled at first, it will increase.

## **SERMON CVIII**

## **I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.—VER. 102**

IN the former verse he had spoken of his vigilancy against evil, as the result of that wisdom which he got by the word; now he speaketh of his constant adherence to God's direction. Here you may take notice of two things—(1.) David's exactness and constancy in obedience, I have not departed from thy judgments. (2.) The reason of it, for thou hast taught me.

Branch 1. By *misphalim*, judgments, is meant God's law, for thereby he will judge the world. And the word departed not intimateth both his exactness and constancy; his exactness, that he did not go an hair's-breadth from his direction: Deut. 5:32; 'Ye shall observe to do what the Lord your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.' And his constancy is employed in it; for then we are said to depart from God and his law when we fall off from him in judgment and practice, Jer. 32:40.

Branch 2. God's institution and continual instincts. The Septuagint, *ἐνομοθέτησάς με*; and thence the vulgar, *Legem posuisti mihi*—thou hast given me that law; and so the reason would be drawn from God's authority; but rather it is meant of his internal illumination and constant direction. Observe—

1. A man that would show love to the word must show it by a constant and exact adherence to the directions thereof, whatever temptations he meet with to the contrary. David produceth this as one evidence of that affection in the first verse of this section or part: 'Oh, how I love thy law!' I shall show you—



1. What temptations there are to the contrary.
2. What reason there is to be exact and constant.

First, What temptations to the contrary.

1. From the natural instability of our own hearts; nothing is so changeable as man. We have certain heats for the present, but we soon cool again; and when temptations arise, are carried off from God, and that exactness and care that we were wont to show in our obedience to him. What was said of Reuben is true of every man in some degree, Gen. 49:4, 'Unstable as water.' It is carried hither and thither, in various and uncertain motions. So are we up and down, off and on, ebbing and flowing, not steadfast in any good frame; sometimes seen to have strong motions towards God and holiness, but anon grow cold and careless, or as a bird is now upon the top of a tree, by and by upon the under branches, and then upon the ground. Such a different posture or spirit may every one observe in himself, and sometimes in the same duty. God is always the same, and so are his ways; they have the same loveliness which they had before, but we are not always the same. The rock standeth where it did, but the waters flow to and again. The least blast of a temptation maketh us break off our course. Now this natural levity of spirit is a great hindrance to us. We do not always see with the same eyes, nor have we the same degree of affection. 'You did run well, who hindered you?' Gal. 5:7. There may be a ready forwardness, and yet a great defection afterwards. This uncertainty is not only at first, before we are settled by grace, or have any sound acquaintance with God's ways. Then it is most, James 1:8. But after conversion it remaineth with us in part. Those measures of affection and zeal which we once obtained are not constant with us, but suffer some notable decay, and our edge is often taken off and blunted. Especially our first love

is not of long standing, and our after-carriage not answerable to our promising beginnings. Now, there is no satisfying reason for this change, why we should make a halt, and grow remiss and lag in the profession of godliness, and leave off our first works; nothing but our changeableness of spirit.

2. From the furious oppositions and malice of Satan and his instruments.

[1.] Satan pursueth after men that would cleave to God's ways, as Pharaoh did after the Israelites; either to bring them back again, or to weary them and vex them, and make their present course uncomfortable to them. Now, the violent assault of multiplied temptations is apt to make us stagger and depart from that good course that we have propounded to ourselves; as the Israelites were running back to Egypt because of the inconveniences of the wilderness. But it should not be so; a Christian should stand his ground, 'Whom resist, steadfast in the faith; knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world,' 1 Peter 5:9. They that make conscience of their duty, and are most set to serve and honour God, must reckon upon the hottest battle, and sorest conflict from Satan, to hinder or discourage them therein: he watcheth all advantages, and is still in action against them. Now this should not shake us, or loosen our adherence to the truths of the gospel; for so it is with every one that goeth to heaven: he must be watching, praying, striving. Yielding is not the way to be quiet, but resisting; if you yield to him in the least, he will carry you farther and farther, till he hath left thee under a stupefied or terrified conscience: stupefied till thou hast lost all thy tenderness. A stone at the top of a hill, when it beginneth to roll down, ceaseth not till it come to the bottom. Thou thinkest it is but yielding a little, and so by degrees art carried on, till thou hast sinned away all thy profession, and all

principles of conscience, by the secret witchery of his temptations: and of the other side, terrified, till thy peace, comfort, and sweet sense of God's love be gone; and thou brought under the black horrors of a dreadful despair. Therefore a stout and peremptory resistance is the only means of safety. Consider, your case is not singular, your lot is no harder than the rest of God's children therefore do not depart from God.

[2.] Satan's instruments may rage against us, and yet we must not depart: Ps. 44:17, 18, 'All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant: our heart is not turned back, neither hath our steps declined from thy way.' All this! What? Scorn, disgrace, bloody, cruel, reprov'd, maligned, butchered, yet steadfast with God in the profession of the faith. Hazards and troubles are no excuse; this is but a time to show our love to God, our duty to God is the same still.

3. From the example of others, especially who are of esteem for godliness. Example hath a mighty force upon men. Man is a ductile creature; like sheep, they run for company; not what we ought to do, but what others do. There are three reasons—of natural corruption, the flesh, the devil. But first, example of others: Eph. 2:2, 'In time past ye walked according to the course of this world.' The universal corrupt course and custom of those among whom we live is a great snare. To follow a multitude to do evil is a strong excitement, but no sufficient excuse, especially of good men. They that are gracious may stagger strangely in reeling times, and be overtaken with dangerous mistakes. Now their sins authorise others, and draw them into the snare: Gal. 2:12, 'Carried away with their dissimulation.' A strong stream or current impetuously doth carry all things away with it. They take all for current that they do, without examining their actions, and so run away from the rule by their errors.

4. From the providence of God, which may seem to be against those that are exact right, or the sure way pointed out to us in his word, two ways:—

[1.] In the manifold disappointments as to his favouring a good cause; their endeavours blasted, many troubles befall them. God's people are often put to trials by God himself, to try the sincerity of their love. Blind Bartimeus rebuked by the disciples: Mark 10:48, 'Many charged him that he should hold his peace, but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me.' And so Christ to the woman of Canaan, Mat. 15:22–27, puts her off. And are not we put to such trials in these latter times? When we own him, God seemeth to put us off; providence appeareth with a doubtful face. They that take to the better part may be reduced to great straits; therefore sometimes it may 'happen to the righteous according to the work of the wicked, and to the wicked according to the work of the righteous' Eccles. 8:4. So variously doth God dispense external good and evil, and may seem to frown upon those that are faithful now; yet we should not depart from his judgments: Job 13:14, 'Though he kill me, yet will I trust in him.' We should wrestle through many disappointments here, or hereafter God will not own us.

[2.] By giving success to a wrong party, that layeth claim to him, to his favour in an evil way, and interpret when his providence seems to be an approbation of an evil course. It is a great temptation. God's choicest servants have been staggered by it; yet it is but a temptation: Ps. 50:21, 'I kept silence, and thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.' God may hold his hand, though they strangely transform him in their thoughts, and entitle their actions to his patronage. God trieth you: Deut. 10:2, 3, 'The Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God, with all your heart and with all your soul.' God's word is so clear and

satisfactory, that by a righteous judgment he may permit it, to try our steadfastness and obedience, not as chaff, but as solid grain. But must we not regard providences? Yes, but not interpret them against the word, but with it. It is comfortable to see the word backed with a providence, Rom. 2:18; Heb. 2:2; and Hosea 7:12; when the word is made good, and they feel that which they would not believe. Not interpret it against the word. Providence is never against the word; it is an exact comment upon it, if we had eyes to see it; and when we see it altogether we shall find it so. But now we view it by pieces, and so mistake: Rom. 8:28, 'For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to purpose;' Ps. 73:17, 'Until I went into the sanctuary, then understood I their ends.' When we look to the end of things, all hazards are over.

Secondly, The reasons why we must be exact and constant, notwithstanding these temptations. I will name but two, implied in the two words of the text, 'Thy judgments'—(1.) It is God's word; (2.) God's word is judgment.

1. It is God's direction, who cannot deceive or be deceived; you may venture your soul's temporal and eternal estate, and all upon it, upon God's bare word; for it is impossible for him to lie in his promises, Heb. 6:18, or to be deceived in his directions. The word of the Lord is a pure rule: 1 John 2:27, 'The unction teacheth you all things, and is truth, and is no lie.' There is no erring while we walk by this direction, the Spirit of God teaching us by his word; and indeed this is the effect of that great faith, to believe God upon his bare word, to believe what he hath spoken is true, and to act accordingly. If this were rooted in our hearts, we should not be so unstable, so easily foiled by Satan, discouraged by the oppositions of evil men, or live by example, but by rule, and would interpret the providence of God to the advantage, and not the prejudice of obedience: 'Whom resist,

steadfast in the faith,' 1 Peter 5:9. Adhere to the truth of the word: I know here is my direction, and in the issue will be my safety and happiness. But either we do not believe this is God's word, or do not urge the heart with God's authority and veracity, and therefore we are up and down. But now, when we determine this is God's word, and so receive it, 1 Thes. 2:13, 'When ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.' And then it is my rule; whatever it cost me. There you urge the heart with the authority of God, Mat. 16:24: a resolute giving up ourselves to God's direction, and to receive the law from his mouth. And it is a certain rule, whatever cross accidents fall out, it should be received with such certainty and absolute authority as nothing should move us. So assured of it, 'that if an angel should preach any other doctrine, let him be accursed,' Gal. 1:8; 2 Tim. 3:16; and 2 Peter 1:2. When it is believed to be the Lord's mind, it is a sure ground for faith to rest upon; it is not a doctrine found out by the wit of man, no private invention of others, but God's inspiration. God hath wisdom to direct me the safest way, and goodness and faithfulness enough not to mislead me: 'Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he teach sinners in the way,' Ps. 25:8. It is not the devices of their heads that wrote it, but the public mind of God. And saith the apostle, 'Knowing this first;' this is the first and supreme principle: he had said, ver. 19, that we should consult with the word for direction and comfort before we can get any saving light or true comfort.

2. It is judgments. Every man's doom is contained in the word, and if you can but stay a little, you shall see it verified by sensible and plain experiences. Do but wait and observe how God maketh good his promises, and accomplisheth his threatenings, and you will see no cause to depart; you will find you have done right in the issue, and that close obedience is the only way of safety and happiness here and

hereafter. David did so as to his own case: Ps. 18:21, 'I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God.' And was he a loser by it? No; 'God hath recompensed me according to the cleanness of my hands.' On the other side, those that depart from God are destroyed; his word will be made good against them: Ps. 119:119, 'Thou puttest away the wicked of the earth like dross.'

Use 1. Direction to us both in public and private cases. Be sure you follow such ways as God's word doth allow, for otherwise it is not constancy, but obstinacy; and then whatever troubles and discouragements you meet with, this will be a comfort to you, that you are in God's way.

First, As to your private case, be not discouraged by the instability of your heart and the temptations of Satan. You will be up and down with God; but observe these two rules:—

1. It is necessary to watch against your first declinings, lest by little and little the heart be stolen away from God. When you lose your savour of holy things, lessen your diligence, and are not so exact and watchful, you begin to depart from God. The gap once made in the conscience groweth wider and wider every day. The first declinings are a cause of all the rest; remitting your watch and spiritual fervour, by degrees you do not walk with such a straight foot: he that looketh to the house to keep it tight and in constant repair, prevents the fall of it.

2. If through our infirmity we miscarry at any time, we must not persist in a wrong course, but reclaim speedily, not depart wickedly, Ps. 18:21, not lie in the dirt when we have caught a fall. There is a departing out of infirmity, and a departing wickedly. A candle sucketh light if presently kindled again; the longer we lie in our sins

the worse; the more care, the more speedy, the more likely to succeed, when there is any breach between us and God; not lie in it.

Secondly, As to public actions. We live in changeable times, but it is well that we have a sure rule; this may stablish your hearts. If governed by sense and interest, with what a gracious face shall we appear to the world? Though you meet with troubles for being exact and punctual as to principles of conscience, and many disappointments from God, yet in the issue that will be found to be the best course for you and yours. Now, when you see your duty, for which you must consult both with word and Spirit, take heed of two things:—

1. Unbelief: Heb. 3:12, 'Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.' The cause of apostasy is unbelief; they do not look upon God's directions as judgments. Men that look to the present face of things cannot see things to come, and so miscarry. Hezekiah, in the midst of dangers and difficulties, was steady to God: 2 Kings 18:5, 6, 'He trusted in the Lord God of Israel: he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses.' Every duty hath a sanction, invested with promises and threatenings; therefore, as there needeth obedience to make conscience of the precept, so faith to believe the sanction, which doth enliven the duty, and keep our hearts under the awe of it.

2. Mortification; for till there be an indifferency to all events in temporal things, we shall ever be departing and turning off from God; sometimes allured out of our obedience, sometimes affrighted out of it; therefore, till dead to worldly accidents and interests, we are easily turned out of the way: Heb. 12:13, 'Lest that which is lame be turned out of the way;' that which is lame, feeble, and fearful.



Good men may be carried away thus, as Peter. Too weak and inconstant are the best of men; the least blast of temptation will make them leave off the course of well-doing, and, without respect had to conscience or credit, openly desert it. For fear of man's offence Peter slipped from his duty. Fear of losing applause, or incurring hatred with men, maketh us venture on God's dishonour; unmortified lusts make us more tender of ourselves than of God.

Second point. That divine teaching causeth constancy; for therefore David saith, 'I departed not, for thou hast taught me.' Here—

1. What it is to be taught of God; it is often spoken of in scripture: Isa. 54:13, 'All thy children shall be taught of the Lord'; John 6:45, 'All taught of God.' Now God teacheth outwardly by his word, but inwardly by his Spirit; these two must not be severed. Our hearing is necessary: Eph. 4:21, 'If so be ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus;' the ordinary means of hearing him preached, and set forth in the gospel and public ministry, and by that means doth Christ make use of it to teach us by his Spirit. So John 6:45, 'Heard and learned of the Father;' it doth not seclude a teaching ministry in the gospel; but it is said, 1 Thes. 4:9, 'Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another;' and 1 John 2:27, 'But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you; and ye need not that any man teach you, but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie; and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.' It is a rhetorical insinuation, the negative to be understood comparatively; man's teaching is nothing to what you have already by the Spirit. On the other side, much more doth it not exclude the Spirit, upon whom the efficacy dependeth. God teacheth by men, but the effect is from his grace: Mark 16:20, 'They went forth preaching the word, the Lord working with them;' 1 Cor. 3:6, 'Paul may plant, and Apollos water,

but God giveth the increase.' The internal efficacy worketh by external means: Docet Spiritus Sanctus, sed per verbum, saith Ferus, docent apostoli; sed per co-operationem Spiritus Sancti—God worketh in and by the means.

2. Inwardly God teacheth two ways—(1.) By common illumination; (2.) Special operation.

1. Common illumination, barely enlightening the mind to know or understand what he propoundeth by his messengers. So Rom. 1:20, God showed it to the heathen, 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse.'

2. But then, by way of special operation, effectually inclining the will to embrace and prosecute duties so known: Jer. 31:33, 'I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.' This way of teaching is always effectual and persuasive. Now in this sense they are taught of God, that they do not only get an ear to hear, but a heart to understand, learn, and practise.

Secondly, Why this teaching is the ground of constancy.

1. They that are thus taught of God see things more clearly than others do: God is the most excellent teacher. One man seeth a thing by candlelight, another by daylight; he seeth most clearly that seeth by noonday. The light of the Spirit doth clearly manifest things, both object and faculty. The unction teacheth us all things, 1 John 2:20, 2 Cor. 3:18.—a distinct, clear, abiding light. Carnal men are blind, 2 Peter 1:9. How sharp-sighted soever in other things, yet blind; they do not see so as to affect their hearts.

2. They know things more surely, and with certainty of demonstration; whereas others have but dubious conjectures, and loose and wavering opinions about the things of God: John 6:69, 'We believe, and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God;' John 17:8, 'Known surely that I came out from thee.' The many temptations and assaults we meet with need such a certain apprehension.

3. This teaching is so efficacious and powerful, as that the effect followeth: Ps. 86:11, 'Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth;' 1 Cor. 2:4. It is a lovely teaching, causing us to cleave to what is taught.

4. God reneweth this teaching, and is always at hand to guide us, and give counsel to us, which is cause of our standing. We need this continual teaching to keep us mindful, that we may not forget things known. The Spirit puts us in remembrance, because of the decay of fervency, and dulness of spirit that groweth upon us; therefore are truths revived to keep us fresh and lively, that we may not neglect our duty. Because of incogitancy and heedlessness we mistake our way, and are apt to run into sin in the time of trial and temptation. Therefore we need a monitor on all occasions, Isa. 30:31, that we may not be carried away with the corrupt bent of our own hearts. Well, then, this abiding in us is the cause of perseverance, 1 John 2:27.

Use. To show the reason of men's fickleness and inconstancy, both in opinion and practice. He that is led by man unto man, both as to opinion and practice, may be led off by man again, when we take up truth upon tradition and human recommendation. Oh! seek it of God: Isa. 48:17, 'I am the Lord your God, that teacheth you to profit.'

Not our own ability, but the light of the Holy Ghost; wait upon God, learn something of him every day, and give God all the glory.

## **SERMON CIX**

**How sweet are thy words unto my taste!  
yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth.—**

**VER. 103**

IN this verse you have another evidence of David's affection to the word, and that is the incomparable delight which he found therein, as being suitable to his taste and spiritual appetite. This pleasure and delight he found in the word is propounded—(1.) By way of interrogation or admiration, 'How sweet are thy words unto my taste!' As if he said, So sweet that I am not able to express it. (2.) By way of comparison, 'Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth.' To external sense nothing is sweeter than honey; honey is not so sweet to the mouth and palate as the word of God is to the soul. It is usual to express the affections of the mind by words proper to the bodily senses, as taste is put here for delight, and elsewhere eating is put for believing and digesting the truth: 'Thy word was sweet, and I did eat it,' Jer. 15:16. Again, in all kind of writers; both profane and sacred, it is usual to compare the excellency of speech to honey. The poet describes an eloquent man, that his speech flowed from him sweeter than honey. And the like we may observe in scripture: Prov. 16:24, 'Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.' He means words of wisdom, such words as come from a pure heart; now these are sweeter than honey. So the spouse; because of her gracious doctrine, it is said, Cant. 4:11, 'Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb;' and Ps. 19:10, 'More to be desired

are they than gold; yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb.' For profit, he esteemed them more than gold; for pleasure, more than honey or the honeycomb. And David saith here, 'Thy words are sweet unto my taste.' He doth not say in general, They are sweet unto the taste, but sweet unto my taste. Holy men, that have much communion with God, such as David was, they that have his Spirit, find this delight in the word of God; nothing so sweet, or so full of pleasure to the soul. Two points:—

1. That there is such a thing as spiritual taste.
2. That to a spiritual taste the word of God is sweeter than all pleasures and delights whatsoever.

Doct. 1. That there is such a thing as spiritual taste.

I shall show that it is, and what it is; the use of it, and what is requisite to it.

First, It appears that there is such a thing; the soul hath its senses as well as the body. We do not only know, but feel things to be either hurtful or comfortable to us; so the new nature doth not only know it, but doth seem to feel it, that some things are hurtful, and others are comfortable to it; and hence the apostle's expression, Heb. 5:14, 'Such have their senses exercised, to discern both good and evil.' Christians, if there be such a thing as spiritual life, certainly there must be spiritual sense; for all life is accompanied with a sense of what is good or evil for that life, and the higher the life the greater the sense. Beasts feel more than a plant when hurt is done to them, because they have a nobler life, and a man than a beast; and the life of grace being above the life of reason, there is a higher sense joined with it, and therefore the pain and pleasure of that life is greater than the pain or pleasure of any other life; for spiritual things, as they are

greater in themselves, so they do more affect us than bodily: 'A wounded conscience, who can bear it?' Prov. 18:14. What a sense doth the evil of the spiritual life leave upon the soul! And then for the comforts of the spiritual life, the joys and pleasures of it are unspeakable and glorious, 1 Peter 1:8, such joy as no tongue or words can sufficiently express. A taste of the first-fruits of glory, how sweet is it! Briefly, let me tell you there are three internal senses spoken of in scripture—seeing, tasting, and feeling. Sight implies faith: John 8:56, 'Abraham rejoiced to see my day;' and Heb. 11:27, 'By faith Moses saw him that was invisible.' There is a seeing not only with the eyes of the body, but with the eyes of the mind, things that cannot be seen with the outward sense: 'Abraham saw my day,' at so great a distance. As there is sight, so also taste; which, if we refer it to good, is nothing else but spiritual experience of the sweetness of God in Christ, and the benefits which flow from communion with him: Ps. 34:8, 'Oh, come, taste and see that the Lord is gracious.' Do not only come and see, but come and taste. The third sense is feeling or touch; that relates to the power of grace: Phil. 3:10, 'That I might know him, and the power of his resurrection,' &c. There is a sense that a Christian hath of the power of grace and of Christ upon his soul; so 2 Tim. 3:5, 'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.' When men resist the force and virtue of that religion which they profess, then they are said to deny the power of those principles. Well, then, there are spiritual senses.

Now, that we might know what they are, let me show—

1. How these spiritual senses differ from the external.

2. That in some sense they differ from the understanding.

1. These spiritual senses differ from the external sense; that I shall prove by three arguments:—

[1.] Because in those things that are liable to external sense, a man may have an outward sense of them when he hath not an inward.

[2.] There are certain things that cannot be discerned by external senses, yet a Christian may have a feeling of them by internal sense.

[3.] The outward senses sometimes set the inward senses awork.

[1.] Because in those things which are liable to external sense, a man may have an outward sense of them when he hath not an inward, as in seeing, tasting, touching.

In seeing: Deut. 29:2, compared with ver. 4, 'Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt; and yet the Lord hath not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear unto this day.' They saw, yet had not a heart to see; they saw those wonders with the eyes of their body; they had a sense outward and natural, but not a sense inward and spiritual.

So for taste; there is a taste of God's goodness in the creature; all taste it by their outward senses: Ps. 145:9, 'The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.' The wicked are not excepted from his taste; for the creatures are as useful for the preservation of their lives, as the lives of others. They do not mind God's love in it, and so do rather taste the creature, than God's goodness in the creature; but the child of God tasteth his love therein. The fly finds no honey in the flower, but the bee doth. A fleshly palate relisheth only the gross pleasure of the creature, not that refined delight which a spiritual palate hath, who hath a double sweetness; it doth not only receive the creature for its natural use, but it tastes God, and feels the love of God in the conscience as well as the warmth of the creature in his bowels.

So for feeling: Jer. 3:25, 'We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God.' Men may feel the blows of his providence, and be sensible of the natural inconvenience, yet they have not a spiritual feeling so as to be affected with God's displeasure, and have a kindly impression left upon the soul, that may make them return to God.

[2.] It differs from the outward senses, because they can by a spiritual sense discern that which cannot be discerned by the outward sense; as in that place, Heb. 11:27, 'By faith Moses saw him that was invisible;' see the invisible God, and are as much affected with his eye and presence as if he were before the eyes of the body, as others are awed by the presence of a worldly potentate; this is matter of internal sense. So for taste; they have meat which the world knows not of, invisible comforts, John 4:37. They have hidden manna to feed upon, and are as deeply affected with a sense of God's love, and hopes of eternal life, as others are with all outward dainties. Then as to feeling; many things the outward sense cannot discern; sometimes they feel spiritual agonies, heartbreakings: when all is well and sound without, a man would wonder what they should be troubled about, that abound in wealth and all worldly comforts and accommodations. They have an inward feeling, they feel that which worldly men feel not; when they are afflicted in their spirits, carnal comforts can work nothing upon them; when they are afflicted outwardly, spiritual comforts ease their heart. And as they feel soul agonies and soul comforts, so they feel the operations of the spiritual life; they have a feeling of the power of the Spirit working in them; they live, and know that they live, Now no man knows that he lives but by sense; therefore if a child of God knows he lives, he hath internal sense as well as external. We know we live naturally by natural sense, and we know we live spiritually by spiritual sense: Gal. 2:20, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;' he lived, and knew that



he lived. They have a life which they feel within themselves, the operations and motions of the spiritual life; they feel its impulsions to duty, its abhorrences from sin; tendency of soul to God, and spiritual supports; and they feel the stirrings of the old nature, workings of heart towards sin and vanity, which the outward senses cannot discover.

[3.] The outward senses sometimes set the inward senses awork. The sweetness of those good things which are liable to sense, puts us in mind of the sweetness of better things; as the prodigal's husks put him in mind of the bread in his father's house; or as the priests of Mercury among the heathen, when they were eating figs, they were to cry, Truth is sweet, because the god whom they worshipped was supposed to be the inventor of arts, and the discoverer of truth. So Christians, when by the outward taste they find anything sweet, the inward sense is set awork, and they have a more lively feeling of spiritual comforts; as David, honey is sweet, but the word of God was 'sweeter than honey to him, or the honeycomb.' Thus Christ, when he was eating bread, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God,' Luke 14:15; and they that have Christ's spirit, they act suitably.

2. This sense differs from a bare and simple act of the understanding. Why? For a man may know things that he doth not feel. Simple apprehension is one thing, and an impression another. An apprehension of the sharpness of pain is not a feeling of the sharpness of pain. Jesus Christ had a full apprehension of his sufferings all his life-long, but felt them not until his agonies, therefore he said, John 12:27, 'Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?' We have notions of good and evil, when we neither taste the one nor the other. It is one thing to know sin to be the greatest evil, and another thing to feel it to be so; to know the excellency of Christ's love, and to taste the sweetness of it, this doth not only

constitute a difference between a renewed and carnal man, but sometimes between a renewed man and himself.

[1.] Between renewed men and carnal men; they know the same truths, yet have not the same affections. A carnal man may talk of truths according to godliness, and may dispute of them, and hold opinions about them, but doth not taste them; so he does but know the grace of God in conceit, not in truth and reality, as the expression is, Col. 1:6. As a man only that hath read of honey may have a fancy and imagination of the sweetness of it, but he that tastes it knows it in truth and in effect; they know the grace of God, and the happiness of being in communion with God, by the light of nature, in conceit, but not in reality; but the other they taste it: 'If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious,' 1 Peter 2:3. There is an impression of sweetness left upon the soul, and real experience of the goodness of God in Christ, so as to make them affect him with all their hearts, to choose him for their portion, and to make his will their only rule, and obey and serve him, whatever it cost them. They have such a taste of this sweetness, as doth engage their hearts to a close and constant adherence to Christ. Carnal men have only a naked knowledge of these things, weak and ineffectual notions and apprehensions about them; and if the sublimity, reasonableness and suitableness of these truths to soul necessities cause any taste, it is but slight, slender, and insufficient. So indeed temporaries and hypocrites are said to 'taste the heavenly gift, the good word of God, and powers of the world to come,' Heb. 6:4. They have some languishing apprehensions, but they do not so taste them as to relish and feed upon them. They do not relish Christ himself, but only some benefit which they hope to get by him upon slight and easy terms; have not such experience and sweetness of God in Christ, as that their souls should constantly cleave to him. It may be their fancy may be pleased a little in a supposition and possibility of salvation by Christ, or in some general

thought of those large promises and great offers which God makes in the gospel, not as it enforceth duty and subjection to God; well, then, it differs from a bare understanding of the goodness of God's ways.

2. This constitutes a difference sometimes between a renewed man and himself, as to some things; his inward senses are not always alike quick and lively; he is still like-minded as he was, but yet not alike affected; his sight is not so clear, nor taste so acute, nor his feeling so tender; though he hath the same thoughts of things he had before, yet his spiritual sense is benumbed, and is not at all times affected alike, while he keeps his spiritual eye clear from the clouds of lust and passion; he is otherwise affected with things to come than he is when his eye is blinded with inordinate passion and love to present things; and while he keeps his taste, how sweet and welcome is this to his soul, the remembrance of Christ, and salvation by him! And so, while he keeps his heart tender, he is sensible of the least stirring of sin, and is humbled for it; and the least impulsion of grace, to be thankful for it. Those instructions, reproofs, consolations, which at some times either wound or revive their spirits, at other times do not move them at all; their senses are benumbed, not kept fresh and lively. And thus in the general I have proved that there is such a thing as spiritual taste.

Secondly, What is this spiritual sense? It is an impression left upon our hearts, which gives us an ability to relish and savour spiritual things; but it cannot be known by description so much as by these two questions:—

1. The use of it, what doth this taste serve for?
2. What are the requisites that we may have such a taste and relish of divine and spiritual things?

1. What doth this taste serve for? There is a threefold use of them:—

[1.]. To discern things good and wholesome from things noxious and hurtful to the soul; that is the use of spiritual sense in general, to discern things good and evil, Heb. 5:14; Job 6:30, 'Is there iniquity in my tongue? Cannot my taste discern perverse things?' God hath given all sensitive creatures a taste, whereby they may distinguish between things pleasant or bitter, sweet or sour, wholesome or unwholesome, savoury or unsavoury, that they may choose what is convenient to nature; so the new creature hath a taste to know things, things contrary to the new nature, and things that will keep it in life: Job 12:11, 'Doth not the ear try words, and the mouth taste his meat?' or, as it is more plain, Job 34:3, 'For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat.' Spiritual taste distinguished between what is salubrious and profitable to us, that which is the pure word, milk agreeable to the new nature; and what is frothy, garnished out with the pomp of eloquence, it is tasteless to a gracious soul, if it suiteth not with the interests of the new nature: they have a faculty within them, whereby they distinguish between men's inventions and God's message. A man of spiritual taste, when reason is restored to its use, he comes to a doctrine, and many times smells the man; saith he, this is not the breast-milk that must nourish me, the pure milk of the word by which I must grow in strength and stature; and if he finds anything of God, he owns God; he discerns what is human and what is divine.

[2.] The use of this taste is also to refresh and comfort the soul in the sweetness of spiritual things: Cant. 2:3, 'I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste;' the taste of Christ's fruit in the comforts of redemption; the fruit that grows there is sweet and pleasant to the new nature. When the love of God to sinners in Christ is not only heard but believed, not only believed

but tasted, it ravisheth and transports the soul with sweet delight and content, that excels all the pleasures of the world.

[3.] It serves for this use, to preserve the vitality of grace, that is, to keep it alive and in action. *Omnis vita gustu ducitur*—every life hath its food, and the food must be tasted. This grace quickeneth us to look after that food; it keeps the new creature free for its operations, helps it to grow: 1 Peter 2:3, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' The truths of the gospel are as necessary and natural for the cherishing and strengthening the spiritual life as the milk of the mother is to the new-born babe, and taste is necessary that we may relish it. They that have a taste have an appetite, and they delight in the word more than in any other thing; whereas those that have no taste or appetite, grow not up to any strength, they thrive not.

2. What is requisite to cause this taste? (1.) Something about the object; (2.) Something about the faculty.

[1.] Something about the object, which is the word of God. Eating, or taking into the mouth, that is necessary before tasting; for the tongue is the instrument of taste; the outward part of the tongue that serves for meats, the inward part, towards the root, for drink. So for this spiritual taste there is required eating, or taking in the object, therefore we read often of eating the word of God: Jer. 15:16, 'Thy word was sweet, and I did eat it;' and Ezek. 3:3, we read of eating the roll; it is interpreted spiritually, 'I did eat it;' then follows his taste, 'it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.' So Rev. 10:10, 'I took the little book and ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.' There was somewhat of prophetic vision in these things, but generally it is carried not an outward and literal eating, but a

spiritual taste, relishing the sweetness of it. Well, then, the word must not only be read and heard, but eaten. What is this spiritual eating of the word? Three things are in it, and all make way for this taste. (1.) Sound belief; (2.) Serious consideration; (3.) Close application. He that would have a taste of spiritual things, these three things are necessary.

(1.) That there be a sound belief of it. Men have not taste, because they have not faith; we cannot be affected with what we do not believe: Heb. 4:2, 'The word profited not, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.' What is the reason men have no taste in the doctrine of God, and in the free offers of his grace? It is not mingled with faith, and then it wants one necessary ingredient towards this taste. So 1 Thes. 2:13, 'Ye received the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.' If you would have spiritual sense, faith makes way for it: we must take the word as the word of God. When we read in feigned stories of enchanted castles and golden mountains, they affect us not, because we know they are but witty fictions, pleasant fables, or idle dreams; and such atheism and unbelief lies in the hearts of men against the very scriptures, and therefore the apostle seeks to obviate and take off this: 2 Peter 1:16, 'We have not followed cunningly devised fables,' intimating there is such a thought in man's heart. Certainly if men did believe the mystery, that is without controversy great, that God hath indeed sent his Son to redeem the world, and would indeed bestow heaven and eternal happiness upon them, they would have a greater taste; but they hear of these things as a dream of mountains of gold, or rubies falling from the clouds. If they did believe these glorious things of eternity, their hearts would be ravished with them.

(2.) As faith is necessary, so serious consideration, by which we concoct truths, and chew them, and work them upon the heart, that

causeth this sweetness; by knocking on the flint the sparks fly out: those ponderous and deep inculcative thoughts of divine and heavenly things make us taste a sweetness in them. When we look slightly and superficially into the word, no wonder we do not find this comfort and sweetness; but when we dig deeply into the mines of the word, and work out truths by serious thoughts, and search for wisdom, when we come to see truth with our own eyes in its full nature, order, and dependence, this is that which gets this taste: Prov. 24:13, 14, 'My son, eat thou honey, because it is good, and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste. So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul, when thou hast found it.' When men are serious, look into the nature, and see all truths in their order and dependence, then they will be like honey and the honeycomb; this makes way for this sweet taste.

(3.) There is necessary to this taste close application; for the nearer and closer things touch one another, the greater their efficacy; so the more close you set the word home upon your own hearts, the more it works: Job 5:27, 'Know it for thy good;' break out thy portion of the bread of life, look upon these promises and offers of grace as including thee, these commands speaking to thee, and these threatenings as concerning thee; look upon it not only as God's message in common, but urge it upon thy soul: Jer. 15:16, 'It was unto me the rejoicing of my heart.' There must be a particular application of these things. These things are necessary to this taste with respect to the object; as there must be eating, a taking into the mouth, if we would taste, so there must be a digesting or working upon the word, by sound belief, serious consideration, close application.

[2.] As to this taste, there is somewhat necessary as to the soul or faculty; we must have a palate qualified for these delicacies. Now

there is a double qualification necessary to this taste—a hungry conscience and mortified affections.

(1.) A hungry conscience. Without this, a man hath a secret loathing of this spiritual food, his taste is benumbed; but to a hungry conscience the word is sweet, when he is kept in a constant hungering after Christ and his grace: Prov. 27:7, 'The full soul loatheth the honeycomb, but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.' Cordials, they are nauseous things to a full stomach; oh but how reviving, comfortable, and sweet are they to a poor broken heart! The first time that we got this taste, it was when we were under the stings of a guilty conscience, then God came and tendered his grace to us in Christ; he sent a messenger, one of a thousand, to tell us he hath found a ransom, and that we shall be delivered from going down into the pit; that he will spare us, and do us good in Christ Jesus, then the man's flesh recovers again like a child's, Job 33:25. When men have felt the stings of the second death, and God comes with a sentence of life and peace by Christ, how sweet is it then! Now, though we have not always a wounded conscience, yet we must always have a tender conscience, always sensible of the need of gospel support; we came to this first relish of the doctrine of eternal life and salvation by Christ when we lay under the sentence of eternal death.

(2.) The heart must be purged from carnal affections; for until we lose our fleshly savour we cannot have this spiritual taste: Rom. 8:5, 'They that are after the flesh, do savour the things of the flesh;' the word may be translated so. A carnal heart relishes nothing but carnal things, worldly pleasures, worldly delights; now this doth exceedingly deaden your spiritual taste. Spiritual taste is a delicate thing, therefore the heart must be purged from fleshly lusts; for when fleshly lusts bear sway, and you relish the garlic and onions and



fleshpots of Egypt, your affections will carry you elsewhere, to the vanities of the world, and contentments of the flesh. Look, as sick men have lost their taste, and that which is sweet seems sour and ungrateful to a distempered appetite, so a carnal appetite hath not this taste from the word of God; to a carnal heart it is no more savoury than the white of an egg; yea, it is as gall to them, but now to others it is exceeding sweet, it is their joy, the life of their souls. Well, then, you see what is this spiritual taste, that relish which a renewed soul hath for spiritual comforts.

Use. To persuade you to get this taste; and when once you have got it, take heed you do not lose it.

1. It concerns you very much to get this taste; take these arguments:

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[1.] It is a good evidence of the new nature; it is a sign you have gotten that other heart, that new spirit, which must have new comfort, new supports: 1 Peter 2:3, 4, 'As new-born babes you desire the sincere milk of the work; if so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' Hereby we may know the new man, by his appetite and savour. Life is known by this, as much as by any one thing else.

[2.] This will give you a more assured knowledge of the truth and worth of spiritual and heavenly things, whereas otherwise we shall but talk of them by rote, until we experiment the comfort and sweetness of them in our own souls; then we will see there is more than notions in promises, the word of God is not a well-devised fable and golden dream, for our taste will be our confirmation. The greatest demonstration is from the senses, 1 John 5:10, the believer hath a testimony of the truth of religion within himself, in his own heart. Oh! it is a great advantage to have our remedy there where our danger lies, in the heart; where atheism and disbelief lurks, to have

spiritual sense there: when you have a real experience of them, then Satan cannot have such advantage, and atheistical and unbelieving thoughts such advantage, for you have felt the benefit of spiritual things. It is a great advantage against temptation, when you have had a sense, when you do not only know by hearsay and guess that the word is sweet, but you have had a taste, as a man that hath been at the fire knows it warms; when we can not only say with him, 'We have heard the kings of Israel are merciful kings,' but, with the men of Samaria, 'We have seen him ourselves.'

[3.] The life of grace mightily depends upon it; all your liveliness in grace depends upon this taste, therefore get it. When you have no taste, you lose your appetite; and when you lose your appetite, you lose your strength; and when you lose your strength, all goes to ruin in the soul; sin prevails, and deadness increaseth upon the soul. All the strength, comfort, and vitality of your lives depend upon your taste.

[4.] It is this taste that will make you more useful to others. That which we have seen, heard, and tasted, that we commend to others. A report of a report and tradition, it may be or not; that is a cold thing, this is not a valid testimony. Ay! but when you can speak of that which you 'have felt and tasted, your eyes have seen, and hands handled of the word of life,' 1 John 1:1; when it is matter of sense, then we can speak boldly and affectionately, as the apostle, 2 Cor. 1:4, 'That we might comfort them which are in trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.' When we ourselves are comforted of God, and that which we speak is the result of our own experience, it makes us more useful in our Christian converse. The prophet Ezekiel was to eat his own prophecies, and St John to eat the book; the meaning is, they must digest it. What we

communicate to others, we must digest it ourselves, that, finding it sweet, we may speak the more effectually for God.

2. Do not lose this taste. Oh! it is a sad thing to lose these spiritual senses. Hypocrites, their taste doth lightly come and lightly go; they have a little vanishing sweetness now and then, but it is soon gone; it is a sad thing to lose our spiritual taste. It may be lost in a great measure; sometimes a Christian hath it, and sometimes he hath it not, at least not in such a degree as formerly. Experience shows it may be lost too too often; all the business will be to discern the first tendencies of this evil when we begin to lose our taste and spiritual senses. This may be discerned with respect to the threefold object of this taste—heavenly gift, the good word of God, and powers of the world to come.

[1.] Heavenly gift, that is Christ Jesus. When we do not so highly value the love of God in Christ, and prize his blood, and the precious effects of it; when we do not so earnestly beg pardon of sin, and hunger and thirst after his righteousness; when we have not that former earnestness and strength of desire to enjoy Christ. Time was when thou thoughtest no terms too dear for him, when thy heart made hard pursuit after him; but now thou art grown cold and careless, and so pass him by lightly, as a full stomach with meat, with which it is cloyed; when you are not so earnest and zealous for Christ, it is a sign you have lost your taste.

[2.] Your tasting of the good word of God. When you slight the word, either in not reading, hearing, meditating in it so frequently as you were wont to do. Oh, time was when you could say, No honey or honeycomb so sweet as this to my poor soul! Ps. 19:10; when you could hardly call off your thoughts. Now you are more infrequent in these godly exercises, or else, if conversant about it, not with that life

and that affection; in a more customary manner you can read of the love of God and sufferings of Christ Jesus, without any love to him again; can read the promises, and they seem to be but like dry chips and withered flowers, and not yield that marrow and fatness to you. You can read the promises of eternal life, and have not that joy, thankfulness, and blessing of God. You could hardly contain yourselves before, but cry out, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and blessed be God that hath visited and redeemed his people.' Now your affections are more flat and cold, and have not that relish in holy conference, sweetness in hearing, and that contentment of soul in meditating.

[3.] You may lose your taste in the powers of the world to come, when you grow more mindless of God, and eternal blessedness, when you have not such fresh and warm thoughts as you were wont to have; when your desires, hopes, expectations of the life to come is abated, you have not that lively hope, 1 Peter 3:3, to quicken you for the attaining of eternal blessedness. While this taste is fresh upon the hearts of Christians, they are for heaven, for God, carried on with vigour and strength in the way of holiness; but when your hearts are carried out to worldly vanity, and you relish more the honour, applause, fulness of estate, worldly increase, and you are grown more cold in heavenly things, you have lost this taste of the powers of the world to come, Heb. 6:4.

The causes of this. One is, want of a due esteem, not an esteem in an idea, naked or abstract notion from those thoughts out of a temptation. No man is so unreasonable, but, if he be a little enlightened with Christianity, will say, the favour of God is better than all things. Ay! but want of that practical esteem, when they can forfeit this taste for every trifle and flesh-pleasing vanity; or when they carelessly look after him, are indifferent as to communion with

God, and think it not much whether they are accepted of God, yea or no; or manifest himself to you in Christ, when the comforts of the Spirit are things you can spare, and the consolations of God seem to be small, it is all one to you whether you have experiences from God in duty or no, your souls are satisfied; this is a cause of decaying. Then negligence in duties; pray lazily, hear carelessly, not meditate often. Inordinate savour of carnal pleasure, that is another cause. What is the reason the temporary seems to be so affected? He loseth his taste altogether; carnal things have the first possession of his heart, and being confirmed there by long use and custom, being so suitable to us, and so long rooted in us, and we have such a vanishing glance of things to come, this will work out that taste, the love, the sense we have of better things. Godly men, when they turn out to the contentments of the flesh, they lose their taste, it becomes dead. This is a considerable loss as to the vitality of your graces; for without a taste of good or evil, we shall neither eschew the evil, nor follow that which is good, with that serious constancy and diligence that is necessary. A man that hath tasted of the poison of asps, and the bitterness of the gall and wormwood that is in sin, will be afraid of it, Rom. 6:21. So a man that hath tasted of the sweetness of communion with God in Christ, he is quickened and carried on with life, courage, and constancy. That is a dreadful place, Heb. 6:4, 5; the loss of their taste is a degree to final apostasy. Oh, how many lose their taste, their relish of Christ, the good word of God, the powers of the life to come, and are fallen foully, some forward into error, some backward into a licentious course, so that it is impossible to recover themselves by repentance!

## SERMON CX

### **Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.—VER. 104**

IN the former verse, the man of God had spoken of the pleasure that was to be had by the word, now of the profit of it. There is a great deal of pleasure to spiritual sense; if we could once get our appetite, we should find a world of sweetness in it; and there is as much profit as pleasure. As the pleasure is spiritual, so also is the profit to be measured by spiritual considerations. To escape the snares of the devil, and the dangers that waylay us in our passage to heaven, is a great advantage. Now the word doth not only warn us of our danger, but where it is received in the love of it, breedeth a hatred of all these things that may lead us into it: 'Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.'

In which sentence, the prophet seems to invert the order set down, ver. 101. He had said, 'I refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word,' where the avoiding of evil is made the means of profiting by the word. Here his profiting by the word is made the cause of avoiding evil. In the one verse you have an account of his beginning with God, in the other of his progress.

In this verse there is—

1. The benefit he received by the word, and that is sound and saving knowledge.

2. The fruit and effect which this knowledge produceth in his heart, therefore I hate every false way.

Mark, first, The firmness of this effect, I hate. He doth not say I abstain, but I hate.

Secondly, The note of universality, every.

Thirdly, The object, false way. It is not said evil way, but false way; or, as it is in the original, 'every path of lying and falsehood.'

Falsehood is either in point of opinion or practice. If you take it in the first sense, for falsehood in opinion, or error in judgment, or false doctrine, or false worship, this sentence holds good. Those that get understanding by the word are established against error; and not only established against error, or against the embracing or profession of it, but they hate it.

1. They are established. All error cometh from ignorance, or else judicial blindness.

[1.] From ignorance, or unacquaintedness with the word of God; so Christ said to the Sadducees, 'Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures,' Mat. 12:29. When men study not the word, which is the rule of truth, no wonder if they lie open to every fancy; they take up things hand over head, and by a fond credulity are led away by every suggestion presented to them. So it is said, 2 Peter 3:16, that 'the unstable and unlearned wrest the scriptures to their own destruction.' By the unlearned, is meant not those that are unskilful in human literature, though that be a great help; but those that are unskilful in the word of righteousness, poor deluded souls that lie under a great uncertainty.

[2.] Judicial blindness. For men that have great parts, and a presumption of their own wit, are given up to be blinded by their own lusts; and though they know the scriptures, yet they wrest them to speak according to the sense of their carnal interest, 1 Thes. 2:12. And so they see not what they see, being given up to the witchery and enchantment of error: Gal. 3:1, 'O foolish Galatians! who hath bewitched you?' So that all false ways proceed from the want of reason and the pride of reason. The one is the cause of the simple's erring, who believeth every word; the other of those that are knowing, and are otherwise of great parts, but they make their wit their idol, and so would be wise above the scriptures, or else are swayed by their own lusts. They do not fix themselves in the power, love, and practice of truths revealed in the scriptures, and so are given up to hellish delusions. Now, in this sense, I might speak with great profit of these words, especially now when so many errors are broached, and all the errors of Christianity come abreast to assault it at once; and such changeable times as produce several interests, whereby men are blinded, and such levity in the professors of religion. Why, then, study the word with a teachable heart; that is, renouncing your own wit, and giving up yourselves to God's direction, and practise what is plain, without being swayed with the profits and pleasures of the world, and you may come to know what is the mind of God. Men think all is uncertain in religion, and are apt to say with Pilate, 'What is truth?' John 18:38. No; the scriptures are not obscure, but our hearts are dark and blind with worldly lusts. Otherwise the counsel is plain, and you might say with David, 'Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.'

(1.) Where the Spirit of God doth affect men with an earnest desire of knowledge, and so affect them as to desire to know the will of God, for no other reason but that they may avoid what is displeasing to



God, and do what is pleasing in his sight; and therefore hear, pray read, meditate, and study the holy scriptures; they are sure to be right for the main.

(2.) Not only avoid the belief and profession of falsehood, but hate it: 'I hate every false way.' Not the persons, but pity them: Phil. 3:19, 'I tell you weeping.' It should be the grief of our hearts to see them misled; but as for the error, hate it, whatever is not agreeable to the rule of truth, or dissenteth from the purity of the word. There is too great a coldness and indifferency about the things of religion, as if truth were not to be stood upon. Carnal men hate the truth: Ps. 50:17, 'They hate instruction, and cast my laws behind their backs.' Truly we have much more reason to hate error, without which we cannot be safe, it is so catching with our natures.

2. In point of practice, and so every falsehood may be applied—

[1.] To craft, or carnal wisdom. I hate fraud and deceit; true understanding makes us hate false wisdom. A simple, honest conversation suits best with Christians: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'In simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.'

[2.] Carnal or worldly vanities, and flattering or fallacious pleasures, these entice us with a fair outside, and promise a great deal of happiness and comfort to us; but when we neglect better things, and run after them, they deceive us in the issue. They are called 'deceitful riches,' Mark 4:19. And 'beauty' is said to be 'deceitful,' Prov. 31:30. And those that run after these things are said to 'run after lying vanities,' Jonah 2:8; those that fail when we hope to enjoy them.

3. I take it more generally for all sin. Sinful ways are false ways, and will surely deceive those that expect good from them or walk in them: Heb. 3:13, 'Deceitfulness of sin;' and 'deceitful lusts,' Eph.

4:22; and 'sin hath deceived me, and slew me,' saith Paul, Rom. 7:11. Sin is false and deceitful many ways—

[1.] It presents itself in another dress than its own, proposing evil under the name of good, calling light darkness, and darkness light, Isa. 5:20, or shadows of good for that which is really good, gilded trash for perfect gold.

[2.] As it promiseth happiness and impunity which it never performeth or maketh good, Deut. 29:19, 20; and so the poor sinner is led as an ox to the slaughter, Prov. 7:22, 23. And we do not see the danger of it till it be too late to help it, and it appeareth in its own colours in the foulness of the act and the smartness of the punishment. Esau, when he had sold the birthright, bewailed it with tears when it was too late, Heb. 12:16, 17. The foolish virgins tarried till the door was shut, Mat. 25:11, 12. It is good to have our eyes in our head, to see a plague when we may prevent it, Prov. 22:3. The foulness of the act terrifieth, as it did Judas when he betrayed his master, Mat. 27:4. Their hearts give evidence against them, Rom. 2:15 'Excusing or accusing one another;' as Cain, Gen. 4:14, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear.' The unclean person shall 'mourn at the last, when his flesh and his body shall be consumed,' Prov. 5:11. Adam and Eve were sensible too late, when their eyes were opened.

Doct. By the word of God we get that true, sound wisdom which maketh us to hate every false way.

Four things are implied in the point and in the text:—

1. A hatred of sin.
2. The universality of this hatred, every false way.

3. That this is a part and fruit of wisdom, I get understanding, therefore I hate.

4. This wisdom and understanding is gotten by God's precepts.

First, That it is our duty to hate sin. It is not enough to reform our practice, or to abstain from the act, or to avoid the occasions that may lead to it, but it must be hated: Ps. 97:10, 'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.' He doth not say forbear it, but hate it. Love to the chiefest good is fitly accompanied with hatred of the chiefest evil. God, he is our chiefest good: you love the Lord, and you must also hate evil. The one is as natural to grace as the other; for the new nature hath its slight and aversation, as well as its choice and prosecution. As it inclines us to choose God for our portion, and to pursue after things that lead to God, so it hath a disposition to make us avoid that which is evil. There are things hurtful to the new nature as well as any other being; now hatred is to arm us against it. In short, this hatred is required—

1. Because this is the true principle of resistance against sin. Until a man hate sin, he is never truly set against it; as a man is never thoroughly gained to that which is good until he loves holiness for holiness' sake. His affections may be bribed with other considerations, but then he is rooted in holiness when he loves holiness for its own sake. So a man that is not resolved against sin, that will not hate it for its own sake, may be frighted out of sin for a fit, or by the interposings of conscience put out of humour, but his heart falls in again with his old lusts, until there be an envy and detestation of sin; but when it comes to this hatred, then temptations cannot easily overcome—examples draw not, nor difficulties compel us to that which is evil. Persuasions and allurements formerly were of great force; straightway they followed; but when the bent is

another way, they are not so easily drawn by force and examples, which seem to have such cogency. Before men did easily swim with the stream, but here is a counter motion when they hate that which is evil. This is the fence of the soul, and draws us to an indignation, Hosea 14:8.

2. Partly because this is a true distinctive evidence between those that are good and those that are evil. Many may forbear sin that yet do not hate it; they forbear it out of restraint, out of fear of punishment, shame, worldly ends, yet they 'regard iniquity in their hearts,' Ps. 66:18; as a dog loves the bone, yet fears the blows. God judgeth not as man; man is blameless, he abstains from sin, but God hateth sin. Man judgeth according to the action, but God judgeth according to the frame of the heart, 1 Sam. 16:7; for he is able to look to the inward springs, and poise our spirits. So on the other side, good men may slip into an evil action, but their hearts are against it; it is the evil which they hate, Rom. 7:15. They may be foiled, but their hearts are bent another way.

But what is this hatred of sin?

1. It implies a universal repugnancy in every part of a man against sin, not only in his reason and conscience, but will and affections. There is not a wicked man, but in many cases his conscience bids him do otherwise; ay! but a renewed man, his heart inclines him to do otherwise; his heart is set against sin, and taken up with the things of God: Rom. 7:22, 'I delight in the law of God according to the inner man.' It is in the whole inward man, which consists of many parts and faculties. Briefly, then, it notes the opposition, not from enlightened conscience only, but from the bent of the renewed heart. Reason and conscience will take God's part, and quarrel with sins, else wicked men could not be self-condemned.

2. Hatred; it is a fixed rooted enmity. Many a man may fall out with sin upon some occasion, but he hath not an irreconcilable enmity against it. The transient motions of the soul are things quite distinct from a permanent principle that abides in a renewed heart; he hath that same 'seed of God remaining in him,' 1 John 3:9. A habit notes a habitual aversation. A brabble many times falls out between us and sin upon several occasions, when it hath sensibly done us wrong, destroyed our peace, blasted our names, or brought temporal inconvenience upon us. In time of judgment and fears, and present troubles and dangers, men think of bewailing their sins and returning to God, but they fall out and fall in again; this is anger, not hatred; like the rising of the heart against a drawn sword, when it is flashed in our faces, whereas afterwards we can take it up without any such commotion of spirit.

3. Hatred; it is an active enmity, warring upon sin by serious and constant endeavours, manifested by watching, striving, groaning; watching before the temptation comes, resisting in the temptation, groaning under it, and bemoaning ourselves after the temptation hath prevailed over us.

[1.] There is a constant jealousy and watchfulness before the temptation comes. They that hate sin will keep at a distance from whatever is displeasing unto God: Prov. 28:14, 'Happy is the man that feareth alway.' A hard heart, that knows not the evil of sin, rusheth on to things according to the present inclination. Ay! but a man that hath a hatred against sin, that hath felt the evil of it in his conscience, that hath been scorched in the flames of a true conviction, will not come near the fire. A broken heart is shy and fearful, therefore he weighs his thoughts, words, and actions, and takes notice of the first appearance of any temptation; they know sin is always present, soon stirred, and therefore live in a holy jealousy.

Certainly they that walk up and down heedlessly in the midst of so many snares and temptations wherewith we are waylaid in our passage to heaven, they have not this active enmity against sin, and therefore hatred is seen by watching.

[2.] It is seen by striving, or serious resistance in the temptation. A Christian is not always to be measured by the success, but by conflict; he fights it out: Rom. 7:15, 'The evil which I hate, that do I.' Though they be foiled by sin, yet they hate it. An enemy may be overcome, yet he retains his spite and malice. Sin doth not freely carry it in the heart, neither is the act completely willing: Gal. 5:17, 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh; for,' saith he, 'the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would;' that is, you cannot sin with such proneness and full consent and bent of heart as others; they have a principle of opposition, a rooted enmity in their souls against sin.

[3.] By a bitter grief after the temptation; as Peter, when he had fallen foully, 'he went out and wept bitterly,' Mat. 26:75. They do not lie in sin, but recover themselves by a kindly remorse; it is the grief of their souls that they have fallen into God's displeasure, grieved his Spirit, and hazarded their communion with him. Oh! sin is grievous to a gracious heart, and this makes them groan and complain to God, 'O wretched man!' &c.

4. It is such an enmity against sin as aims at the utter extermination and expulsion of it, that endeavoureth to destroy it both root and branch. Hatred is all for mischief; annihilation, that is that which hatred aims at. Anger worketh trouble, but hatred mischief. It is an implacable affection, that continues to the death, that will not be appeased till the thing which we hate be abolished. So where there is

this hatred of sin, it follows sin close till it hath gotten the life of it. As by the grace of justification they have obtained such favour with God, ne damnet, it shall not damn; by the grace of sanctification, ne regnet, sin shall not reign; and still they are aspiring and looking after the grace of glorification, ne sit, that sin may no longer be; therefore they are longing and groaning under the relics of corruption: Rom. 7:24, 'O wretched man!' &c. Many scratch the face of sin, but they do not seek to root it up, to destroy the body of death; it is their constant grief that anything of sin is left in the heart, as enemies are not satisfied till they have the blood of each other. Where there is hatred it is not enough to stop the spreading, weaken the power of sin, but labouring to destroy the being of sin; as David said of his enemies, 'I pursued them till they were destroyed;' so when we set against sin with an aim not to give over till we have the life of it; or as God said concerning the Canaanites, Deut. 7:23, 'I will destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed;' so doth a renewed heart war against sin, that he may leave neither root nor fruit within them.

Use. If this be to hate sin, how few can say with David, 'I hate every false way!' how few are of David's temper! Some love sin with all their heart, that 'hide it as a sweet morsel under their tongue,' Job 20:12. The love of sin, that is the life of it; it dies when it begins to be hated; but when you have a love to it, it lives in the soul and prevails over us. And as they testify their love of sin, so they misplace their hatred. What do they hate? Not sin, but the word that discovers it. They 'hate the light, because their deeds are evil,' John 3:20. They do not hate sin, but God's messengers that plead against it: 1 Kings 22:8, 'I hate him,' saith Ahab concerning Micaiah, 'for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil'. They hate the faithful brother that reproves them; he is hated because he will not hate his brother, to see sin upon him. They hate the magistrate that would

reform, the faithful Christian that condemns them by his exact walking: John 15:19, 'Because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.' They hate God's image in his people, and cannot endure to be condemned by the light that shines out from their conversations. Godly men are objects reviving guilt, therefore they hate them. Thus shamefully are a man's affections transposed; we love where we should hate, and hate where we should love. And then if we come to the other sort of men, a degree above these, many are frightened out of their sins by slavish fear, but yet their hearts are in league with them still; and as they get out of the stocks of conscience they enlarge themselves in all manner of carnal liberty: these are not changed, but awed; sin is not mortified, but only lurks to watch a safe opportunity when it may discover itself with more advantage.

## SERMON CXI

**Therefore I hate every false way.—VER.**

**104**

THE second proposition is the universality of this hatred, every false way. They that hate sin must hate all sin.

1. This doth necessarily follow upon the former; for if we hate sin especially as sin, for the intrinsic evil that is in it, not upon foreign accidental reasons, then we will hate all sin, for hatred is εἰς τὰ γένη, to the whole kind; as Haman, when he hated the Jews, he thought scorn to lay his hand only on Mordecai, but would have destroyed all the Jews, Esther 5:6. It is but a casual dislike, and not a hatred. Certainly if we hate sin as sin, we shall hate all sin. The same reasons that incline us to hate one sin will incline us to hate all. Why! what is



it to hate sin as sin? As it is a violation of God's law, as it is a contempt of God's authority, a breach of spiritual friendship, it grieves the Spirit; these are the reasons to incline us to hate one as well as another. Well, then, private reservation and indulgences, or setting up a toleration in our own hearts, will not stand with the hatred of all sin. Some sins may shame and trouble us more, but all are alike contrary to the will of God; therefore if we hate them upon reasons of duty to God, we should hate them universally, 'every false way.'

2. Every sin is hateful to God, therefore every sin should be hateful to us. The reason of this is, we should hate what he hates, and love what he loves. There is a perfect friendship between God and those in covenant with him. Now that is true friendship, to will and nill the same thing; it is built upon likeness, and suitableness of disposition. This argument is urged by the Holy Ghost: Prov. 8:13, 'The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.' This is friendship with God, to hate what God hates: I hate it, therefore they hate it. Sins of thought are intended by pride and arrogance, for that puts us upon vain musings and imaginations; and sins of word by the froward mouth; and sins of action by the evil way, outward practice. All this God hates, so should we: Rev. 2:6, 'Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.' If we be in the same covenant with God, we will have the same love, the same hatred. Nay, as we have the same nature with God, the saints are 'made partakers of the divine nature,' 2 Peter 1:4. The divine nature shows itself by suitable dispositions.

3. From our covenant relation with God, which implies an entire surrender of soul, which is without any reservation. When you give up yourselves to God, he will have all. If you say, God be merciful to me, and spare me in this, then you forfeit all the blessings of the

covenant. God will have all or none; therefore all sin, without exception, must be hated by us, for otherwise God is not our chief good: if anything be loved besides him, or against his will, it is love above him. One man allowed besides the husband is a violation of the marriage covenant; so one sin allowed in the heart breaks all the covenant between God and us: James 2:10, 'If a man keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' That sentence is not a legal sentence belonging to the covenant of works; that were a mistake of it: it is not only true in the sense of the covenant of works, one sin undoes us for ever, but it is true in the evangelical covenant. Thus one sin allowed with full consent of heart makes void the gospel covenant, as one article not consented to disannuls the whole treaty and agreement between us and God. It is not consistent with sincerity that we should bring down the gospel covenant, to allow any one sin.

4. From the damage and mischief that it doth to our souls. One sin keeps up the devil's interest; it is like a nest egg, left there to draw a new temptation. You continue his empire in you; this is his great design, to keep a part. Conscience begins to work, they must have something; all then that he pleads for is but a part, and he knows that will bring the whole; as Pharaoh would have a pawn, either their flocks, herds, or children, that this might bring them back again. One sin reserved gives Satan an interest; one leak in the ship, though all the rest be stopped, if that be neglected, will sink it in time.

Use. Let us lay this branch also to heart. There is something usually wherein we would be excused and expect favour. We all have a tender part of our soul, and loathe it should be touched; some vain fashions, customs, or ways, and outgoings of soul, which we are unwilling to leave, though we have often smarted for them. Consider, it is not consistent with your obedience and your love to God, nor

with the power of grace in your hearts, to allow any false way. Herod did many things, yet perished for all that. A man may do many things that are good, upon sin's account. When you allow any one thing, it is only to hide and feed your lusts with greater pretence; so many religious things may be fuel of lusts, as well as carnal comforts. It is not for the interest of the flesh or indwelling corruption that men should have no religion; sin cannot be served in such a cleanly way, unless there be something done in compliance with God's will, under some disguise, or conformity to the will of God. Say then, Shall I do and suffer so many things in vain? Bring your hearts thus to hate every false way.

Thirdly, This is a part and fruit of true wisdom.

1. That this is a chief part of wisdom and understanding, to hate every false way, appears from Job 28:28, 'The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding.' So much as we hate sin, so much of spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding. Certainly to hate sin is wisdom; I prove it from the nature of sin. All disobedience is the greatest folly that can be in the world; and therefore, if to sin be to do foolishly, to hate sin is to be wise; and not to have understanding certainly is a fruit of folly, for a man to do that which will condemn himself, if ever he comes to himself. Now, when a man comes to himself, as when he dies or repents, oh! how will his heart condemn and reproach him for the vanity of his worldly course, when he is filled with his own ways! Especially repentance, that is a coming to ourselves. As a man when he hath slept out his drunkenness and excess, and begins to look back upon his follies committed under that distemper; such is repentance, it is an after-wisdom, and therefore it argues that there was an imprudence and inconsideration of the things we repent of, and therefore we condemn ourselves. That is folly which gratifies

those that are our utter enemies. Now sin it gratifies the devil, which seeks our ruin: he 'goes about, seeking whom he may devour,' 1 Peter 5:8. You please him that seeks your utter destruction; and will you grieve God and please the devil? That is folly which brings no disadvantage upon him whom you disobey, but upon you it brings the greatest mischief imaginable. God is not hurt by your sins; he is above our injury: Prov. 9:12, 'If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.' There is no hurt done to God; all the hurt is to our own souls: Prov. 8:36, 'He that sinneth against me, wrongs his own soul; and he that hateth me, loveth death.' Every sinner is his own murderer and his own destroyer. All those arrows we shoot up against heaven, they fall down with more violence upon our own heads. That is folly for a man to hazard a jewel for a trifle, to stake his soul, and heaven, and eternal happiness, against a little flesh-pleasing and carnal satisfaction: Jonah 2:8, 'They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercies.' Poor fugacious comforts, lying vanities, to follow after, and forsake their own mercy; that is, all that happiness which might have been their own. A sinner is a mad gamester, that throws away the kingdom of heaven at every cast for a little momentary short delight and vain contentment. That is folly to break with him upon whom our all depends, our life, being, comfort, happiness; so doth sin make us break with God: Isa. 59:2, 'Your iniquities have separated between you and your God.' Well, then, if sin be to do foolishly, to depart from sin, this is wisdom, this is understanding. Certainly he that provides against the greatest mischief doth escape the greatest danger; he is the wise man, and not he that provides against temporal inconveniences only, as poverty and disgrace. He that escapes sin, escapes hell, the wrath of God, the extremest misery that can light upon a poor creature: Prov. 15:24, 'The way of the wise is above, to avoid hell beneath;' and therefore it is a high point of wisdom to hate sin.

2. As it is a high point of understanding, so it is a fruit and effect of understanding. According to the degree of understanding that we have, so will our hatred of sin be; for he saith, 'Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. To prove this by two reasons:—

[1.] Our affections follow our apprehensions. There is no way to come to the heart but by the mind, by the understanding. Look, as there is no way to come to the bowels to purge our distempers that are there but by the mouth, stomach, and other passages that lead to the bowels, so there is no way to come to the heart and affections but by the understanding. Knowledge begets all other affections, those which belong to choice and pursuit, or those that belong to slight or aversation. Those that belong to choice and pursuit, desire, delight. There is no desire of that which is unknown; so in those things that belong to slight and aversation, those affections, be it grief or shame for sin already committed, or fear or hatred that sin may not be committed. Grief or shame: Jer. 31:19, 'After I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.' It is light which humbles, and the soul is affected according to the sight it hath of things; or go to those affections which serve to prevent the commission of sin, as hatred and fear. Hatred in the text; a good understanding goes before, a thorough hatred will follow.

[2.] Second reason; that when the mind is fraught with truths, and gotten a good stock of knowledge by God's precepts, then it will be checking and urging the soul to caution against sin; and therefore the more understanding you yet by God's precepts, the more are you warned and put in mind of things: Ps. 119:11, 'I have hid thy word in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.' When the word hath laid up in the heart a good stock of knowledge, there will be one

thought or other that will be rising up and defying all temptations wherewith you are assaulted: Eph. 6:17, 'Take unto you the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.' In the spiritual conflict we need weapons not only defensive but offensive; not only the shield of faith, but the sword of the Spirit, that we may destroy and slay sin, and withstand temptation, and chase away Satan from us. What is this sword of the Spirit? The word of God. The more seasonable relief the more fresh thoughts you have to withstand temptations which are apt to come in upon you: Prov. 6:21, 22, 'Bind them upon thine heart: when thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.' This will always be urging him to duty, and warning him of his danger.

A word of use. (1.) Get understanding; (2.) Never count yourselves to understand anything but as you increase in hatred of sin.

1. Get understanding. Partly—(1.) Because there are many false ways you will never discern without much understanding. There are many false ways that are palliated and represented under the show of good, and we are easily ensnared unless we have light to choose our way: 1 Cor. 2:8, 'Had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' A man will be carried on with a great deal of life and activity in a way contrary to God: Acts 26:9, 'I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.' Oh! the tyranny and madness of an erring conscience and an ignorant zealot! What a ready prey is a man to Satan, and is carried headlong to destroying courses, when a man hath more zeal and earnestness of spirit than knowledge to guide him! How will he stumble and dash upon things that are very contrary to the will of God. (2.) If they can discern them, they shall not have a heart and skill to remedy them without understanding. We shall not have a

heart, for light will be urging, calling upon us, minding us of our duty, warning us of danger; whereas otherwise we shall go on tamely, like an ox to the slaughter, and like a fool to the correction of the stocks. We shall not have this restless importunity of conscience, which is a great restraint of sin; and then we shall not have the skill, for all is misapplied and misconceived by an ignorant spirit, for the whole business of his religion is making cordials instead of purges, and potions instead of antidotes, catching at promises when threatenings belong to him, lulling his soul asleep with new strains of grace, when he should awaken himself to duty.

2. Never count yourselves to have profited in anything till your hearts are awakened into a further hatred of sin. Christians! they are but notions; it is not saving knowledge unless it be in order to practice; men have no understanding that have not this active and rooted enmity against sin: Ps. 111:10, 'A good understanding have all that they do his commandments;' they that hate sin more, and are more weary of corruption. He is made wiser by the word that is made better by it. It is not the talker against, but the hater of iniquity that is the wise man. If wisdom enters upon the heart, and breaks out in our practice, by that is our thriving in knowledge to be measured: 1 John 2:3, 'Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.'

This was God's scope in giving the word, not to make trial of men's wits, who could most sharply conceive, or of their memories, who could most faithfully retain, or of their eloquence, who could most nimbly discourse; but of the sincerity of the heart, who could most obediently submit to the will of God. Jer. 22:16, when he had spoke of hating of sin, and doing good, 'Was not this to know me? saith the Lord.' This is to know God to hate sin. Outward things were not made for sight only, but for use, as herbs, plants, and stars. So our

reason, and the scriptures the Lord hath given us; it is not only for sight, but for use, that we may be wise to salvation; not that we may please ourselves with acute notions about the things of God, but seriously set our hearts to practise.

The fourth thing in this general point is, that this wisdom and understanding is gotten by God's precepts. Mark, 'I hate every false way.' Why? 'Because by thy precepts I get understanding.' Where have we it? By studying God's word.' Rom. 3:20, 'By the law is the knowledge of sin.' How is the knowledge of sin by the law? Three ways: according to the nature of the sin, according to who is the sinner, and according to the guilt and dreadful estate of them that lie in a state of sin. So the knowledge of sin, that is, the nature of it, and where it lives, and where it reigns, and what will be the effects of it, all this knowledge is by the law.

1. By the law is the knowledge of sin, quoad naturam peccati. There are many things we should never know but by the law of God, though we have some general notions of good and evil. Rom. 7:7, saith the apostle, 'I had not known sin but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.' Those first stirrings and secret lingerings of heart and inclinations to that which is cross to the will of God, that they go before all consent of will, and all delight, these things we could never discern by the light of nature.

2. Quoad subjectum, what is the sinner, and who is guilty of it? So Rom. 7:9, 'I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' He saw his lost, miserable, undone condition by the law of God. The acts of sin are discovered by the word of God; it discovers the thoughts and intents of the heart, Heb. 4:12, and state of sin; our natural face, the condition wherein we are, is to be seen in this glass.



3. Quoad reatum et magnitudinem peccati, what will be the effects of it? Rom. 5:20, 'The law entered, that the offence might abound.' Therefore the law was given, that it might work a deep sense of the evil consequents of sin, and what wrath man was bound over to for violating the righteous law. The law represents the heinous nature of sin as it is ἀνομία, a transgression of the law, as it strikes at God's being or at God's authority, seeks to jostle him out of the throne; as it contradicts his sovereignty, and plucks the sceptre out of his hand and the crown from his head, and makes men to say, 'Who is lord over us?' As if we had nothing to guide us but our own lusts. The word of God discovers this pride of heart, and then the manifold mischiefs of sin are discovered; we get this understanding by the word. It is better to know these mischiefs of sin by the threatenings of the word, than by our own bitter experience. It is sin that separates from God, and renders us incapable of all blessings.

Use 1. Study yourselves, and take a view of the case and state of your souls by the glass of the word; see what you gain by every reading, hearing, every time you converse with him, what is given out to convince you of sin, or awaken your soul against sin.

Use 2. When you consult with the word, beg the light of the Spirit, which is only lively and efficacious. The apostle speaks of knowing things in the evidence and 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power,' 1 Cor. 2:4. There is the same demonstration of the Spirit. There is a manifest difference between the evidence of reason and arguments held out from a natural understanding, and between the illumination or the demonstration of the Spirit. There are many that may have a full knowledge of the letter and the sense of the words, as they lie open to the evidence of reason, yet be without the light and power of those truths, for that is a fruit of the demonstration of the Spirit, the lively light of the Holy Ghost that goes along with the word.

## SERMON CXII

### **Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.—VER. 105**

THE present world, as much as it suits with our carnal nature, it is but like a howling wilderness with respect to Canaan, in which there are many crooked paths and dangerous precipices, yea, many privy snares and secret ambushes laid for us by the devil and his instruments; so that unless we have a faithful guide, a clear, full, and sure direction, we shall certainly miscarry, and every day run into the mouth of a thousand mischiefs. Now God, out of his abundant mercy, hath given us a light, a rule to walk by, to set us clear from these rocks and precipices, and to guide us safe to true happiness. And what is this light? It is his word; so David acknowledgeth in this verse, thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Here you may observe—(1.) The double notion by which the direction of the word is set forth. (2.) You have the object, or the matter wherein we are directed; that also is expressed by a double notion, 'It is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.' Let me explain these a little.

1. The two notions whereby the direction is expressed, it is a light, that is a more general expression; the other is more particular; it is a lamp, possibly with allusion to the lamp of the sanctuary. The use of a lamp is to light in the night, and the light shines in the day. The word of God is both a light and lamp; it is of use to us by day and night, in all conditions, in adversity, in prosperity, in all the conditions we pass through in this world. Chrysostom hath an observation, but I doubt a little too curious, ὁ νόμος λύκνος

ὀνομάζεται, ὁ Χριστός υἱὸς τῆς δικαιοσύνης, saith he—The law shineth in narrow limits, within small bounds, therefore that is called a lamp; but Christ, in the gospel, is called a son of righteousness.

2. Let us come to the term by which the object is expressed, path and feet. By path is meant our general choice and course of life; the law will direct to that; not only so, but it is a light to our feet, that is, will direct us in every step, in every particular action.

Doct. That the word of God is a clear and a full rule to direct us in all the conditions and affairs of the present life.

It is a clear rule, for it is called a lamp; and it is a full rule, for it is a lamp not only for our path, but for our feet. I shall speak of both severally, that it is a lamp and a light.

First, It is a clear rule, and therefore called a light, and that in three regards:—

1. By reason of its direction, as it shows us the right way to our desired end. He that would come to his journey's end needs a way, and needs a light to see and find it out. Our end is eternal life, and that to be enjoyed in heaven: Prov. 6:23, 'The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.' God hath stated the way that leads to eternal happiness by his wisdom and justice, and revealed it in the scriptures. See that place, Ps. 43:3, 'Oh, send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me, let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.' We should have wandered up and down in various uncertainties, and have neither pitched upon the right end nor way, but have lost ourselves in a maze of perplexities, if God had not sent forth his light and truth. Austin reckons up two hundred and eighty-eight opinions about the

chiefest good. Men are seeking out many inventions, looking here and there to find happiness, but God hath showed the true way.

2. It is a light in regard of conviction, as it convinceth of all errors and mistakes both in judgment and practice—*Verum est index sui et obliqui*. In this respect it is said, Eph. 5:13, because of this convincing light that is in the word, 'All things that are reprov'd, are made manifest by the light; for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.' It discovereth to us our sins as well as our duties; light doth manifest itself, and make all other things manifest. Now this convictive power of the word is double—by way of prevention, and by way of reproof.

[1.] By way of prevention. The word of God shows us our danger, pits, precipices, and stumbling-blocks that lie in our way to heaven; it shows us both our food and our poison, and therefore he that walks according to the direction of the word is prevented from falling into a great deal of mischief: 1 John 2:10, 11, 'He that abideth in the light, there is none occasion of stumbling in him: but he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.' The meaning of that place is this, he that walks according to the light of scripture, and lives in obedience thereto, avoids stumbling; but he that is blinded by his own passion, he wants his light, knows not whither he goes, neither in what way he goes—*respectu viæ, et respectu termini*. What will be the end of his going? He mistakes the way, sins for duties, and good for evil; or he mistakes the end, thinking he is going to heaven, when he is in the highway to hell.

[2.] By way of humiliation and reproof, it discovers our sins to us in their own colours, so as to affect the heart, yea, our secret sins, which could not be found out by any other light: 1 Cor. 14:24, 'When he that believeth not, or is unlearned, comes in, he is convinced of all, he is

judged of all.' The light of the word it brings a sinner upon his face, makes him fall down, acknowledging the majesty of God in his word. God's word it hath his signature upon it, it is like himself, and bewrayeth its author by its convictive power and majesty. So it is notable, Heb. 4:12, 13, 'The word of God is quick and powerful, &c., and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.' Mark what he had said of the word. He proves the properties of the word by the properties of God; that God searcheth all things, God's word is like himself.

3. It is light in regard of comfort: Eccles. 11:7, 'Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun;' especially to those that have been shut up in darkness, and kept in a dungeon. Oh, it is a pleasant thing to behold the light again! So is the word of God light in this sense, to relieve us in all the dark and gloomy passages of the present life.

[1.] In outward darkness. When all outward comforts fail, and have spent their allowance, the comforts of the word are left; there is enough to support and strengthen our hearts in waiting upon God: Ps. 23:4, 'When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' The staff and rod they are instruments of a shepherd, and Christ is our spiritual shepherd, so that this staff and rod are his word and Spirit, they are the instruments of the spiritual shepherd; and this comforts us when we are in the shadow of death; in our crosses, in confusions and difficulties, when we have nothing else left but the promises, this is a reviving to the soul.

[2.] It is a comfort and refreshing to us in spiritual troubles, that arise from the guilt of sin, and want of the sense of God's love: Isa. 50:10, 'Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the

voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.' What shall he do? Shall he compass himself about in his own sparks? Oh, how miserable are we then! No; but let him depend upon God according to his promise. The word of God is a great part of his name; let him stay his heart upon the word of God, when he walketh in darkness, and seeth no light.

Now, that the word of God is such a light, such a sure and clear direction, I shall—(1.) Give a direct proof of it from scripture; (2.) Some types of it; (3.) Prove it by experience; (4.) By reason.

1. For the proof from scripture, you have the notions of the text. So Prov. 6:23, 'The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light.' It is that which keeps us from stumbling. So 2 Peter 1:19, 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.' The world is a dark place. Ay! but now here is a light that shines in a dark place, and that is the Holy Scripture, 'the sure word of prophecy;' it showeth us our way to heaven, and prevents us from stumbling into hell.

2. To prove it by types. Two types I shall mention; one is, Israel being directed by the pillar of a cloud; the other is, the lamp of the sanctuary.

[1.] The type of Israel's being directed by the pillar of the cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night, till they came into the land of Canaan, Exod. 13:21. Still they moved up and down, hither and thither, as the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire went before them. Thus our whole course is to be ordered by God's direction. See how this type is expressed, Neh. 9:19, 'The pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day to lead them in the way, neither the pillar of fire by night to show them light, and the way wherein they should go.' Mark, when

they were in the wilderness, the pillar of cloud and fire showed them the way where they were to go; this is an emblem of the safe conduct the church may expect from Christ Jesus in all ages; God's pillar departed not from them by night nor day. So while we are travelling in the wilderness of this our pilgrimage, his word and Spirit is continued to us. When they entered into Canaan, that was a type of heaven, then this pillar of cloud was removed. It is notable, Josh 14, when Israel passed over Jordan, we do not read the pillar went before them, but the ark of God was carried before them. So when the church comes to heaven, the resting-place, then this conduct ceaseth; the word hath no more use. Jesus Christ, as the great shepherd, leads his flock into their everlasting fold.

[2.] The other type was the lamp of the sanctuary; we read of that, Exod. 27:20, 21. There was a great lamp hung upon the veil, to distinguish the holy of holies from the other part of the tabernacle, and was fed with pure oil-olive, and this lamp was prepared and trimmed up by the priest daily. Now what did this lamp signify? Mark the application. This pure olive-oil signified God's pure word; without the mixture of human traditions; this hung up in the veil, shined in the church, and every day it was prepared, furnished, set forth by them that are called thereunto, for the use of the faithful.

3. Let me prove it by experience, that the word is such a sure direction.

[1.] Because natural men have a sense of it, and upon that account fear it. See John 3:20, 21, 'Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.' Natural men will not come to the word, they fear it as discovering, and therefore never feel it as refreshing. Evil-doers hate the light; they are afraid of the word lest it should convince them, and discover

them to themselves; therefore they stand off, and shun all means of closing with it; there is such conviction in the oar, a secret jealousy of the searching power that is in the word of God.

[2.] Godly men do find a great deal of comfort and satisfaction from this light as to all the doubts and fears of the soul: Ps. 19:8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.' All their scruples vanish; here is an apt and fit doctrine accommodated to the heart of man. A man hath never true and rational delight till he is fully satisfied in point of religion, till he can have rest for his soul, and commodious notions of God. Now, if you would have rest for your souls, Jer. 6:16, here it is, the children of God find it. There is a fair compliance in this doctrine with all those natural principles and ingrafted notions within us concerning God and his will; they find satisfaction in it to conscience, though not to fond curiosity; the one is necessary, the other dangerous and unprofitable. Christians! there is a great deal of difference between these two, satisfying conscience and satisfying curiosity, as much as between quenching the thirst of a sober man and satisfying the lust and appetite of a drunkard. Here is enough to satisfy conscience, a fair accommodation of excellent truths to a reasonable nature, truths becoming God, truths suiting with the heart of man, and therefore here they find it to be light, that is a sure direction. The wicked feel the discovery of it, and the saints feel the impression of it.

[3.] We have this external and outward experience to assure us of our rule and light that shines in the word of God, because those that go against this light and direction do sensibly miscarry, and are sure to split themselves upon some rock or other. Our first parent, Adam, when he hearkened to the voice of the serpent rather than the voice of the Lord, destroyed himself and all his posterity. As long as he



obeyed the word of God, he remained in a blessed estate in paradise, but when he gave heed to other counsels, he was cast out of paradise, and rendered liable to many sorrows, yea, eternal death. So all that walk in the imagination of their own hearts, and have not light from the word, they presently run themselves into sundry mischiefs. The young prophet is an instance of this, 1 Kings 13:21. To go to particular instances would be innumerable, every day's experience will furnish us with enough of this; they that will not take the light of God's word, stumble upon dark mountains, for God hath owned his word to a tittle, owned both the tables: Rom. 1:18, 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven,' &c.; from heaven, by the effects of his wrath. If men be ungodly and unrighteous, they are punished; nay, not only in the general, but in particular: Heb. 2:2, 'For if the word spoken by angels were steadfast'—why?—'for every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' By every transgression he means a sin of omission; by every disobedience, a sin of commission. And as he will do so for sins against the law, so sins against the gospel; that place where the gospel was first propounded smarted for the neglect of it: 1 Thes. 2:16, 'Wrath is come upon them to the uttermost,' for despising the gospel. And still God secures the certainty of our direction by new judgments; those that will go contrary to the word, turn aside to paths of their own, they perish in their devices.

4. Let me prove it by reasons that certainly the word must needs be light, that is, a clear and sure direction. I prove it from the author, the instruments, and penmen, and from the ends why God hath given the word.

[1.] From the author of it, it is God's word. Everything that comes from God hath some resemblance of his majesty: 'God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all,' 1 John 1:5. His word is light. If God

would give us anything to direct us, it must needs be clear and sure, it must have light. As at first God gave reason to direct man: John 1:4, 'That life was the light of men;' as it came from God, before it was weakened by the fall, it was a full direction, it discovered its author; and now since the fall, still it discovers its author. Conscience, which remains with us, it is called the candle of the Lord,' Prov. 20:27. From a glorious sun now it is dwindled to a candle, yet it is called the candle of the Lord; it is a candle lighted by God himself. The understanding and conscience that is privy to our most secret motions, thoughts, and actions; though it may be maimed and lessened by sin, it is sensible of some distinction between good and evil, and acts God's part in the soul, sometimes condemning, sometimes approving, accusing and excusing by turns, Rom. 2:15. But, alas! if we were only left to this light, we should be for ever miserable. The light of reason is too short for us now, and there is a double reason; partly, because our chief good and last end being altered by sin, we shall strangely mistake things, if we weigh them in the balance of the flesh, which we seek to please. Now our chief good is altered, or rather we are apt to mistake it; all our business is to please the flesh, and to gratify lust and appetite, Ps. 49:12. Therefore go to a man led by carnal and unsanctified reason, he shall 'put light for darkness, and darkness for light; good for evil, and evil for good,' Isa. 5:20. He shall confound the names and natures of things, so miserably grope in the dark, and not find out the way to true happiness, either stumbling, dashing his foot against a stone, or wander out of the way in a maze of a thousand uncertainties; therefore it is a blessed thing not to be left to this candle of reason, the light within us, for that will not guide us, but God hath drawn a straight line for us to heaven, which if we follow we cannot miss. Again, partly because man's condition since the fall is such that he needs a supernatural remedy; before he can be happy, he needs a redeemer. Now the gift of a redeemer depending upon the

free grace of God, cannot be found out by natural light, for that can only judge of things necessary, and not of such things as depend upon the arbitrary love of God, therefore this light cannot guide, John 3:16. Well, then, because the candle of the Lord that is within us is not enough to direct us, God hath set up a lamp in the sanctuary to give us light, and to guide us in the pursuit of true happiness, and that is the scripture. Now, if they have God for their author, surely they must needs be clear and full, for nothing indited by his Spirit can be dark, confused, and inconveniently expressed, either with respect to the things revealed, or to the persons to whom this revelation is made. For if God should speak darkly (here is my argument), especially in necessary things, it is either because God could not speak otherwise, or would not. The former is direct blasphemy; he that made the eye, cannot he see? and he that made the mouth, cannot he speak plainly and intelligibly to his people, so as to be understood by them? And the latter cannot be said, that God would not, for that is contrary to his goodness and love to mankind: Ps. 25:8, 'Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will he teach sinners in the way.' If this be true, that God is a just good God, he will teach us plainly; the Psalmist infers it, he is just, and will not lead us wrong; he is an upright God, and he is a good God; and therefore, though we have fallen from the state of our creation, though the candle of the Lord burn dim in our hearts since the fall, yet he is a good God, therefore he will show us the way. Now it is not to be imagined that there should not be light in the word of God, that that should be dark, confused, and unintelligible; that the most powerful and wise monarch, and most loving of all, that he should write a book to teach men the way to heaven, and do it so cloudily, that we cannot tell what to make of it. Therefore if God be the author, this book must be true; here must be light, a clear and sure direction to guide us in all our ways.

[2.] I prove it by reason again, from the instruments used in this work. Shall I take those words for my groundwork? 2 Peter 1:21, 'For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;' that is, it is not the fancies or dictates of men, but the word of God; for they were holy men, and holy men guided by the Holy Ghost, and so guided as that they were moved, borne up by the special motion of the Spirit. Let me reason thus: those that God hath employed to deliver his mind to the world, look either to the prophets of the Old Testament or apostles of the New, and you will find them to be holy men, burning with zeal for God and love to souls; and it is not to be imagined that they would deliver God's mind so darkly that nobody could understand their meaning. Christians they were, not men that were to act a part of their own upon the stage of the world, not men that aimed at ostentation of wisdom and curiosity of science; but they were holy men, they were free from ambition and envy, and other such vile affections, which are wont to make writers to affect obscurity; therefore in all simplicity of style, plainness of heart, and faithfulness to their message, they minded their master's honour and the people's good; they renounced pomp of words and lofty speculations, minded that people might understand the mind of God published by them. As they were holy men, so they were acted by the Spirit of God. Now the Spirit of God is not a spirit of darkness but a spirit of light, which gives understanding to all men, therefore they spake luminously and clearly. Nay, they were not only acted by the Spirit, but they were borne up by the Spirit, carried by the Holy Ghost while they were employed in this work, publishing the mind of God to the church; they were carried beyond the line of their natural spirits, by an extraordinary impulse infallibly borne up, so that they could not err and miscarry. Now from such holy men that were not swayed by ambition and private aims, so guided, so acted by the Spirit, what can be expected but what is sure, clear, and plain?

[3.] I argue and reason again from the end of God in giving us the scriptures; all which doth clearly infer that here is a sure and plain direction that will lead you to heaven. There is a fourfold end wherefore God hath given us the scriptures:—

(1.) That by this means heavenly doctrine might be kept free from corruption, that men might not obtrude articles of faith upon us and fancies of their own brain, that heavenly doctrine might be put into a stated course and kept pure from corruption. When mankind sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, it was necessary that one way or other they should have light, that God by some way or other would reveal his mind to them, either by word of mouth or by writing. Now God did it by oracles and extraordinary messages at first, while there were but few truths revealed, and such as did not much burden the memory, and while men were long-lived, and so could a great while avouch their message from God, and while they were of great simplicity, and the church was confined to a few men, to a few families, within a small compass of ground, not liable to those miseries and changes now in latter days. Before Christ came it was fit God should send his messengers; but now in these latter days, when he hath spoken to us by his Son, Heb. 1:1, it is fit the rule of faith should be closed up. It is not for the honour of the Son of God that after him should come any extraordinary nuncio or ambassador from heaven, as if he had not fully discovered his Father's mind. Well, then, therefore God hath put all his messages into writing for the use of after-ages, and for this end that there might be some public standard for trying of things by. Now God's end would not be accomplished if this writing were not clear. Here is the argument, the world would be left at great uncertainties, far more than in old time, and so this end for preserving truth for the use and direction of the church would be wholly lost. Well, then, if God will make a writing serve instead of extraordinary messages, which brought their own

evidence with them, certainly he will not put it into words liable to mistake, but that are intelligible. Wisdom saith, Prov. 8:9, 'They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.' Certainly they that come in simplicity of heart, with a mind to learn God's will, not to cavil, they may know.

(2.) God's end in setting forth the scripture was that it might be read of all ages and of all sexes, as the book of the law was to be read in the congregation before the men, women, little ones, and strangers, Deut. 21; from day to day it was read in the synagogue, Acts 15:21; and God would have them teach their children, Deut. 6:6; and Timothy is commended for reading the scriptures from his youth, 2 Tim. 3:5. And the apostles do express themselves to be 'debtors both to the wise and unwise, to Greeks and barbarians,' Rom. 1:14, to speak wisdom to the wise and plainness to the simple; and St John he writes to children and young men and fathers, 1 John 2:13. Well, then, here is my argument, if God would write a book to be read by men, women, children, all sorts, surely it is that all might understand, not that they might repeat it by rote, and toss the words of it in their mouths as parrots do words they understand not; surely, then, they are compiled to profit all.

(3.) God's end in giving the word was for converting of men, or leaving them without excuse. Now take either end, and it shows there must be a plain direction. If for converting of men, then it must be so plain that it may be understood by them, for there is nothing gets to the heart but by the understanding: 'After I was instructed I smote upon my thigh.' And all influences are conveyed by light, and if God gains any heart it is by teaching and by light. Or if it were for leaving them without excuse, it must be by a clear revealing of his will, otherwise they might pretend obscurity. The apostle pleads this, 2 Cor. 4:2-4; saith the apostle, there is such plain truth in the gospel

that every man's conscience may take it up if he will; and if they cannot see the majesty of God in this doctrine they are blinded by Satan; the fault is not in gospel light, but in their own eyes; they cannot complain of God, but of themselves.

(4.) The end is, that it might be a rule of faith and manners by which all doctrines are to be tried. A rule of faith: Isa. 8:20, 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' And Acts 17:11, 'They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.' So to be a rule of manners: Gal. 6:16, 'As many as walk according to this rule,' &c. There are many actions which God requireth of us that expose us to great difficulty and hazard. Now, before the heart be gained to them, we had need have a plain proof that it is the will of God; for who will venture his all unless he have a clear warrant, that knows whither he goes, and whither to look for amends, if he suffer the loss of all things? Thus there is light in the word.

Secondly, But now it is a full direction, for David speaks it of his feet and path.

1. In general observe this: it is not a light to our brains to fill us with empty notions, but a light to our feet to regulate our practice and to guide our actions, Jer. 6:16. He doth not say, hearken after the true religion, but walk therein. For a man to study the scripture only to satisfy curiosity, only to know what is right and good, and not follow it with all his heart, is but to make a rod for his own back, and doth but cause his own condemnation to be sore and terrible, Luke 12:47. To be able to dispute for truth and not lie under the power of it, to avoid heresy and live in vice, will never bring him to heaven, Gal. 6:16. It is not them that are able to talk of it, but to 'walk according to

this rule;' not to play with it, but to work with it. Knowledge and practice must be joined together; they do never well asunder, but excellent together.

## 2. In our practice.

[1.] Our path, our general choice. A man that consults with God's word, 'The Lord will teach him the way that he shall choose,' Ps. 25:12. Everything appointed to an end must have all things absolutely necessary to that end, else it is not perfect in its kind; though perfect to guide us to eternal life; therefore it must contain all things that belong or conduce to that end. It is not a rule given us to be rich or safe, but to be eternally happy.

[2.] As it is a light to our path, so to our feet. How? In the particular actions that we perform, and in the particular conditions that we pass through.

(1.) In the particular actions that we perform. Every action we go about must be guided by the word. Why? Because obedience in particular actions we are most apt to miscarry in. Many are wise in generals, but in particulars they quite mistake their way. We have general notions that we must be holy; ay! but we are not 'holy in all manner of conversation,' 1 Peter 1:15. In every creek and turning of our lives, in all our actions of eating, drinking, sleeping, and waking, we are to be mindful and respect the command of God in all these. No path of a Christian's conversation but ought to savour of grace and holiness; not only his religious, but his common and civil actions. Every action is a step to heaven or hell, for this life is compared to a walk, and in a walk every step brings us onward in our way. Briefly, in every act, either sin or grace interposeth, therefore we had need look to every step, and still to walk according to rule.



(2.) It guides us in all the conditions that we pass through. In every age; here is milk for the weak, and strong meat for men of ripe age. In every calling, from the king to the lowest beggar. In every state of life, adversity, prosperity, still here is light for you.

There are two parties whose interest it is to decry the clearness of scripture, papists and libertines. Papists, they are afraid to stand to this trial, they would bring all to the judgment of the church; therefore, it is for their interest that the scriptures were not a clear, safe, and a full direction. Libertines, they decry the clearness of scripture upon several grounds. Those that plead for a boundless toleration, what is their great argument? Nothing is certain in religion. If the word be a clear rule, then, &c.

## **SERMON CXIII**

### **The word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.—VER. 105**

HERE I shall answer five objections that are made by cavillers.

Object. 1. First, If it be so clear a light, why do men so often mistake that have the scriptures, and consult with them? yea, why is there such differences among good men?

Ans. I answer, in general, there is light in the scriptures, but there is darkness in men that are conversant about them. The object may be well represented when the faculty is not well disposed. There are defects in them to whom this discovery is made; though they have light, yet they want eyes. The sun giveth light enough, though blind men cannot see it; the word doth whatsoever is necessary on its own part. To the beholding of anything by the outward sense, there must not only be light to make the object conspicuous, but also a faculty of seeing in the eye; blind men cannot see at noonday, nor the sharpest-sighted at midnight. There is light in the scriptures surely, for God would not deal hypocritically with us that are his people; if he hath given us a rule, he would not wrap it up in darkness, so as we should not know his meaning; so that the defect is in us. This in general.

But, secondly, there are many causes of men's mistake.

1. Some come to the word with a presumption of their own wit, and leaning upon their own understanding, as if that should discover the whole counsel of God, and these God never undertook to teach: Ps. 25:9, 'The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.' Those that, in a humble sense of their own nothingness, depend upon his direction, them will he teach: James 1:21, 'Receive with meekness the ingrafted word of God.' We have caution given us, and admonitions against pride and arrogance and self-dependence, Prov. 1:3–6.

2. Many bring their prejudicate opinions along with them, and are biassed and prepossessed before they come to the word of God, and so do not so much take up the sense which the scriptures offer, as seek to impose their own sense on them, and regulate the scriptures to their own hearts, not regulating their hearts and principles and senses according to the word of God. *Optimus ille lector est*, saith

Hilary, qui dictorum intelligentiam expectat, &c. That mind which is preoccupied with evil opinions, and enslaved to preconceived conclusions, they do not take anything from the word, but impose something upon it which God never revealed there. If the weights be equal, yet if the balance be not equipendent, wrong may be done. They come with an idol in their own hearts, Ezek. 14:2, as those that would ask counsel of the Lord, that were resolved beforehand, Jer. 42. While we look through the spectacles of our own fancies and preconceptions, the mind, poisoned with error, seemeth to see what we see not.

3. Some search the scriptures not out of any love to the truth, or to know the mind of God, but to oppose it rather, and so seek a pretence from thence to justify their private faction in way of opposition against God. The devil gets scripture to wrest it to his own purpose, Mat. 4:6. They read not to be better, but to cavil, and put a greater varnish upon the devil's cause, as Julian did search the scriptures to pick an advantage against the true religion, and scoff at them that professed it; and Herod inquired after the place where Jesus was born, not to adore him, but to kill him, Mat. 2:8. Our great rule is, John 17:17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.' When you come to study the scriptures, to be the better for them, and not to cavil, then you are in the way to find profit from them.

4. Some come to the word leavened with some carnal affections, and so their hearts are blinded by their lusts and passion: 2 Cor. 4:3, 4, 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.' There is evidence enough in the truth, but their hearts are wedded to their sins, and so cannot see it; they are ambitious, and seek after honour and worldly greatness; and the whole bent and scope of the scripture being against their design, they can never have a perfect

understanding of it; their hearts are full of avarice, earthly-mindedness, and some other beloved sin that they cherish, which doth defile all that they touch, even the very word of God. Hag. 2:13, A man that was unclean by a dead body, whatsoever he touched was also unclean, even holy things; and, Titus 1:15, 'To the impure all things are impure;' and so by the just judgment of God are blinded and hardened in their own prejudices, for the light they have hindereth them from discerning the truth.

5. Some content themselves with some superficial apprehensions, and do not dig deep in the mines of knowledge, and therefore no wonder they mistake in many things: Prov. 2:4, 5, 'If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.' No excellent things are to be had without pain and industry and search; certainly the knowledge of God's word must cost us great pains.

6. Where men are right in the main, and give diligence to know God's mind, there will be mistakes in lesser things. All have not parts alike, and gifts and graces alike, and therefore there is some variety of opinions and interpretations of scripture among the godly wise. Every man is not so happy to be so well studied, nor hath not that ability to understand, nor so furnished with acquired helps of arts and tongues, nor such a degree of the Spirit. There is a difference in age, growth, and experience among good men; some are babes, and some grown in years in Christianity, Phil. 3:15. Grace is bewrayed in knowledge, as well as in holiness.

Object. 2. If there be such a light in the scriptures, what need is there of the Spirit?

Ans. I answer—The scriptures are the means of light, the Spirit is the author of light, both together enlighten the eyes, Ps. 19:8. These two

must be taken in conjunction, not in exclusion. To pretend to the Spirit and neglect the scriptures, makes way for error and fond conceits: Isa. 8:20, 'To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' Light is not contrary to light; so to study the scriptures, and neglect the Spirit, who 'searcheth out the deep things of God,' 1 Cor. 2:11, leaveth us in darkness about God's mind. The object to be known is fixed in the scriptures, but the faculty that knoweth must be enlightened by the Spirit. There is a literal understanding of the scriptures and a spiritual understanding, 1 Cor. 2:14. Now, as to the spiritual understanding of them, there needs the Spirit, 'for the natural man, cannot understand the things of the Spirit;' so that here is a fair correspondence between the word and the Spirit.

Object. 3. If the scriptures be so plain, what need of the ministry?

Ans. 1. I answer—It is God's institution, and we must submit to it, though we could see no reason for it. That it is God's institution is plain, for he hath set some in the church, not only apostles and prophets, but pastors and teachers, to apply scriptures to us; and, 1 Cor. 1:21, 'It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' If there were no reason but this, because it is God's institution, we should submit to it.

2. The use of the ministry is to explain and vindicate truth. Men darken counsel with words, and render plain things obscure by their litigations and unprofitable debates. Now they are set for the defence of the truth, εἰς ἀπολόγιαν, Phil. 1:7. And the ministry must be ἀντεχόμενος, Titus 1:9, 'Able to convince the gainsayers;' good at holding and drawing; it is the human help for weak understandings. The eunuch was reading, and could not tell what to make of it, then God sent him an interpreter, Acts 8. Now God's help should not be

despised; when he will employ men to solve doubts, to guide us in our way to heaven, we should thankfully accept of it, rather than quarrel at the institution.

3. They are of use to apply generals to particular cases, and to teach us how to deduce genuine inferences from those truths laid down in the scriptures. Mal. 2:7, in this sense it is said, 'The priest's lips should preserve knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.' God hath appointed this office to some, to solve the doubts that do arise about particular exigencies and cases, and to make out the mind of God to his people, otherwise they need go no farther than the tables and books of Moses to seek the law; but God hath appointed some in the church that are skilled in consequences and deductions, to raise matter therefrom, so that it is a minister's work to open and explain scripture.

4. There is a use of the ministry to keep doctrines still afoot in the church, and to keep us in remembrance. Ministers are the Lord's remembrancers; it is a great part of their office to mind people of their duty. The word is a light, but it must be set in the candlestick of the church; they are to hold out the light for our direction and guidance.

5. There is a peculiar blessing and efficacy to a Christian from their calling: Mat. 28:20, 'Lo, I am with you to the end of the world.'

Object. 4. It is said, 2 Peter 3:16, that there are some things hard to be understood, therefore how should it be a clear rule to us? Thereupon many take occasion to tax the scriptures of obscurity, and cry out that nothing is certain in religion, and so hinder and discourage men from the study of the word.

Ans. 1. I answer—The apostle saith there are *δυσνόητα*, some things hard to be understood, but doth not say there are *ἀνόητα*, things that cannot be understood; not there are things impossible to be understood, but there is some difficulty in them, to exercise our diligence, to subdue our pride, for the humbling of us, for the prevention of the contempt of things easy and plain, that are soon despised, to excite us to prayer for knowledge, to avoid satiety in this holy banquet.

2. The second thing that I answer is this; he doth not say there are *πολλὰ*, but *τινά*; many things, but some. Though there are some things propounded which are difficult, to exercise our diligence, yet other things are plainly delivered, to invite our search. *Multa sunt aperta et manifesta* (saith Austin) *unde aperiuntur*, &c. Though there are some things obscure, there are many things will help to clear them, and whatsoever is necessary to salvation is clear. There are some things hidden like spots in the moon and stones in the earth, things that serve for plenitude of knowledge and curiosity. He saith these things are hid, but now things necessary to salvation are made obvious to us; as water and bread, they are not hard to come by, but gold and silver is hid in the bowels of the earth; and therefore though there be some things hard to be understood, he doth not say they are not to be understood. Now the question between us and the papists is not, whether some things in the scripture be obscure, but whether they be so obscure as that people ought not to read them, or cannot with any profit, and that there can be no certainty thence deduced? As to the defining things controverted in matters necessary to salvation, we say there are some things hard to be understood, to keep us humble, to quicken us to pray for the Spirit, yet for the most part God's mind is plain and easy to be understood by them that humbly depend upon Christ teaching in the use of the appointed means.

Object. 5. Another objection is from experience; a poor Christian complaineth, as Job 19:8, 'He hath set darkness in my path that I cannot pass.' They would fain know the mind of God in some particular cases, but they cannot see it.

Ans. I answer—This darkness of ours should not be urged to the disparagement of the word. We are under many doubts, we are divided between light and interest, we puzzle and grope, and would reconcile the light of the scriptures and our interests together, but this should not disparage the word. The scriptures complain of our darkness, not of its own, and the saints always say, Lord, do not make a plainer law; but open our eyes, in the 18th verse of this psalm; this is Chrysostom's gloss upon that place. When a man walketh in the way of his own heart, his way may be darkness, and he may stumble, and know not whither he goeth. But you that give up yourselves sincerely to the directions of his word, he will make your path clear and plain before you; that is, when you seek nothing but God's glory, and your own eternal salvation for your end, and come with a humble meek mind to seek God's counsel, being free from the preoccupations of self-conceits, being resolved to follow God's directions whatever they be, and use that diligence which is necessary; you will not be long kept in the dark.

Use 1.—[1.] To inform us how to answer this question, how to know whether the scriptures be the word of God. It shows itself, and evidenceth itself to be so; for it is a light that discovers itself, and all things else, without any other testimony. When the sun is up, there needs no witness and proof that it is light. Let the least child bring a candle into a room, and as it discovers other things, so it discovers itself. So the word of God is that which discovers itself to us, yea, it hath a self-evidencing light.



[2.] If the word be a light, it informs us, then, there is none that are above the scriptures. There is a fond conceit that men take up, that the scriptures are for novices and young beginners, not for strong Christians. David was no novice, yet he saith, 'Thy word is a light.' And Daniel was no novice, yet he got understanding by the prophecy of the prophet Jeremiah, Dan. 9:2. Timothy was no novice, who was to 'give attendance to reading, and exhortation, and doctrine,' 1 Tim. 4:13. Aye! but what is meant by that place, 2 Peter 1:19? 'We have a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.' From thence many gather that as soon as Christ is revealed in us, we should not look after the scriptures, for it is said, 'until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.' Some understand this place of the light of glory, and others of the light of the gospel; you do well to take heed to the Old Testament light, till you have the New Testament light, which is most agreeable to the mind of God. For my part, I pitch upon the former, and shall understand it of the dawning of eternity, or Christ's second coming, which is called in scripture a day which shall then begin and never be ended, after which there is no night, nor any other day, but a blessed eternity; and sometimes it is called 'the day,' 2 Tim. 4:8, and 'that day,' 1 Thes. 5:4; and Christ is called 'the bright morning star,' Rev. 22:16, and 'the glorious shall shine like the morning stars,' Dan. 12:3, and Rev. 2:28. Our happiness is expressed by a day-star; so that the meaning is, take heed unto this word until the day of eternity dawn upon you, till you come to the light of glory, till you have a greater light than that of the gospel.

Now, I rather pitch upon this interpretation, because they to whom the apostle wrote were converted Jews, and did not only own the Old Testament, but had already received the gospel light, the day-star was risen upon their hearts, so that he bids them take heed to the sure word of prophecy, till the light of glory was revealed to them. I

know there are some divines understand it of a more clear and plentiful knowledge of the gospel, who take prophecy to be the scriptures of the Old Testament that they were to take heed to, till the gospel light did arise upon them; and the times of the Old Testament were called night, Rom. 13:12, but now the gospel time is called day. But if it be understood thus, then some say that the law must be cast off when the gospel appeared to them, because it is said, 'until the day.' Those divines explain themselves safely enough herein, for, say they, until doth not always note terminum temporis, the end of time, but continuationem actus, the continuation of the act, until the time, and afterwards, as it is spoken in other scriptures, 'their sin shall not be blotted out till they die,' that is never; but for the former reason that I have given before, I think it is meant of the light of glory.

Use 2. Reproof.—[1.] Of those that walk in the midst of this light, and yet perceive no more of the things of God, than if they were in darkness, these lose the benefit which God vouchsafeth to them: John 1:5, 'The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not;' and John 3:19, 'The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.' It had been better for them they had never heard of the scriptures, and that God had never set up such a lamp in the church. These men believe the word of God is a light and a lamp, yet never take care of, nor give heed to it; they are careless, and never measure their actions according to this rule.

[2.] It reproveth those that set up another rule, and look for an infallible interpreter.

(1.) Those that set up reason instead of the word of God. Alas! this is an imperfect rule; these men would bring down all things before the

tribunal of their own reason; these are not disciples of Christ, but masters; they will not be taught by the directions of the word, but by their own dark hearts. I have told you the candle of the Lord did burn bright within us; but alas! now it is weakened by sin, it is an imperfect irrational thing, we can never be saved by it.

(2.) Others are guided by their passions and lusts; this is their direction and their lamp; this will surely lead them to utter darkness: 'If you live after the flesh, you shall die,' Rom. 8:13.

(3.) Some take the counsel and example of others, this will leave them comfortless, and make them fall into the snare.

(4.) Some go to witches in straits, as the prophet reproves such, Isa 8:19, 20, 'Should not a people seek unto their God?'

(5.) Others expect new revelations from heaven to counsel them; they would converse, with angels now God hath spoken to us by his Son: Gal. 1:8, 'If an angel from heaven should bring another gospel than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.'

Use 3. Caution to enterprize nothing but what you have a warrant for out of the word of God. When you are going about any action, say, Where is my warrant? If I do it upon my own brain, I must stand to my own hazard; and ail the evil that comes upon me, it is the fruit of my own counsel. Num. 27:21, the priest was to ask counsel of the Lord, who shall go out, and who hall go in; and 1 Sam. 23:9, 10. To do things with a doubting conscience, with an uncertainty, whether it be good or bad, it is a sin; for 'whatsoever is not of faith, is sin;' still seek your direction from the word.

Use 4.—[1.] It exhorts us to bless God, and be thankful for this light: Isa. 9:2, 'The people that sat in darkness saw great light.'. There is

the same difference between the church and other places, as there was between Egypt and Goshen, Exod. 10:23. Here is light, and in other places thick darkness. What a mercy it is that we have present direction, a light to guide us here in grace, that will bring us to glory. Give thanks to God for so great a benefit.

[2.] Walk according to the directions of the word; walk in the light,' Eph. 5:8; believe it, Heb. 4:2, the true and infallible truth that came out of God's mouth; and then apply it; say, This truth which is spoken is spoken to me, Mat. 13:37, and urge thy heart with the duties of it; this was spoken for our learning, be persuaded of this truth, and so walk and so do, and you shall not find any miscarriage, 1 Cor. 15:58. Here is my warrant and my direction, I will keep to it, though it expose me to many hazards and straits, I know it will be made up at last, it will not be lost labour to do what God biddeth thee to do.

## **SERMON CXIV**

# **I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.—VER.**

## **106**

IN the former verse David had commended the word for a sure direction; it is a light and a lamp. How so? Not only by God's designation and appointment, but by David's choice, 'It was a light to my feet, and a lamp to my steps.' Now, in this verse, he speaks of his firmness and constancy to that choice; I have taken thy word for my guidance and direction, and there he did resolve to stick. His constancy was grounded upon a vow, or upon a promissory oath, which he saw no cause to retract or repent of: 'I have sworn, and I will perform it,' &c.

In which words you may observe—

1. The strength of David's resolution and purpose, expressed in his oath; not I must, or I will keep, but I have sworn, &c.
2. The matter of this purpose or oath, and that was to keep God's judgments.
3. One great motive and reason that inclined him so to do, in the word, thy righteous judgments; the marvellous equity that was to be observed in the things commanded by God.
4. The conscience that lay upon him of observing this oath, I will perform it. As if he had said, I saw a great deal of reason to make the promise so solemnly to God, and I see no reason at all to retract it. Four points I shall observe:—

1. That it is not only lawful, hut good and profitable, to bind ourselves to our duty by a vow, solemnly declared purpose, and holy oath; so David, I have sworn.

2. That this help of an oath or vow should be used in a matter lawful, weighty, and necessary, 'I have sworn,' saith David; but what hath he sworn? To keep thy righteous judgments. A great duty which God had enjoined him in his covenant.

3. Those that are entered into the bond of a holy oath must religiously observe and perform what they have sworn to God: I have sworn, and I will perform.

4. That we may perform our oaths, and lie under a sense and conscience of our engagements to God, it is good that they should be often revived and renewed upon us; for so doth David here recognise his oath, I have sworn that, &c.

Doct. 1. That it concerns us sometimes to bind ourselves to God, and the duty that we owe to him, by an oath.

1. That it is lawful so to do appears from God's injunction, and the practice of the saints.

[1.] From God's injunction. He hath commanded us to accept of the gospel covenant, and not barely so, but to submit unto the seals and rites by which it is confirmed, which submission of ours implieth an oath made to God. Baptism is our sacramentum militare, sacramental vow, our oath of allegiance to God; and therefore it is called, 1 Peter 3:21, ἐπερώτημα, 'The answer of a good conscience towards God,' an answer upon God's demands in the covenant. God does, as it were, in the covenant of grace, put us to the question, Will you renounce all your sins, and all the vanities you have doted upon?

And we answer to God, enter into a solemn oath, that we will renounce sin, that we will accept of Christ as our Saviour, and will walk before him in all holy obedience. Among the Romans, when any soldier was pressed for war, he took an oath to serve his captain faithfully, and not to forsake him, and then he was called miles per sacramentum, a soldier by sacrifice or by oath; and sometimes one took an oath for all the rest, and the others only said, The same oath he took, the same do I; and these were called milites per conjurationem, et milites evocati. Thus every Christian is a professed soldier of Christ; he hath sworn to become the Lord's, to cleave faithfully to him; and this oath, that it may not be forgotten, is renewed at the Lord's supper, where again we solemnly engage, by the public rites that are there used, to stand to our covenant. We do not only come and take God's enfeoffment, take a pledge out of God's hands, to be assured of the privileges of the covenant, but we bind ourselves to perform the duty thereof; for as the blood of the beast, Exod. 24:7, 8, that was offered in the sacrifice, which is called there the blood of the covenant, was sprinkled not only upon the altar, to show that God was engaged to bless, but sprinkled half upon the people, to show they were engaged to obey; there was a confirmation of that promise made to God, 'All that the Lord hath commanded us, that will we do.' Well, now, if God thought such a course necessary and profitable for us, certainly we may upon occasion use the like means for our confirmation, for our strengthening in the work of obedience. That there is such a vow expressed or implied in every prayer may be easily made good in the whole tenor of our Christianity; therefore certainly it is lawful so to do, to make our duty more urgent and explicit upon our souls, by solemn vow and serious oath of dedication of ourselves to God's use and service.

[2.] The practice of the saints, who have publicly and privately engaged themselves to God, do show the lawfulness of it. Public

instances: 2 Chron. 15:12–14, 'They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul; and they swore unto the Lord,' &c. So in Josiah's time: 2 Chron. 34:31, 'And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord to walk after the Lord, and keep his commandments,' &c. So Neh. 10:29, 'They entered into an oath to walk in God's laws.' And for private oaths, we have David's instance here in the text; and Job 31:1, 'I made covenant with mine eyes.' He had bound himself by a holy vow and purpose to guard his senses, and take heed his heart did not take fire by the gazing of his eye, that it was not inflamed with lust and sin.

2. That it is convenient so to do.

[1.] To answer God's love and condescension to us in the covenant. God thinks he can never be bound fast enough to us, and therefore interposeth by an oath. An oath is properly conversant about a doubtful matter, of which there is some question or scruple, which cannot otherwise be decided; then the law saith, he should give his oath to his neighbour. Why then doth the Lord swear? Is there any doubtfulness in his promises? No; the apostle saith, Heb. 6:18, the Lord swears, being willing over and above to give 'the heirs of promise' ample satisfaction. Now for God, that cannot lie, and whose word is above all assurance, to stoop to us, and put himself to an oath, certainly this should work upon our hearts, and draw from us some answerable return on our part, there being great and visible danger of our breaking with God, none of God's breaking with us; therefore, that we may not play fast and loose with him, we should come under this engagement to him of vow and public promise to God.



[2.] To testify our affection to his service, we should put ourselves under the most high and sacred bonds that can be found out. Many have some slight and wandering motions towards God, and cold purposes of serving him, which soon vanish, and come to nothing; but now it argueth the heart is more thoroughly bent and set towards God, and that we have a deep sense of our duty, when we seriously confirm our purpose by a vow and holy oath. There are divers sorts of men in the world, some that are of that spirit as to break all bonds, cast away all cords, and think they can never be loose enough in point of religion, Ps. 2:3. They seek to deface and blot out of their conscience the natural sense which they have of religion and of their duty to God, and so give up themselves headlong to all manner of impiety. There are others have some cold approbation of the way of God, and which manifests itself by some faint, weak, and wavering purposes, and slight attempts upon religion, but are soon discouraged, and never come to a fixed resolution, or serious dedication or surrender of themselves to the Lord's use. Now, a gracious heart thinks it can never be bound fast enough to God, therefore doth not only approve the ways of God, or desire to walk therein, but issues forth a purpose, a practical decree in his soul. Besides the approbation of conscience, there is a desire of heart, and this desire backed with a purpose, and this promise backed with an oath, which is the highest way of obligation; and thus doth he dedicate himself to the Lord and his service, in the strictest way of expressing his consent, for an oath binds more than a promise.

3. It is very profitable so to do, because of our backwardness, laziness, and fickleness.

[1.] Because of our backwardness; we need to thrust forth the heart into the ways of obedience, for we hang off from God. Though we are his by every kind of right and title, yet we are very slow of heart to do

his will, and therefore an oath is profitable to increase the sense of our duty; a threefold cord is not easily broken. Now there is a triple tie and bond upon a man.

(1.) There is God's natural right that he hath over us and to our service, the sovereignty and dominion that he hath over us. We are not free as to obedience before the oath, but are bound by creation; for God hath created us, not only as he created other things, ultimately and terminatively, but immediately, for his service. All things were created for his glory, so that ultimately they are for his use; but the proper end and use wherefore man was created was for the immediate service of God. He that planteth a vine expecteth fruit from it. By continual preservation; he giveth us maintenance, and therefore justly expecteth service. By redemption, as having bought us with a dear price, 1 Cor. 6:20. From all which there resulteth a natural duty which we owe to him as our sovereign, and he may command us what he will.

(2.) There is the bond of voluntary consent, that our duty may be more active and urging upon our hearts. God doth not only interpose his own authority and command us to keep his laws diligently, Ps. 119:4, but requires a consent on the creature's part. All the treaties and tenders of grace are made to draw us to this consent, that we may voluntarily and by the inclination of our own hearts present ourselves before the Lord, and yield up ourselves to his service, Rom. 6:13.

(3.) Besides this there is the bond of an oath, which is the strictest way of voluntary resolution and highest engagement that a man can make; therefore when the heart is so backward, and hangs off from God and duties we owe to him, it is good to declare our assent in the most solemn way. That the saints have made use of purposes thus

solemnly declared in case of backwardness appears in scripture. David, when his heart was shy of God's presence, and had sinned away his liberty and peace, and so could not endure to come to God, what course doth he take? He issues forth a practical decree in his soul, and binds his heart by a fixed purpose that he would come to God, Ps. 32:5. So Acts 11:23; he exhorteth them with full purpose of heart to draw nigh to God; it should be the fixed resolution of the soul. And Jer. 30:21, 'Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord.' We should lay the strongest bonds and engagements we possibly can, whereby God's authority may be backed, and his right confirmed, by the most solemn assent that we can make.

[2.] In regard of our fickleness and inconstancy; we are slippery, off and on with God: 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways,' James 1:8. We have unsettled hearts, and when we meet with temptations from without we shall soon give up at the first assault, and so be now for God, anon for Satan; therefore this is a lawful and sanctified means to help us to constancy. Indeed, before we come to this fixed settled purpose we lie open to temptation; and when our first heats are spent we tire and wax weary in the Lord's service, therefore we had need make the most sacred engagements to God, that we may keep to God and persist in our duty. Now a solemn oath seems to be the most serviceable for this use. Why? For it implies a severe and dreadful imprecation. In an oath God is not only invoked as a witness but as a judge. We appeal to his omniscience for the sincerity of our hearts in making promise, and to his vindictive power as a judge if we shall act contrary to what we have sworn. Saith Plutarch, Every oath implies a curse, or a desire of vengeance, in case of the breach of that oath; therefore it is said, Neh. 10:29, 'They entered into a curse to walk in God's law;' that is, a curse in case of disobedience. And this was supposed to be the meaning of

that rite by which they were wont to confirm their covenants. Jer. 34:18, when the calf was cut in twain they did as it were devote themselves thus to be cut in twain and torn in pieces, and to be destroyed as that creature was, if they violated the covenant thus solemnly sworn; and though this imprecation or execration should not be expressed, yet every promissory oath necessarily implies a curse in case of unfaithfulness. Well, now, this is a good means to keep us constant when we have bound ourselves to God upon such strict terms; therefore some derive ὄρκος from εἶργω, to hedge, because it is as a hedge to keep us within the compass of our duty, and confirm our hearts in that which is good. Well, then, because of our fickleness it is not enough to leave the soul to the mere bonds of duty, but confirm our resolution by an oath. I may illustrate this by that passage, when Hooper the blessed martyr was at the stake, and the officers came to fasten him to it, saith he, Let me alone; God that hath called me hither, he will keep me from stirring; and yet, because I am but flesh and blood, I am willing; tie me fast, lest I stir. So we may say in this case, though the authority of God commanding his right in us and sovereignty over us is reason enough to enforce the duty we owe to him, and bind the heart and sway the conscience, yet because of the weakness of our hearts we should make this bond the more urging upon us by a solemn consent, thus ratified and confirmed by the solemnity of an oath, vow, or promise made to God.

[3.] It will be very profitable because of our laziness; by resolution we are quickened to move seriousness and diligence. When a man hath the bond of an oath upon him, then he will make a business of religion, whereas otherwise he will make but a sport and a thing he only regards by the by. Oh! but when his heart is fixed this is the thing he will look after, Ps. 27:4. When our heart is set upon a thing we follow it close; and when it is so set upon a thing as that we have

bound ourselves by the strictest bonds we can lay upon our heart, it will engage us more seriously.

Doct. 2. That this help of an oath or holy vow should be used in a matter lawful, weighty, necessary.

1. In a matter lawful. There is a vow and covenanting in that which is evil; as those that 'bound themselves with a curse that they would not eat nor drink until they had killed Paul,' Acts 23:12. And many will make a vow and promise with themselves that they will never forgive their neighbour such an offence. And we read of a covenant made with death and hell: whether it be meant of the king of Babylon or no, as he is called death and hell by the prophet, some evil covenant is intended thereby; and thus a vow is made the bond of iniquity, and must be broken rather than kept, or indeed it must not be made. To vow that which is sinful, this is like the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog offered to the Lord for a vow, Deut. 23:18.

2. It must be in a matter weighty, necessary, and acceptable unto God. There are two things come under our vow and oath:—

[1.] That which is our necessary work, religious obedience to God in the way of his commandment; for this is not a rash and unnecessary vow, but that we were sworn to in baptism; this is that which David promiseth here, 'I have sworn, and I will perform it, to keep thy righteous judgments.' And this is the vow which Jacob made, though there was something of a particularity he adds to it, Gen. 28:20, 21; but the substance of it was this, 'If the Lord will be with me, and keep me in this way that I go, then shall the Lord be my God.' There are many that will vow and promise trifles, and so infringe their own Christian liberty, and needlessly bind themselves in chains of their own making, where God hath left them free. This help is for the weighty things of Christianity, not for by-matters. Those monkish by-

laws have filled the world with superstition, not with religion, while they have been only conversant about some indifferent things, as pilgrimages, abstinences from meats and marriages, wherein they place the height of Christian perfection.

[2.] Helps to obedience. Such things as we shall find to be helps, and do conduce to the removal of impediments, such should come under a vow and solemn promise to God: Job 31:1, 'I made a covenant with my eyes;' that was a help to the preserving of his chastity, that he would not allow himself to gaze, to take a view of the beauty of others. And the apostle, when it was for the glory of God, makes a vow or kind of solemn promise that he would take no maintenance in Achaia, 2 Cor. 11:10; he solemnly binds himself, that he might not hinder the progress of the gospel. So when we find our heart ready to betray us by this or that evil occasion, we may in this case interpose a vow and promise, but then with this caution, that we do not unreasonably destroy our Christian liberty, and so occasion a snare to our souls, and that we do not think this to be a perfect cure of these distempers, while we neglect the main things; as many will make a vow to play no more at such a game, or drink no more at such a house, or use such a creature, or come into such a particular company, and so place all their religion in these things; this is but like cutting off the branches when the root remains, or stopping one hole in a leaky or ruinous ship and vessel, when everywhere it is ready to let in water upon us, and to be broken in pieces. Therefore when you rest in those by-matters, without resolving to cleave to God in a course of obedience, it but like mending a hole in the wall of a house when the whole building is on fire, or troubling ourselves with a sore finger when we are languishing of a consumption; it is but stopping this or that particular sin when the whole soul lies under the power and slavery of the kingdom of Satan.

Object. But here is a doubt may arise, How can I promise to keep God's law, since it is not in my power to do it exactly? it is impossible.

Ans. 1. When David saith, 'I have sworn,' &c., he speaks not from a presumption of his own strength, but only declareth the sense of his duty, and useth his oath as a sanctified means to bind his heart to God; and therefore it is not to exclude the power of God's grace, or to presume of his own strength: God's assistance is best expected in God's way.

2. Such vows and promises they are always to be interpreted to be made in the sense of the covenant of grace, for no particular voluntary or accessory covenant of ours can take away the general covenant wherein we stand engaged to God, but rather it must be included in it. Therefore when David saith, 'I will keep thy righteous judgments,' he means according to the sense of the covenant of grace, that is, expecting help for duties and pardon for failings.

[1.] As expecting help from God, for so the new covenant gives strength to observe what it requires. *Lex jubet, evangelium juvat*—the law enforceth duty, the covenant of grace helps us to perform the duty required of us. The gospel it is a 'ministration of the Spirit,' 2 Cor. 3:8, and therefore promissory oaths, according to the sense of the new covenant, are made with a confidence upon the Lord's strength and assistance.

[2.] Seeking pardon for his failings. Infirmities may stand with the covenant of grace, provided we crave mercy and recover ourselves by repentance, and so make no final breach with God; therefore this is a keeping according to the measure of grace received, and as human frailty will permit.

Briefly, then, when are sins to be looked upon as infirmities, and not as perjuries and breach of covenant?

Ans. When we would not voluntarily yield to the least sin; but in case of great sin, we grow more watchful, more humble, more holy; when our falls are such as David's when he had fallen foully: Ps. 56:6, 'Now thou shalt make me to know wisdom.' When upon our failings we are more ashamed of ourselves, more afraid of our weakness, more earnest to renew our former resolutions, more careful to wait upon God for grace to perform what he hath required of us, more watchful, more circumspect; when we begin to grow wise by our own smarting, in such cases an oath is not broken. Look, as every failing of the wife doth not dissolve the marriage covenant, so every failing on our part doth not dissolve the covenant between God and us; and therefore, though there will be some infirmities, but yet when we are careful to sue out our pardon in the name of Christ Jesus, and you shall by your failings be more watchful, circumspect, then we keep the covenant in a gospel sense.

Doct. 3. That when we have sworn obedience to God, we must religiously perform and observe what we have sworn to God.

So Ps. 76:11, 'Vow and pay unto the Lord.' When we come under the bond of a vow, we must be careful to make payment; it is a binding upon the heart. See how it is expressed, Num. 30:2, 'If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word.' When we have bound ourselves with a bond, that is, when we have increased our bonds (for the ingeminating words in the Hebrew doth exceedingly increase the sense). When a man is bound upon a bond he should not play fast and loose with God, but be very careful to perform what he hath sworn. God, on his part, hath sworn to the covenant, and he is



constant in all his promises, and he certainly expects the like constancy from us, especially when we are so deeply bound, not only by his laws and obligation of his mercies, but by the solemn consent of our own vows. We have bound ourselves, then, to keep them, whether we will or no. Now, what reasons are there why we must perform?

1. The same motives that inclined us at first to take our oath should persuade us to keep it whatever falls out. After trial we shall see no cause to repent of our resolution, for God is ever the same that he was, and his commands are ever the same in all his righteous judgments, holy, just, good, profitable to the creature. Christians! if we meet with any change in our outward condition, any new impediments, oppositions, and discouragements that we were not aware of when we first entered into our oath, it was our rashness, for we should sit down and count the charges, we should allow for it. The first article of the new covenant was that we should deny ourselves, Mat. 16:24; and after vows we should not make inquiry, but before, Prov. 20:25. When we are bound we must take our lot and hazard, and whatever comes we must perform them to God.

2. Because our oath is a further aggravation of our sin, therefore better never swear than not to keep it: Eccles. 5:5, 'Better it is that thou shouldest not vow, than vow and not pay.' God is mocked by an oath and a covenant when it is not observed. A man that refuseth to be listed doth not meet with the like punishment as he that runs from his colours; so he that never came under the oath of God, doth not sin so much as he that hath sworn to his covenant. That which is but simple fornication in the Gentiles, in Christians it is adultery, breach of vow. Indeed, in things that are absolutely and indispensably necessary to salvation, we are bound to consent. Ay! but when a consent thus solemnly made is broken, it aggravates the

sin; but when we shall be like the man in the Gospel that was possessed with the devil, whom no chains could hold fast, when neither the bond of duty, nor the bonds of our own oaths and engagements will hold us, but we break all cords, the greater is our rebellion and disobedience to God.

3. Therefore must we perform the obedience that we have sworn to God, because God hath ever been a severe and just avenger of breach of covenants. By way of argument, *à minori ad majus*, those made with man; and therefore certainly he will avenge his covenant so solemnly made with himself, and everywhere in scripture you will find it is propounded as a sure mark of vengeance. When one man hath sworn to another, and hath called upon the most high God to confirm that covenant that he makes with him, if there be a failure, a trespass, though it be in point of omission, God hath avenged that covenant. An instance for this you have Amos 1:9, 'For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant.' Tyrus and Judah they were in covenant one with another, a mutual league offensive and defensive that were solemnly sworn. Now though God had many causes of his vengeance, and many quarrels with Tyrus because of their idolatries, but chiefly because of breach of covenant, they forgot the friendship that was between the children of Israel and Judah, and did not assist the people of Judah as they should, and were bound to do, but suffered them to be led into captivity, and spoiled by the Edomites and other nations. So for a sin of commission; it is spoken of as a mark of sore vengeance: Ps. 55:20, 'He hath put forth his hand against such as be at peace with him; he hath broken his covenant.' In those federal transactions and oaths that pass between man and man, God takes himself to be specially interested, and will see that the breach of them be severely punished.

The next step is, not only between equals, but when a covenant hath been made with servants and poor underlings, and would not set them free at the year of jubilee, see how severely God threatens them, Jer. 34:16–18, for the breach of it; nay a covenant made with enemies, Ezek. 17:18, 19. Nay, carry it one gradation higher, though the covenant were extorted by fraud, as the covenant made with the Gibeonites, Josh. 9:19, 20. They were part of the Canaanites, and God severely enjoined the Israelites that they should cut off all those nations; yet when they craftily got them into covenant, when this people were wronged by Saul, the Lord takes notice of it, 2 Sam. 21:1–3. See how God judgeth for them; there were three years' famine and pestilence, which was not appeased until Saul's sons were hanged before the sun. Now the Lord hath ever been such a severe avenger of an oath between man and man, between his people and their servants, between his people and their enemies, and when extorted from them, certainly in such a solemn covenant as he hath made between us and himself, and that in things absolutely necessary, in things enjoined before the covenant was made, it is not safe to break with God. Ananias, when he vowed a thing to the Lord, though he was free before, God strikes him dead. It is not free with us, whether we will obey, yea or nay, what is enjoined upon us; therefore when we will break with God, what shall we expect but that he should avenge the quarrel of his covenant?

## SERMON CXV

**I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.—VER.**

DOCT. 4. I now come to the fourth point, that our oath of obedience to God should be often revived and renewed upon us.

David recognises and takes notice of the oath wherein he was bound to God, and here he renews it again, 'I will perform it.' It should be so:—

1. Because we are apt to forget, and not have such a lively sense of a thing long since done, so that we either break the oath, or perform our duty very negligently. Our old baptismal covenant we are apt to forget it, especially by being under the bond of it in innocency, and dedicated to God by the act of another, viz., our parents. The apostle instanceth in those that were baptized in grown years, 2 Peter 1:9; he intimates they were apt to 'forget they were purged from their old sins.' I suppose it relates to baptism in that clause, forgotten his baptismal vow and obligation of renouncing his sin, and giving himself to the service of the Lord; and therefore there should be a purpose to revive it upon our heart, and the obligation should ever and anon be made new and fresh to quicken us to our duty.

2. This forgetfulness it will cost us dear, it will be an occasion of many and great troubles. Jacob had forgotten his vows of building an altar at Bethel; God quickens him to his duty by sharp affliction: Gen. 35:1, 'Arise, go up to Bethel,' &c. God was fain to quicken him with a scourge. Samson, when his vow was broken, how many dangers is he thrown into? taken, and bound, and made a sport of by the Philistines. God will rub up the memories of his servants by some sharp and severe dispensations of his providence, when they are not sensible of their vow and faith plighted to God. Never forget your obligation to God: Deut. 4:23, 'Take heed to yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God.'

Quest. But when should we renew our covenant, or our oath of allegiance to God?

1. Partly when we stand in need of some special favour from God, or when we draw nigh to him in some special duty; as Jacob, when God manifested himself to him, and he had communion with him at Bethel, then he vowed a vow, Gen. 28:21. So Num. 21:2, Israel vowed a vow to the Lord when they were in some distress; and Ps. 66:14, 'I will pay the vows of my distress, which I made when I was in trouble.'

2. Again, after some special mercy, when under some love pang of spiritual rejoicing, and we have a deep sense of God's love to us, or a new pledge of his love to us either in spiritual or temporal benefits, and our soul melted out towards God in acts of spiritual rejoicing: Ps. 116:8, 9, 'For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling: I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.' And when God breaks the force and power of enemies, when he makes the wrath of man turn to his praise, then Ps. 76:11, 'Vow and pay unto the Lord your God.' Those pagan mariners they made their vows to God when the Lord delivered them from the storm, Jonah 1:16.

3. When all things go to ruin, when the state of religion is collapsed, either in a nation or in our hearts, after some notable breaches of covenant by a people, or by a person, and we have warped from God, seem to have wrested ourselves out of his arms, then to bind ourselves to him again, and to renew our vows; for upon this occasion doth Josiah enter into covenant with God, and 'cause the people to stand to the oath,' 2 Chron. 34.

4. When we are to draw nigh to God in the use of the seals of the new covenant, when a man is to revive his own right in the covenant of

grace; so when we are to draw nigh to God in the Lord's Supper, which is the New Testament in Christ's blood, which is the seal of the covenant, then we should solemnly bind ourselves to the duty of it, and swear to the Lord anew.

Use. To press you with all earnestness to enter into covenant with God, and then to keep it and make it good; to be sensible of the vow of God upon you, and to keep firm in the bond of the holy oath.

First, To enter into solemn obligation to God, a purpose of holy and close walking with God. I shall press you hereunto:—

1. God's laws are holy, just, and good, therefore certainly we should not be backward to swear to him; because we cannot bring ourselves seriously to give up ourselves to the Lord, they are righteous judgments. Suppose you could be free, yet subjection to God were to be chosen before liberty; therefore, when Christ invites us to take his yoke upon ourselves, he doth not so much urge his authority, 'All things are given to me of my Father,' therefore come to me; but he urgeth the sweetness of obedience, and the pleasure we may find in coming to him: Mat. 11:29, 'My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' If a man were free to choose whether he would be for God or no, yet the perfection or well-being of the reasonable nature being so much concerned in obedience to God, you should choose those laws before liberty. What doth the Lord require of you? To be holy, just, temperate, often praying, and praising his name; and are these things hard? A man is not a man if he do not yield to these things, Titus 2:12. All our duties are comprised in those three adverbs, 'soberly, righteously, godly.' By being sober, a man delights himself; and by being just and righteous, a man delights others: without this, the world would be but like a den of thieves; and by being godly, he doth delight God. If we had only leave to love God and serve him,

much more when we have a command to serve him, to be often in communion with him, it is the happiest life in the world. There is a great deal of pleasure, sweetness, and rational contentment doth accompany the exercise of these three graces, sobriety, righteousness, godliness.

2. We are already obliged by God's command, so that whether you resolve or no, you are bound. There are some things that are left free in our own power before the vow passeth upon us; as, Acts 5:4, 'Was it not in thy power?' Ay! but there are other things that are not in our power. God's right over the creature is valid, whether he consent to it or no; as the natural relation doth infer and enforce duty without consent. This is the difference between voluntary and natural relations. Look, as a father is a father, whether the child own him or no in that quality and relation, and without his consent; a father as a father hath a right to command the child. But there are duties that depend upon our consent, as in the choice of a husband or master. So here is a natural relation between God and us, he our creator, we his creatures, he our superior, and we his inferiors, by reason of his authority and eternal right; and God may urge this, 'I am the Lord,' though he do not urge that, 'I am the Lord thy God.' Sometimes, 'I am the Lord,' Lev. 18:5, his own sovereignty; sometimes, 'The Lord thy God,' ver. 2; which argues our choice and consent to choose him for our God; therefore thou art not free.

3. Actual consent and resolution on our part is required, that the sense of our duty may be more explicit upon our heart: 2 Chron. 30:8, 'Yield yourselves to the Lord.' In the original, Give the Lord the hand; that is, strike hands with him, enter into covenant with him, say, Lord, I will be for thee, and thou for me; choose him for your portion, and give up yourselves to be the Lord's people: Rom. 12:1, 'Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God,

which is your reasonable service.' He alludes to the eucharistical sacrifices. All our offerings must not be sin-offerings, but thank-offerings; so present yourselves. Under the law, a man he brought his thank-offering, and laid his hand upon it, 'Lord, I am thine.' It was implied in your baptism, and it is but reason that you should own your baptismal vow when you come to years of discretion. A bargain that is made for an heir during his nonage, it is confirmed by him when he comes to age. You were dedicated to God's service when you were young, and knew not what you did; now when you come to choose your own way, and at years of discretion, you should stand to what was done in your name to God; therefore there must be a serious and solemn consent of your heart.

4. It is for your profit to choose the strictest engagements; not only to approve the ways of God, but purpose; not only purpose, but put it into a promise or declared resolution; and not only resolve, but bind this resolution by an oath. Why? For you have more reason to expect God's assistance this way than any other, because this is the appointed means practised by all the people of God when they expected the grace of the covenant. Surely God's blessing is best expected in his own way, and the greatest engagement to God the more apt to hold us to our duty than a looser engagement.

5. Consider the necessity as well as the profit.

[1.] Laziness is the cause of our backwardness and hanging off from God. We are loath to come to God, are off and on, hang between heaven and hell; we have many loose and wavering thoughts, until we come to a firm purpose and determination; but that engageth the heart—Jer. 30:21, 'Who is this that engageth his heart to draw nigh to me?'—when you lay a command upon yourselves. We are weak and wavering in our purposes and wishes, but it puts an end to this



when we come once to a full and firm purpose: Acts 11:23, 'He exhorted them all, that, with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord.' Austin, in his Confessions, tells us how he would dally with God, and how long he struck in the new birth, until he was resolved, until he bound himself firmly to shake off all his carnal courses, and mind the business of religion.

[2.] Because of our fickleness, and the strength of temptations that will draw us off from God. He that is not resolved cannot be constant: James 1:8, 'The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' Christians! when an unconstant and rebelling heart meets with temptation without, all our wishes and cold purposes will come to nothing, but we shall give out at the first assault, and be unstable in all our ways; but when we are firmly and habitually resolved, then Satan is discouraged. While we are thinking and deliberating what we shall do, the devil hath some hope of us, we lie open to temptation; but when he seeth the bent of the heart is fixed and settled, and we have firmly bound ourselves to God, his hopes are gone. He that is in a wavering condition is easily overborne when temptation comes, but a fixed man is safe. Papers, feathers, and things that lie loose upon the ground, are tossed up and down by every blast and puff of wind, but those things that are fastened to the ground, though the wind blows never so strongly, they remain. Many set out towards the ways of salvation, but are discouraged, and turn back again to a course of sin; but when you solemnly give up yourselves to God, then you will not have so many temptations as before. Look, as Naomi was ever dissuading Ruth that she should not be a companion with her in her sorrows, but go back to her own country; but when she saw she was resolved, and steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her, Ruth 1:18. Or let me take another instance, Acts 21:14. The disciples were persuading Paul that he should not go to Jerusalem, though they did even break his

heart, they could not break his purpose; but when they saw that he was so set that he went bound in the spirit, then they said, 'The will of the Lord be done.' Thus will tempters be discouraged from importuning and setting upon us to draw us off from God, when once our bent is fixed. By resolution we are quickened to more seriousness and diligence, for when once we come under the bond of the holy oath, the awe of an oath will still be upon us, and quicken us to more diligence and seriousness, to make a business of religion, whereas otherwise we make but a recreation and sport of it, and but a business by the by: Ps. 27:4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord; that will I seek after.' When we have laid firm bonds upon ourselves, this makes us awe-ful, serious, and resolute in a course of obedience.

Thus it directeth us to resolve. For the manner of entering:—

1. It must be a resolution of heart rather than of the tongue: Jer. 30:21, 'Who is this that engageth his heart to seek the Lord?' Acts 11:23, 'He exhorted them, that, with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord.' Resolutions are not determined by the tenor of our language so much as by the bent of the heart; therefore empty promises signify nothing, unless they be the result of our very souls, and not only of a natural conscience. Deut. 5:29, the people did not dissemble certainly when the Lord appeared to them by the sound of a trumpet and those mighty earthquakes; but saith the Lord, 'Oh, that there were such a heart in them to fear me always!' That there were a heart, and such a heart; that is, that this were not merely the result of an awakened conscience, but the resolution of a renewed heart. So Ps. 78:37, 'Their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.' Surely they did not dissemble in their distress, but their heart was not right with him; that is, it was not a sanctified heart, it was only the dictate of an awakened conscience for the present.

2. When you thus engage yourselves to God, let it not be a weak, broken, but full resolution; cold wishes are easily overcome by the love of the world and a half purpose: Acts 26:28, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' Carnal men, although they are not converted, yet they have a kind of half turn, almost, but not altogether. Upon a lively sermon, or in sickness, they have their purposes and wishes; but it is not a full strong bent of heart, and love must be a serious bent: 1 Chron. 22:19, 'Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God.'

3. It must not be a wish, but a serious resolution, such as is advised, all difficulties well weighed. In a fit and pang of devotion men will resolve for God, but it will never hold: Josh. 24:19, 'Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God, he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins;' and therefore you must reckon what it is to serve this holy God; you must sit down and count the charges, what it is likely to cost you, that this dedication of yourselves to God may be grounded upon serious consideration. Do you know what lust of the flesh you must renounce, what interest of yours you must lay at his feet?

4. It must be a thorough, absolute, and perfect resolution, whatever it cost, as he that sold all for the pearl of price, Mat. 13:46. A marriage even made may be broken off; some will take up religion by way of essay, to try how they like it, as men go to sea for pleasure, but will not launch so far into the deep but that they may be sure easily to get to shore again; but a man for a voyage resolves upon all weathers. So, whatever disappointment, here is my business, thus will I do; and 'though he should kill me, yet will I trust in him,' Job 13:15.

5. It must be a resolution for the present, not for the future; for all resolutions for the future are false: Ps. 27:8, 'When thou saidst, Seek

ye my face;' like a quick echo, 'My heart answered, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' And we must resolve so to engage presently, for what we do for hereafter it is but a cheat we put upon ourselves, merely to elude the workings of heart, to avoid the present impulse.

6. It must be a resolution according to the covenant of grace, in a sense of our insufficiency and dependence upon Christ, not in a confidence of our own strength. Peter went forth in a confidence of his own resolution, and how soon did he miscarry! Therefore we must resolve in the strength of God: Ps. 119:8, 'I will keep thy precepts; O forsake me not utterly.' If God forsake, all will come to nothing. Thus we should solemnly dedicate ourselves to his use and service.

Secondly, Having entered into such a solemn engagement to be the Lord's, keep this covenant and oath made with God. For motives:—

1. From the nature of such a solemn engagement; it hath more in it than a single promise. There is in every solemn dedication or vowing of ourselves to God an attestation or calling upon God to take witness, and there is an imprecation. An attestation, a calling God to witness of our serious intentions to perform, and will you call God to be witness to a lie? And an imprecation, a calling upon God to punish us if we do the contrary; therefore, being entered into the bond of such a holy oath, how should we tremble to break it! For he that renews his oath of allegiance to God, he doth as it were dare God to do his worst, for you thereby wish some heavy plague to fall upon your heads if you do not fulfil the duty of your oath; that is, he that eats and drinks the body and blood of Christ unworthily, he is guilty of damnation, guilty of the Lord's blood, because these solemn rites do not only confirm the promises, but confirm the threatening; and there is implied not only an invocation of blessing, but an

imprecation upon ourselves; that is, if you do not fulfil the duty of the covenant, you offer yourselves as it were to God's curse.

2. Consider the tenderness of God's people in case of any oath or solemn promise, though it concerned their duty to man. Josh. 9:19, 20, it is spoken of the league with the Gibeonites, 'We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them.' They looked upon it as horrible impiety to break an oath. Now much more doth this hold in our engagements to God. Shall we not look upon it as a, horrid impiety to break a solemn oath so solemnly renewed, and our faith so solemnly plighted? Every sin of ours is made the more heinous because of this oath.

3. Remember the great quarrel that God hath against the Christian world and all the professors of his name is about his covenant and oath taken. What is the reason God doth visit Christendom with famines, pestilences, inundations, and wars? Because they do not stand to the oath of God that is upon them. Every professor of the name of Christ, he is supposed to be in covenant with God: Heb. 10:29, 'Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing?' All visible professors of Christianity are under a covenant with God, to take God for their God, and to live as his people; now because of their looseness and profaneness, they do not stand to their engagement, therefore so many plagues are upon them: Lev. 26:25, 'I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant;' that is, because they did not perform the duties sworn to him.

## **SERMON CXVI**

## **I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word.—VER. 107**

HERE we have—(1.) A representation of his case and condition, I am afflicted; his condition was calamitous, and here is the degree of it, very much. (2.) His prayer, quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word; wherein we have the nature of his request, quicken me, O Lord; then the argument, according unto thy word.

For the first, 'I am afflicted;' it may be understood of outward pressures, or soul troubles. From thence note—

Doct. God's people are liable to sad and sore afflictions here in the world.

He doth not so fondly and delicately bring up his children but that he exerciseth them with sharp afflictions. David, a man dear to God, much in communion with him, ever and anon you hear him complaining of trouble. It is the church's name, Isa. 54:11, 'O thou afflicted, and tossed with tempest, and not comforted.' God's people are sometimes afflicted in the outward, sometimes in the inward man. In the outward man, either by enemies, the more because they are godly: 2 Tim. 3:12, 'All they that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.' They must not dream of worldly ease, and think to go to heaven upon a bed of roses, but sometimes their way is strewed with thorns, and they have fiery trials: 1 Peter 4:12, 'Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you;' no more than you would to see a shower of rain fall, or a cloudy day succeed a fair: we would laugh at one that should be troubled to see a shower fall. So sometimes by sickness under God's immediate hand. In the 3d epistle of John, the apostle saith of Gaius, 'I wish that thou mayest

prosper, and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.' It seems he had a healthful soul in a very sickly crazy body. And Paul's thorn in the flesh notes some racking pain, stone or gout, which he alludes to thrusting up a stake in the body of slaves. The inward man, that hath its affliction too, anguish, sorrow of heart, sometimes by reason of God's desertion. Christ Jesus drunk of this cup: Mat. 27:46, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' And the cup goes round; his people pledge him in this bitter cup, and often complain of a withdrawing God, that they cannot find God as they were wont formerly. Many times perplexing lusts and prevalency of sore distempers: 'O wretched man,' &c., Rom. 7:24, so Paul groans; and sometimes from temptations and assaults from Satan: Luke 22:31, 32, 'Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.' Christ did not pray to exempt him from it, but to preserve him in it.

If you ask why God's children are thus afflicted, I answer—It is not heaven we now enjoy.

1. We are not in our eternal rest, therefore here we must be exercised, tried, afflicted. The world is a middle place between heaven and hell, therefore hath somewhat of both; their principles and actions are mixed, so their condition is mixed, intermixed with sorrows and joys, until they come there where they shall rest from all their labours. So it must be.

2. God doth it to purge out sin: Isa. 27:9, 'By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin.' Gold is cast into the fire. Why? To have its dross consumed. Corn is beaten with the flail. Why? To be severed from its chaff, husks, and straw; and iron is filed to get off its rust; so this is the fruit of all—the taking away sin. Afflictions are a necessary cure for sin: John 15:2, 'Every

branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' Look, as in a vine there are certain superfluous luxuriant leaves and branches that grow up with the fruit, and hindereth the increase of it, which the vine-dresser pares off, not to destroy the vine, but to cultivate and manure it, so it is with no ill intent; so corruption grows up with our graces, and hindereth us that we cannot bear fruit, when we are in a flourishing condition; therefore these need to be purged away.

3. God doth it to humble us. This was that which God aimed at in all his afflictive dispensations towards the people of Israel, Deut. 8:2. God's eminent servants need affliction to humble them. David had many things to puff him up, his royal dignity, the gift of prophecy, familiarity with God, great opulency, many victories, pride of life, &c.; and he needed many afflictions to keep him humble, Ps. 132:1. Paul, he was apt to be lifted up with abundance of revelations, therefore God humbled him with 'a thorn in the flesh,' 2 Cor. 12:7.

Use 1. If we be out of affliction, let us provide for a time of exercise. David, a saint, is afflicted. God's bosom-friends may feel his hand sore upon them. David, a king, is afflicted; those in the highest station have their incident cares and troubles. David, an Old Testament believer, saith, 'I am afflicted.' I observe this, because God then dispensed himself to his people in and by temporal promises, and yet even then they had great mixtures of trouble, to show that which they had in the world was not all they had to expect from God. The promises now in the New Testament, now life and immortality is brought to light, they run to us in another strain, not of temporal, but spiritual things; therefore we must expect our portion of sorrow before we go to heaven. Be not of such a woman-like nature, and so delicately brought up, as never to see evil days; for aught I see, we are entering upon our trial. The strain of our ministry is mainly



consolatory usually, but there comes a time of expense and laying out, when such comforts are to be laid up in our heart, therefore let us be provided.

Use 2. If we be for the present under affliction, let us bear it with patience, observing how God's ends are accomplished. It is smart and grievous now, Heb. 12:11, but it will be salutary and healthful; it will yield to you righteousness, and that righteousness will yield you peace—give the peaceable fruit of righteousness. If God will take away the fuel of our sin, empty us of our pride, self-conceit, weaken the security of the flesh, let us be content, only let us take heed that the time of mortifying sin be not the time of discovering sin, and that we do not trespass the more. To be sinning and suffering is the case of the damned. Take heed you do not sin in your suffering; especially take heed of those sins that are proper to affliction. Fainting: 'If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is but small.' Distrust of God's providence: 'I shall one day perish by the hands of Saul.' Despair of God's promises: 'I said I am cut off,' &c. Then you lose the benefit of God's family discipline when you yield to these sins. But see how it drives you out of the way of hell, for affliction is a gentle remembrance of hell; for look, as those whose garments were singed, as when they threw the three children into the furnace, their own garments were singed by the force of the flame, they knew what it was to be thrown into the pit; so the Lord in effect doth tell you what will be in hell; this is a gentle remembrance, stand farther off, that ye may not be condemned with the world, 1 Cor. 11:32. And then, how it quickens you to look after heavenly things; for when the outward man decays, then look to things not seen, 2 Cor. 4:17; when you are fitted more and more for your change, when you grow more humble, mortified, as stones are hewn and squared for the building.

Let us come to the degree, 'I am afflicted very much; the Septuagint renders it, ἔταπεινώθην ἕως σφόδρα, 'I am afflicted very sore.'

Doct. The afflictions of God's people may not only be many, but very sore and heavy.

So David here, and Ps. 71:20, 'Thou hast showed me great and sore troubles.' Why many?

1. Many and strong lusts are to be subdued, and we need great afflictions to subdue many and great corruptions. Some stains are not easily washed out, but need much rubbing. When pride is deeply rooted in the heart, God brings down even to the grave, that a man goes up and down like a walking ghost, and like a skeleton or dry bones. There is such an one described, Job 33:17 with 22; and why? To bring down pride in his heart? The physic must be according to the distemper; if the distemper be more rooted, the physic must be more strong: Ps. 107:11, 12, 'Because they rebelled against the word of the Lord, and contemned the counsel of the Most High, therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help.' When people begin to grow high and stomachful, contemptuous against God and his ordinances, then God brings them into sore distresses, to break their pride and stoutness of heart.

2. That God may have the more experience and trial of his people. In daily and little afflictions there is no trial of their courage, faith, patience, and submission, and all other graces. The trial of faith is in extremity. Graces are exercised to the life, when we are even at the point of death: 2 Cor. 1:9, 'We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead.' So patience, it is not tried but by sharp affliction; therefore the apostle saith, 'Let patience have its perfect work,' James 1:4. So Christian courage and resolution, that is tried in deep affliction,

when we are 'slain all the day long,' Heb. 11:35, 36; Rom. 8:37, 'In all these things we are more than conquerors.' The strength of a man's back is not tried by a small weight, but by a heavy burden, how much he can bear; so the sharper the affliction, the greater the trial.

3. That they may have the more experience of God, for the sharper the affliction the sweeter their comfort, and the more glorious their deliverance: Ps. 71:20, 'Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles, thou shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.' God's power in raising them up is more seen: 2 Cor. 1:10, 'Who delivered me from so great a death.'

Use 1. If we be under sore troubles—

1. Let us not faint; remember it is no more than we have deserved. God will not afflict a man above his deserts; he cannot complain of wrong, Ezra 9:13. It is never more, it may be less; when our afflictions are great, our deserts are far greater: Isa. 40:1, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God.' Why? 'For she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.' God saith double; he relents presently.

2. Consider the degree of affliction; it is not measured out by yourselves, but measured out by a wise God; though afflicted very much and very sore, the measure it is ordered by God, as well as the kind of it. If it were measured out by ourselves, it would be too light, it would be too gentle; the patient must not be trusted in searching his own wounds; and if it were left to our enemies, they would know no bounds: Zech. 1:15, 'I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.' But it is left to the wise, just, and gracious God and Father; he tempers the cup in his own hand; and therefore when the affliction is grown sore and strong, it comes not only from a wise God, but a tender Father, that best knows what is good for us. Job

34:23, that is a notable place, 'For he will not lay upon man more than right, that he should enter into judgment with God;' that is, the party afflicted hath no just complaint against God, can take no exception against God's proceedings, for he perfectly understands our need, and understands our strength. God perfectly understands our need: 1 Peter 1:6, 'If need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' And understands our strength: 1 Cor. 10:13, 'Faithful is he, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.' Many parents do not correct their children in measure, being ignorant of their nature and disposition. Many physicians mistake their patients' constitution, therefore the physic may work too strongly and too violently for them; but God understands our need and our strength, and so suits all his remedies accordingly.

Use 2. To reprove those fond complaints that are extorted from us in deep and pressing afflictions; as if—

1. Sometimes, there was never any so afflicted as I am. God's people have been sore troubled: Lam. 1:12, 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me.' Yes, others have been afflicted in the same kind and degree, if not worse: 1 Peter 5:9, 'All these things are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.' You think it is such as the like hath never been known or heard of, for every man's own pain seemeth most grievous: Lam. 3:1, 'I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.' Other prophets foretold them, I see them executed. The best of God's people have their measures of hardships; you are not singular, do not stand alone. This is one of Satan's deceits. Satan will suggest this to a child of God, that he may question his Father's affection, lose the comfort of his adoption, and put yourselves out of the number of God's children. Your lot is not harder than the rest of God's children; all

that are in the world have the same trials, troubles, pressing evils upon their hearts now and then.

2. Another you find complaining, taxing God of unfaithfulness, as if he would break trust, and lay upon you more than you are able to bear, and you deceive yourselves; for if you cannot bear your present burden, you would bear none, you do not improve Christ's strength: Phil. 4:13, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.' Christ doth not help us in such a degree, or one trouble, and no more, but in all.

3. Another we find complain, I am cut off; God will be merciful and gracious no more, Ps. 77:8, 9, &c.; he hath forsaken me and forgotten me. God's children have been brought thus low, yet have been raised, as the church: Ps. 118:18, 'Lord, thou hast chastened me sore, yet hast not given me over unto death.' Within a little while he will show this was but our infirmity; this would stop these idle complaints by which we give vent to our daily impatience.

We have seen David's case, but what doth he do? He goes to God about comfort and relief, 'I am afflicted very sore: O Lord, quicken me, according to thy word.' There observe—

1. That he prays, and makes his addresses to God.

2. For what he prays.

Doct. First, That he prays. Observe, affliction should put us upon prayer and serious address to God. Thus God's people are wont to do: Isa. 26:16, 'Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.' They that have neglected God at other times, will be dealing with him then, and this God expects: Hosea 5:15, 'I will go and return to my place, till they

acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early.' It will be the first thing they will do, the greatest thing they will take care of; as that which we most care for, most is thought of in the morning. Nay, it is that which God enjoins: Ps. 50:15, 'Call upon me in the time of trouble.' Some might hang off when God's rod is upon their backs, or be discouraged by the bitter sense of a trouble; therefore God doth not only give us leave, but commands us to call upon him. This is the special season when this duty is performed with life and vigour: 'Is any man afflicted? let him pray,' James 5:13. Let him thus give vent to his trouble, it doth mightily ease the heart. An oven stopped up is the hotter within; the more we keep down grief, and do not unburden ourselves, the more it presseth upon the heart. Wind imprisoned in the bowels of the earth makes a terrible shaking there till it gets vent; so till our sorrow gets a vent it rends and tears the heart. The throne of grace was appointed for such a time, Heb. 4:16; when need comes, then it is a time to improve our interest, to put promises in suit; when God seems to be an enemy to us, when, to appearance, he executes the curse of the old covenant, oh! then we should work through all discouragements, then we should hold God to his second grant and charter, and come to his throne of grace, and keep him there.

For the reasons:—

1. God is the party with whom we have to do; whencesoever the trouble doth arise, there is his hand and his counsel in it; therefore it is best dealing with him about it, in all afflictions, public or private: Amos 3:6, 'Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?' Let men but awaken their reason and conscience, who is it that is at the upper end of causes, that casts our lot upon such troublesome and distracted times? So in private afflictions, David owned God's hand; Shimei had mocked him, but he looks higher; the Lord hath bid him

curse. So Job; he doth not say the Chaldean and Sabeian hath taken away, but the Lord hath taken, Job 1:21. Afflictions have a higher cause than men ordinarily look at; they do not come out of the dust, but come from God. See what inference Eliphaz draws from this principle, Job 5:8, 'I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause;' that is, I would go and deal with him about it; it was Eliphaz's advice to Job, and it is seasonable to us all.

2. It is God only that can help us and relieve us, either by giving support under the trouble, or removing it from us; so saith David, Ps. 57:2, 'I will cry unto God most high, unto God that performeth all things for me.' A believer looks for all things from God; when all things go well with him, God is his best friend; when all things go ill with him, God is his only friend; he runs to none so often as to God. Now upon these principles we go to God; but for what end? Let us see what we go to God for.

[1.] That we may know his mind in all his providences. The affliction hath some errand and message to us, something to deliver us from God; now we need to ask of God to know his mind: Micah 6:9, 'Hear the rod, and who hath appointed it.' We should not only be sensible of the smart, but look to the cause; therefore, if we would know the cause, let us go and expostulate with God about it; as Joab, when Absalom set his corn-field on fire; he sent for him once and twice, but he comes not, until he sets his corn-field on fire, and then he comes and expostulates with him, 'Who hath done this?' 2 Sam. 14:30, 31. So when we make bold, and will not come to God, nor take notice of his messages, God comes and lets out his wrath upon our comforts and conveniences; now let us deal with God about it; wherefore is all this?

[2.] That we may have strength to bear it. Alas! we can bear or do little of ourselves, for that doing refers to bearing: Phil 4:13, 'I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me;' that is, I can suffer want, need, hunger, thirst, nakedness, and run through all conditions, 'through Christ that strengtheneth me.' Now you must ask it of God: James 1:5, 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God.' It is wisdom to bear affliction, if he would wisely carry himself under the rod; that he may not discover his folly, he must ask this strength and grace of God.

[3.] Wisdom to improve our chastisements, that we may have the benefit and fruit of them: Isa. 48:17, 'I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit;' that is, to profit by afflictions, to reap the fruit of them. So Job 33:16, 'He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.' God, by a powerful work upon the heart, impresseth their duty upon them, that they may see wherefore it is that he hath afflicted them.

[4.] We go to God for deliverance and freedom from the trouble: Ps. 34:19, 'Many are the troubles of the righteous, but out of them all the Lord will deliver them.' It is God's prerogative to set us free. We break prison when we attempt to escape merely by our own means; therefore either we shall have no deliverance, or no kindly one. God hath delivered, doth deliver, and we trust will deliver. This must be sought out of God; God helping together with your prayers, 2 Cor. 1:10, 11. Prayer must fetch it out from God, or it is no kindly deliverance. Well, then, in our affliction, we need to be often with God.



## SERMON CXVII

### **Quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word—VER. 107**

USE 1. To reprove the stupidity and carelessness of them that neglect God in their troubles: Dan. 9:13, 'All this evil is come upon us, yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God.' A very senseless slight spirit, that when they are under the blows of God's heavy hand, they will not be much in calling upon God; this is contrary to God's injunction, who expects now with earnestness they will seek him. God reckons upon it; he could not hear from them before, but now they will pray hard, and will make up their former negligence. When God sends a tempest after you, as on Jonah, yet will you keep off from him? It is contrary to the practice of the saints; in their chastisements, troubles, and afflictions, they are much with God, opening their hearts to him. Nay, it is worse than hypocrites, for they will have their pangs of devotion at such a time, Job 27:10, 11. In short, you lose the comfort of your affliction. Seasons of affliction are happy seasons if they prove praying seasons; when they bring you nearer to God, it is a sign God is not wholly gone, but hath left somewhat behind him, when the heart is drawn into him. This is the blessing of every condition, when it brings God nearer to you, and you are more acquainted with him than before.

Use 2. Then it takes off the discouragements of poor disconsolate ones, who mis-expound his providence when they think afflictions put us from God rather than call us to him. Oh no! it is not to drive you from him, but to draw you to him. Do not think God hath no

mercy for thee, because he leaves thee to such pressures, wants, and crosses. This is the way to acquaint yourselves with God, yea, though you have been hitherto strangers to him; he hath invited you to call upon him in time of trouble, he is willing to have you upon any terms. A man will say, You come to me in your necessities; God delights to hear from you, and is glad any occasion will bring you into his presence; and therefore be much with God.

Secondly, I observe, when this affliction was sore and pressing, yet then he hath a heart to pray, 'I am afflicted very sore, O Lord, quicken me.'

Doct. We must not give over prayer, though our afflictions be never so great and heavy. Why? Because—

1. Nothing is too hard for God; he hath ways of his own to save and preserve his people when we are at a loss. This was the glory of Abraham's faith, that he accounted God was able to raise up Isaac from the dead, Heb. 11:19. Difficult cases are fit for God to deal in, to show his divine power. When means have spent their allowance, then is it time to try what God can do: Ps. 142:4, 5, 'I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living.' When all things fail, God faileth not.

2. We must still pray. Faith must express something above sense, or else living by faith and living by sense cannot be distinguished. In desperate cases then is the glory of faith seen: Job 13:15, 'Though he should kill me, yet I will trust in him.' In defiance of all discouragement, we should come and profess our dependence upon God.

Use. To condemn those that despond, and give over all treaty with God, as soon as any difficulty doth arise; whereas this should sharpen prayer, rather than discourage us. This is man's temper, when troubles are little and small, then to neglect God; when great, then to distrust God. A little headache will not send us to the physician, nor the scratch of a pin to the chirurgeon; so if our troubles be little, they do not move us to seek after God, but we are secure and careless: but when our troubles are smart, sore, and pressing, then we are discouraged, and give over all hopes; so hard a matter is it to bring man to God, to keep an even frame, neither to slight the hand of God, nor to faint under it, as we have direction to avoid both extremes, Heb. 12:5, to cherish a due sense of our troubles, with a regular confidence in God.

That he prays you have seen. Now what he prays for. He doth not say deliver me, but quicken me.

Doct. Strength and support under afflictions is a great blessing, to be sought from God, and acknowledged as a favour, as well as deliverance.

1. You shall see this is promised as a favour: Isa. 40:31, 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength;' that is, shall not faint nor be weary, but mount up as it were with wings as eagles; they shall have a new supply of grace, enabling them to bear and hold out till the deliverance cometh. They that wait upon the Lord do not always see the end of their troubles, but are quickened, comforted, and strengthened in them; they shall renew their strength.

2. This is accepted by the saints with thanksgiving, and valued by them as a special answer of prayer; they value it more than temporal deliverance itself many times; as 2 Cor. 12:9, 10, Paul prays for the removal of the thorn in the flesh thrice, when God only gives him this

answer, 'My grace is sufficient for thee;' saith Paul then, 'I will rejoice in mine infirmities,' so I might have strength and support in grievous weaknesses, reproaches, and afflictions, whatever they be. So Ps. 138:3, 'In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.' That is noted as a special answer of prayer. How did he hear him? With strength in my soul. Though he did not give him deliverance, he gave him support, so that was acknowledged as a very great mercy.

3. There are many cases wherein we cannot expect temporal deliverance, then we must only go for quickening and support; when by a lingering disease we are drawing down to the chambers of death, and our outward strength is clean spent and gone, then have we support; that is a great mercy: Ps. 73:26, when strength fail and heart fail, 'God is the strength of my heart, and portion for ever;' that is, to have his heart quickened by God in the languishing of a mortal disease. So 2 Cor. 4:16, 'Though our outward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day by day.' There are many troubles that cannot be avoided, and therefore we are then to be earnest with God for spiritual strength.

Use. Well, then, you see upon what occasion we should go for grace rather than for temporal deliverance. We should pray from the new nature; not deliver me, but quicken me; and if the Lord should suspend deliverance, why, that will be our strength in time of trouble: Ps. 37:39, 'The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord; he is their strength in the time of trouble.'

But more particularly, let us take notice of this request: 'Quicken me,' saith he.

Doct. Quickening grace must be asked of God.

1. What is quickening?

2. Why asked of God?

First, What is this quickening? Quickening in scripture is put for two things:—

1. For regeneration, or the first infusion of the life of grace; as Eph. 2:5, 'And you that were dead in trespasses and sins hath he quickened;' that is, infused life, or making to live a new life.

2. It is put for the renewed excitations of God's grace, God's breathing upon his own work. God, that begins life in our souls, carries on this life, and actuates it. Now this kind of quickening is twofold spoken of in this psalm; there is quickening in duties, and quickening in afflictions. Quickening in duties, that is opposite to deadness of spirit; quickening in affliction, that is opposite to faintness.

[1.] Quickening in duties, that is opposite to that deadness of spirit which creeps upon us now and then, and is occasioned either by our negligence or by our carnal liberty, that deadness of spirit that doth hinder the activity of grace.

(1.) By our negligence and slothfulness in the spiritual life, when we do not stir up ourselves: Isa. 64:7, 'There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold on thee;' when men grow careless and neglectful in their souls. An instrument, though never so well in tune, yet if hung up and laid by, soon grows out of order; so when our hearts are neglected, when they are not under a constant exercise of grace, a deadness creeps upon us. Wells are sweeter for the draining. Our graces they are more fresh and lively the more they are kept a-work, otherwise they lose their vitality. A key rusts that is seldom turned in

the lock, and therefore negligence is a cause of this deadness: 2 Tim. 1:6, 'Stir up the gift that is in thee.' We must blow up the ashes. There needs blowing if we would keep in the fire; we grow dead and lukewarm, and cold in the spiritual life, for want of exercise.

(2.) This deadness is occasioned by carnal liberty: Ps. 119:37, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way.' When we have been too busy about the vanities of the world, or pleasures of the flesh, when we have given contentment to the flesh, and been intermeddling with worldly cares and delights, it brings a brawn and deadness upon the heart: Luke 21:34, 'Take heed that your hearts be not overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this world,' &c. I say, by this the soul is distempered, and rendered inapt for God. Christians! this is a disease very incident to the saints, this deadness that creeps upon them. We have not such lively stirrings, nor a like influence of grace; we have not those earnest and lively motions we were wont to have in prayer. Now God he quickeneth us. How? By exciting the operative graces, as faith, love, hope, and fear, when these are kept pregnant and lively, as we read of 'lively hope,' 1 Peter 1:3. There is living faith and lively faith, and living fear and lively fear of God, and living hope and lively hope. All graces God makes them lively and vivacious, that they may put forth their operations the more readily. Well, this is quickening in duties.

[2.] There is quickening in afflictions, and so it is opposed to fainting, that fainting which is occasioned by too deep a sense of present troubles, or by unbelief, or distrust of God and his promises, and the supplies of his grace. Oh! when troubles press upon us very sore, our hearts are like a bird, dead in the nest, overcome, so that we have no spirit, life, nor aptness for God's service: 'My soul droopeth for very heaviness;' we have lost our life and our courage for God.

Well, how doth God quicken us? By reviving our suffering graces, as our hope of eternal life and eternal glory, patience and faith, and so puts life into us again, that we may go on cheerfully in our service. By infusion of new comforts. He revives the spirit of his contrite ones; so the prophet saith, Isa. 57:15. He doth revive our spirits again when they are dead and sunk under our troubles. Oh! it is very necessary for this: Ps. 80:18, 'Quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.' Discomfort and discouragement they weaken our hands; until the Lord cheers us again we have no life in prayer. By two things especially doth God quicken us in affliction—by reviving the sense of his love, and by reviving the hopes of glory. By reviving the sense of his love: Rom. 5:5, 'The love of God is shed abroad,' like a fragrant ointment that doth revive us, when we are even ready to give up the ghost; Ps. 65:6, 'Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?' I say, when he restores the sense of his love after great and pressing sorrow, then he is said to quicken. So when he doth renew upon us the hopes of glory: Rom. 5:2, 3, 'We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' Well, you see what this quickening is.

Secondly, This quickening must be asked of God.

1. Because it is his prerogative to govern the heart of man, especially to quicken us. God will be owned as the fountain of all life: 1 Tim. 6:13, 'I charge thee in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things.' It is God that quickeneth all things. All the life that is in the creature, all the life that is in new creatures, it comes from God; it is he that giveth us life at first, and he must keep in this life in the soul, and restore it. The meanest worm, all the life it hath, it hath from God. When John would prove the Godhead of Christ, he brings this argument, John 1:4, 'In him is life.' There is not a gnat but receives this benefit from Christ as God. He hath the life of all things, and this life is the light of men; much more the noble creature man hath this

life from God; much more the new creature; greater operation of spiritual life, more depends upon his influence; and therefore, if we would be quickened, and carried out with any life and strength, we must go to God for it.

2. God as our judge, he must be treated with about it, for he smites us with deadness; therefore till he takes off his sentence, we cannot get rid of this distemper; it is one of God's spiritual plagues, which must be removed before we can hope for any liveliness, and any activity of grace again. Under the law, God punished sins more sensibly; as unhallowed addresses, he punished them with death. Under the gospel, he punisheth sins with deadness of heart. When they seem careless in the worshipping of God, they have a blow and breach, as he smote Uzzah and Nadab and Abihu dead in the place; and now he smites with deadness, Rev. 3:7. He 'hath the key of David, that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth;' without his permission we can never recover our former lively estate again, for there is a judicial sentence passed upon us.

Use. To press us to be often with God for quickening, that we may obtain this benefit. I have spoken of it at large upon another verse; if you would have this benefit, rouse up yourselves: Isa. 64:7, 'There is none that stirreth up himself;' and 2 Tim. 1:6, 'Stir up the gift that is in thee.' A man hath a faculty to work upon his own heart, to commune and reason with himself; and we are bidden to 'strengthen the things that are ready to die,' Rev. 3:2. When things are dying and fainting in the soul, we are to strengthen ourselves; therefore, if we would have God to quicken us, thus must we do, chide the heart for its deadness in duty; we can be lively enough in a way of sin; chide the heart for its deadness in affliction: Ps. 42, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? still trust in God.' And after you have done this, then look up, and expect this grace from God in and through Christ



Jesus. It is said, John 10:10, 'I am come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.' Jesus Christ, he came not only that we might have life enough to keep body and soul together, but that we might not only be living but lively, full of life, strength, and cheerfulness in the service of God. He is come into the world for this end and purpose: expect it through Christ, who hath purchased it for us. And then plead with God about it, according to his promise, Ah! Lord, according to thy word; hast thou not said, I will quicken a dead heart? When thou art broken and tossed with affliction, remember it is the high and lofty one that hath said he will 'revive the heart of the contrite ones,' Isa. 57:15; and plead thus with God, Ah! Lord, dost not thou delight in a cheerful spirit? 'Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?' Ps. 85:6. And then humble yourselves for the cause of the distemper. What is the matter? how comes this deadness upon me? Isa. 63:17, 'Why hast thou caused us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?' Inquire what is the cause of this deadness that grows upon me, that you may humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.

The argument only is behind, according to thy word. David, when he begs for quickening, he is encouraged so to do by a promise. The question is, where this promise should be? Some think it was that general promise of the law, 'If thou do these things, thou shalt live in them,' Lev. 18:5; and that from thence David drew this particular conclusion, that God would give life to his people. But rather it was some other promise, some word of God he had to bear him out in this request. We see he hath made many promises to us of sanctifying our affliction: Isa. 27:9, 'The fruit of all shall be the taking away of sin;' of bettering and improving us by it, Heb. 2:11; of moderating our affliction; that he will 'stay his rough wind in the day of the east-wind,' Isa. 27:8; that he will 'lay no more upon us than he will enable us to bear,' 1 Cor. 10:13. He hath promised he will

moderate our affliction, so that we shall not be tempted above our strength. He hath promised he will deliver us from it, that 'the rod of the wicked shall not always rest on the back of the righteous?' Ps. 125:3; that he will be with us in it, and never fail us, Heb. 13:5. Now, I argue thus: if the people of God could stay their hearts upon God's word when they had but such obscure hints to work upon, that we do not know where the promise lies, ah! how should our hearts be stayed upon God when we have so many promises! When the scriptures are enlarged for the comfort and enlarging of our faith, surely we should say now as Paul, when he got a word, Acts 27:25, 'I believe God;' I may expect God will do thus for me, when his word speaks it everywhere. Then you may expostulate with God: I have thy word for it, Lord; as she, when she showed him the jewel, ring, and staff, Whose are these? So we may cast in God his promises: Whose are these according to thy word? And mark, David, that was punctual with God, 'I have sworn, and I will perform it; and quicken me according to thy word.' Sincere hearts may plead promises with God: Isa. 38:3, 'Lord, remember I have walked before thee with an upright heart.' These may look up and wait upon God for deliverance.

## SERMON CXVIII

**Accept, I beseech thee, the free-will-offerings of my mouth, O Lord, and teach me thy judgments.—VER. 108**

IN this verse two things are asked of God—God's acceptance; then, secondly, instruction.

First, He begs acceptation. Therein take notice—(1.) Of the matter, object, or thing that he would have to be accepted, the free-will-

offerings of my mouth. (2.) The manner of asking this acceptance, accept, I beseech thee, O Lord. In the former, you may observe the general nature of the thing, and then the particular kind; they were free-will-offerings; and yet more express, they were free-will-offerings of his hands; not legal sacrifices, but spiritual services, free-will-offerings of his mouth, implying praises. Our praises of God are called 'the calves of our lips,' Hosea 14:2, rendered there by the Septuagint, 'the fruit of our lips,' and accordingly translated by the apostle, Heb. 13:15, 'The fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.' He was in deep affliction, wandering up and down the desert; he was disabled to offer up to God any other sacrifice, therefore he desires God would accept the free-will-offerings of his mouth; he had nothing else to bring him.

Secondly, He begs of God instruction in his way, teach me thy judgments. By misphalim, 'judgments,' are meant both God's statutes and God's providences. If you take them in the former sense, for God's statutes, so he begs grace to excite, direct, and assist him in a course of sincere obedience to God, practically to walk according to God's will. If you understand it in the latter sense, only for the accomplishment of what God had spoken in his word, for God's providence, for his corrective dispensation, 'Teach me,' he begs understanding and profiting by them.

I shall begin with his first request, which offereth four observations:  
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1. That God's people have their spiritual offerings.
2. That these spiritual offerings must be free-will-offerings.
3. That these free-will-offerings are graciously accepted by God.

4. That this gracious acceptance must be earnestly sought and valued as a great blessing, 'I beseech thee accept,' &c.

Doct. 1. First, That God's people have their spiritual offerings. I shall give the sense of this point in five propositions.

1. That all God's people are made priests to God, for every offering supposeth a priest; so it is said, Rev. 1:6, that Christ Jesus 'hath made us kings and priests.' All Christians, they have a communion with Christ in all his offices; whatever Christ was, that certainly they are in some measure and degree. Now, Christ was king, priest, and prophet; and so is every Christian, in a spiritual sense, a king, priest, and prophet; for they have their anointing, their unction from the Holy One, and he communicates with them in his offices. So also do they resemble the priesthood under the law. In 1 Peter 2:5, they are called 'a holy priesthood to offer sacrifices to God;' and 1 Peter 2:9, they are called 'a royal priesthood.' They are a holy priesthood, like the sons of Aaron, who were separated from the people, to minister before the Lord; and they are a royal priesthood, in conformity to the priesthood of Melchisedec, who was 'king of Salem, and also priest of the most high God.' There is a mighty conformity between what is done by every Christian and the solemnities and rites used by the priests under the law. The priests of the law were separated from the rest of the people: so are all God's people from the rest of the world. The priests of the law were to be anointed with holy oil, Exod. 28:41; so all Christians they receive 'an unction from the Holy One,' 1 John 2:20. By the holy oil was figured the Holy Spirit, which was the unction of the Holy One, by which they are made fit and ready to perform those duties which are acceptable to God. After the priest was thus generally prepared by the anointing to their services, before they went to offer, they were to wash in the great laver which stood in the sanctuary door, Exod. 29:4; Lev. 8:4, 5. So every Christian is to

be washed in the great laver of regeneration, Titus 3:5. And when they are regenerated, born again, purged and cleansed from their sins, then they are priests to offer sacrifices to God; for till this be done, none of their offerings are acceptable to him: for 'they that are in the flesh cannot please God,' Rom. 8:8; and 'the sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination unto the Lord,' Prov. 15:8. Thus you see in all these correspondences, and in many more, Christians they are priests. What the priests of the law were to God, that is every Christian now to God, to offer spiritual sacrifices by Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. They have their offerings. The great work of the priest was to offer sacrifice, and this is our employment, to offer sacrifices to God. What sacrifices do we offer now in the time of the gospel? Not sin-offerings, but thank-offerings. A sin-offering can be offered but once: Heb. 10:14, 'By one offering Jesus Christ hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.' And there needs no more of that kind; that was but to be once offered, Heb. 7:27; and therefore there remains nothing more to be done by us but the offering of thank-offerings, and this is to be done continually: Heb. 13:15, 'By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.'

3. These offerings must be spiritual thank-offerings. Under the law the thank-offering was that of a beast, but now under the gospel we offer spiritual sacrifices; therefore the apostle saith, 1 Peter 2:5, 'Ye are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.' The sacrifice must suit with the nature of the priesthood. The priesthood is spiritual, and not after the law of a carnal commandment, and not by an external consecration, but the inward anointing of the Holy Ghost. And herein we differ from the priests of the law, because the very nature

and substance of our worship is more pleasing to God than the nature of theirs; for moral worship is better and more suited to the nature of God than ceremonial: 'God is a spirit, and will be worshipped in spirit,' John 4:24. And therefore, when ceremonial worship was in force, they that rested in external ceremonies, and did not look to the spiritual intent and signification of them, were not accepted by God; though the ceremony was performed with never so much pomp, though they came with their flocks and herds, yet praying to God, and praising God with a willing mind, which was the soul of their offering, was that alone which was acceptable to God; therefore it is said, Ps. 69:30, 31, 'I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving: this also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs;' that is, which is perfect and exact according to the institutions of the law, for there was to be no blemish in the sacrifice of the law; yet calling upon the name of God, and praising him, is better than the service performed with the exactest conformity to legal rites: Ps. 50:13–15, 'Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' The Lord draws them off from ceremonies to the spiritual service; it is more becoming the nature of God, and it is more reasonable service. The offering of a beast hath not so much of God's nature, nor of man's nature in it, only God would keep it up for a while; therefore now these are the great offerings.

4. The two great sacrifices required of us, prayer and praise; there are many others, but they are implied in these. To instance, under the gospel there is this thank-offering, presenting ourselves to the Lord, dedicating ourselves to the Lord's use and service: Rom. 12:1, 'I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your

reasonable service;' 2 Cor. 8:5, 'They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.' And then there is alms: Heb. 13:16, 'To do good and communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' And when the Philippians had made contribution to Paul's necessities, he saith it was 'a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour unto God,' Phil. 4:18. Ay! but now both these are included in the other two, namely, as they are evidences of our thankfulness to God, and the sense of his love and favour which we have received by Christ. The great and usual offerings are 'the fruit of our lips,' 'the calves of our lips,' here called 'the free-will-offerings of our mouth,' prayer and praise. That prayer is a sacrifice, see Ps. 141:2, 'Let my prayer be set before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.' The daily offering was accompanied with incense, and he mentions the evening sacrifice, because then was a more perfect atonement for the day, therefore when the evening sacrifice came, it was to be understood they were perfectly reconciled to God. And then that praise is a sacrifice, see Ps. 54:6, 'I will freely sacrifice unto thee; I will praise thy name, O Lord, for it is good.' And in that other place where the Lord rejects the flesh of bulls and blood of goats, praise is substituted, 'Will I eat the flesh of bulls and blood of goats?' No: Ps. 50:14, 'Offer to me thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High.' So Ps. 116:17, 18. So that prayers and praises are the oblations which we offer unto God under the gospel, either acknowledgments for former mercies, or petitions for future deliverances. These are the two duties which contain the substance of the ceremonies under the law, and are daily and constantly to be performed by us.

5. Whatever was figured in the old sacrifices, it must be spiritually performed in the duty of prayer and praise. In those legal rites, there was an evangelical equity, or something that was moral and spiritual for us still to observe.

As, first, in prayer, truth was the inward part of the sacrifice, for the mere external oblation was of no significancy with God. There were three things wherein it symbolizeth with prayer; in prayer there is required brokenness of heart, owning of Christ, renewing covenant with God.

[1.] One thing that was required in sacrifices was brokenness of heart; for when a man came to present his beast before the Lord, he was to consider this beast was to be slain and burnt with fire; and to consider, All this was my case; I might have been consumed with his wrath, and be burnt with fire; and so come with a compunctionate spirit, with brokenness of heart, to bemoan his case before the Lord; therefore it is said, Ps. 51:17, 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.' This is required in every one that comes to prayer, brokenness of heart; that is, a sensibleness of his want of those good things for which he comes, and his inability to supply himself with anything without God; nay, his ill-deservings, how justly he might be denied of God, and cursed by all manner of plagues; how he hath forfeited all manner of blessings; this must be at the bottom.

[2.] The sacrifices implied an eying of the Redeemer, by virtue of whose oblation and intercession we are accepted with God; for every one that came with his sacrifice was to lay his hand upon the head of the beast, to put his sins there, to show Christ bore the iniquity of us all; and in every prayer we make, there is this evangelical equity, by virtue of the old sacrifice remaining upon us, that we should eye the Redeemer, even Christ Jesus, our Lord, 'Who hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour,' Eph. 5:2. He is the expiatory sacrifice, and therefore in all our supplicatory or gratulatory offerings to God we must still look to him. The word, an offering, relates to things destitute of life that were



dedicated to God, as flour, oil, frankincense; that which was signified thereby was accomplished in Christ. And for the other word, sacrifice, gave himself as an offering and sacrifice; the beasts whose blood was shed, those things which had life in them, were called a real sacrifice offered to God to appease his justice. Thus Christ Jesus was given as a sacrifice, to obtain all manner of blessings for us. We should look upon God as an all-sufficient fountain of grace, and the author of every good gift, depending upon him for his goodness and bounty for Christ's sake.

[3.] In sacrifices there was implied a renewing of covenant; so the Lord saith, Ps. 50:5, 'Gather my saints together, that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.' As they did dedicate the beast offered to God, so was the worshipper to dedicate himself to God. Now we must renew this dedication of ourselves to the Lord's service; all this was morally in the sacrifices, and is to be done every day in our future prayers, with brokenness of heart, eying our Redeemer, casting our whole dependence upon him, and in a sense of his love dedicating and devoting ourselves to God.

Secondly, For the other duty, of thanksgiving and praise for mercies received. Every point and passage of his undeserved favour to be owned, and praise thereof to be given to God, and still to look on all done not for our sakes, but for the sake of Christ Jesus. You read under the law, Lev. 3:3, when the thank-offering was brought to God, it was to be laid upon the top of the burnt-offering. First they were to bring the burnt-offering, and offer that to God, then to lay upon it the peace or thank-offering, to show that first we must be reconciled to God, and by virtue of that all mercies descend and come down upon us; and then upon this solemn occasion they were to give up themselves anew to the Lord. So the apostle presseth this, Rom. 12:1, 'I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your

bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.' And this is one part of the offering of our lips, namely, when we come solemnly by virtue of every mercy received, and promise obedience anew and afresh to God. To apply this—(1.) Are you priests? (2.) Do you offer sacrifices of prayer and praise to God continually?

[1.] Are you priests unto God? Are you priests by separation? Hath God called you out from amongst men? Ps. 4:3, 'The Lord hath set apart the man that is godly for himself.' Hath God called you off from sin to holiness, from self to Christ, from the creature to God? for these are the three things wherein conversion consists. From the creature to God, as our last end; from self to Christ, as the only means to come to God; and from sin to holiness, as the only way to get an interest in Christ. Are you called off from the common course of living, wherein most men are involved, that you may live and act for God? Are you priests by unction? Are you anointed by the Spirit as to gifts and graces, and qualified and made meet for this holy ministration unto God? Christ hath purchased gifts in some measure for his people; for as we were maimed in Adam, not only as to graces but also as to gifts, so is our restitution by Christ, that the plaster may be as broad as the sore. We have necessary gifts given us by virtue of his ascension, whereby we may lay open our state and case to God. Indeed, all God's people have not a like measure of gifts, and carnal men may come behind in no gift, therefore have you the grace of prayer: Zech. 12:10, 'I will pour upon them the Spirit of grace and supplication.' Have you a heart qualified by grace, made meet to converse with God? the tendency and disposition of your souls that carrieth you to God? grace that seeks a vent and utterance in prayer and holy converses with God? and are you priests by purgation? Every priest was to be washed in the great laver; are you washed and purged from sin, that you may serve God acceptably? Mal. 3:3, first

they must be purified, then offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. God will not take a gift out of a carnal man's hand; and therefore you should look to this, that you be purified and purged.

[2.] Do you offer spiritual sacrifices to God, of prayer and praise?

(1.) Prayer, a duty very kindly to the saints. It is natural to them; it is, as it were, the sphere of their activity, the Spirit discovers himself to men in prayer. As soon as they are converted to God they will fall a-praying, and be dealing with God often in this kind; therefore the children of God are described by this, as a duty wherein they are most exercised: Zeph. 3:10, 'My suppliants;' and Ps. 24:6, 'This is a generation of them that seek thee;' to show this is a vital act, a usual and constant expressing of the new nature that is put into them. Surely they that love God will be always seeking him, and a broken heart, sensible of its condition, can never want an errand to the throne of grace. You are to offer sacrifices as they did under the law. Now under the law there was a daily sacrifice, every morning they were to offer a lamb without spot, Num. 28:3, to show that every morning they should come and sue out their pardon by Christ, and every evening to look to the Messiah, the lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world; that was the intent of the type. Now I reason thus: certainly we have as much need as they; we are sinners as well as that people which lived under that dispensation; therefore every morning we must look to the lamb of God. Nay, we have more reason, for they could not clearly discern the meaning of that type; but now all things are open, we can behold the lamb of God, therefore must be often with God, suing out our pardon in the name of Christ.

(2.) The sacrifice of praise. It is notable when the apostle had spoken of Christ as a sin-offering he mentions this as the main thing in the gospel: Heb. 13:15, 'By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.' Praise, it ought continually, frequently, and upon all occasions to be offered to God, for this is a more noble duty than prayer. Self-love may put us upon prayer, but love to God puts us upon praise and thanksgiving; we pray because we need God, and we praise because we love him. In prayer we become beggars, that God would bestow something upon us; but in praise we come, according to poor creatures, to bestow something upon God, even to give him the glory due to his name, and tell him what he hath done for our poor souls. This is the most noble among all the parts of Christian worship. We have more cause to give thanks than to pray, for we have many things more to praise God for than to pray to him for. There are many favours which go before all thought of desert, and many favours still bestowed upon us beyond what we can either ask or think.

Doct. 2. Secondly, These spiritual offerings must be free-will-offerings to God. This expression is often spoken of in the law, Lev. 22:18; Num. 29:39; 2 Chron. 31:14; Amos 4:5. What are these free-will-offerings? They are distinguished from God's stated worship, and distinguished from that service which fell under a vow. Besides the stated peace-offerings there were certain sacrifices performed upon certain occasions to testify God's general goodness, and upon receipts of some special mercy; and you will find these sacrifices to be expressly distinguished from such services as men bound themselves to by vow, Lev. 7:16. What is there that answers now to these free-will-offerings? Certainly this is not spoken to this use, that a man should devise any part of worship of his own head, whatever pretence of zeal he hath; but they serve to teach us two things:—

1. They are to teach us how ready we should be to take all occasions of thankfulness and spiritual worship; for besides their vowed services and instituted services they had daily sacrifices and set feasts commanded by God; they had their free-will-offerings offered to God in thankfulness for some special blessing received or deliverance from danger.

2. It shows with what voluntariness and cheerfulness we should go about God's worship in the gospel, and what a free disposition of heart there should be, and edge upon our affections in all things that we offer to God. And in this latter sense I shall speak, that our offerings to God, prayer and praise, should be free-will-offerings, come from us not like water out of a still forced by the fire, but like water out of a fountain, with native freeness, readily and freely.

[1.] God loves a cheerful giver; constrained service is of no value and respect with him. Under the law, when sacrifice of beasts was in fashion, wherefore did God choose the purest and fattest of everything offered to him, but as a testimony of a willing mind? And still he looks to the affections rather than the action. God weighs the spirit, Prov. 16:2. When God comes to put them into the balance of the sanctuary, what doth he weigh? External circumstances of duty, or the pomp and appearance wherein men go? No; but he considers with what kind of heart it is done; and the love of sin, God takes notice of that, as well as the practice of sin. So in our duties, God takes notice of the love, the inclination of our souls, as well as the outward service; therefore our offerings must be free and voluntary.

[2.] God deserves it, he doth us good with all his heart, and all his givings come to us from his love. Why did he give Christ for us and to us? 'He loved us.' Why gave he him for us? 'God so loved the world,' John 3:16. Why doth he give Christ to us? Eph. 2:4, 5, 'God, who is

rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.' That which moved God to bestow his saving grace upon us was his great love, and all the good we receive from him. Why, mercy pleaseth him: 'I will rejoice over them to do them good.' If he deliver us out of any danger, he hath 'loved us from the grave,' Isa. 38:7. Now love should season all our services to God.

[3.] Where a day of grace hath passed upon our hearts, so it will be; the soul will come off readily and freely to the duties God hath required of us: Ps. 110:3, 'Thy people shall be a willing people in the day of thy power.' We are naturally backward, slow of heart to do anything that is good, hang off from God, will not be subject to him; but when the day of his power passeth upon us, then we are a willing people, we are more delighted in communion with God, less averse from him, the bent of our hearts is altered, and the stream of our affections is turned another way, and our converses with God are more delightful, and we are as earnest in serving God as before we were in serving sin.

Use. To press us to serve God with a perfect heart and with a willing mind, 1 Chron. 29:9. Thus when we give God any spiritual sacrifice, when we pray to or praise him, we should do it willingly, not customarily, or by constraint, or for by-ends, nor by the compulsion of a natural conscience; and when we feel, as we shall now and then, any tediousness and irksomeness in prayer, we should quicken ourselves by this motive: Christ Jesus, who was our sin-offering, he willingly offered up himself upon the service of our salvation. I might urge other arguments, as the nobleness of our service, the greatness of our reward, the many sweet experiences we shall gain in our converse with God; but this should be as the reason of reasons, and instead of all. Christ Jesus did not grudgingly go about the work of

our salvation, but willingly offered himself: Ps. 40:8, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.' When God would have no more legal sin-offerings, but the great sin-offering of the gospel was to be produced and brought forth in the view of the world, 'Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me.' Now our thank-offering should be carried on with the same willingness. Christ will be served now out of gratitude, and therefore his love should constrain us. Surely if we believe this great mystery of Christ, that he did willingly offer himself upon the service of our souls, and if we have any faith in him, 'faith will work by love,' Gal. 5:6. The soul may reason and discourse thus with itself, Do I believe Christ Jesus did thus willingly give himself for my soul? how can I be backward in God's service and hang off from him? Oh! let me live to Christ, 'who loved me, and gave himself for me,' Gal. 2:20. What! shall I be more backward to do for God than Christ was to die for me, to go to the throne of grace than Christ Jesus was to go to the cross? Can I hang him off from such pleasing noble service, when Jesus Christ my Lord refused not the hard work of my redemption? If his will was in it, certainly so should be yours.

Doct. 3. The third point, that these free-will-offerings are accepted with God. 'They shall come with rams,' speaking of the conversion of the Gentiles in terms proper to the old legal dispensation, 'and they shall come with acceptance,' Isa. 60:7; and Mal. 3:4, 'Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord.' Upon what grounds, and what way our acceptance with God is brought about? Our works in themselves cannot please God, they are accepted not as merits, but as testimonies of thankfulness.

1. Our persons are by Christ reconciled to God, and in worship he delights. This is the proper importance of laying the peace-offering upon the top of the burnt-offering, Lev. 3:10.

2. Our infirmities are covered with his righteousness; for Christ is the propitiation, the mercy-seat that interposeth between the law and God's gracious audience. We come to the throne of grace when we come to God in and by him, Heb. 4:16.

3. By his intercession our duties are commended to God; as Aaron was to stand before the Lord with his plate upon his forehead, wherein was writ, 'Holiness to the Lord.' Why? 'That he might bear the iniquity of the people, that they might be accepted of the Lord.' All our acceptance comes from Christ's intercession; and alas! our prayers and praises are unsavoury eructations, belches of the flesh, as they come from us; a great deal of infirmity we mingle with them, we mingle brimstone with our incense and sweet spices, therefore provoke the Lord to abhor and despise us; but there is an angel stands by the altar that perfumes all our prayers and praises. How should this encourage us against the slights of the world and discouragements of our own hearts, and to look after the testimony of our acceptance with God!

Doct. 4. The fourth point, that this gracious acceptance must be sought and valued as a great blessing: Ps. 19:14, 'Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord.' And it must be valued as a great blessing, if we consider either who the Lord is, or what we are, or what it is we go to him for. If we consider who the Lord is, God all-sufficient, that standeth in no need of what we can do, that cannot be profited by us; he is of so great a majesty, that his honour is rather lessened than greatened by anything we can do; the great author of all blessings, all our offerings come from himself first: 'Of thine own have we given thee.' And if we consider what we are, poor, impotent, sinful creatures, will God take, an offering at our hands? And if we consider what we do, nothing but



imperfection; there is more of us in it, of our fleshly part, in anything we do, yet that these things should be accepted with God.

## SERMON CXIX

### **My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law.—VER. 109**

IN this verse and the next, David asserts his integrity against two sorts of temptations and ways of assault—the violence and craft of his enemies. Their violence in this verse, my soul is in my hand; and their craft in the next verse, they laid snares for me. And yet still his heart is upright with God.

In this verse observe—(1.) David's condition, my soul is continually in my hand. (2.) His constancy and perseverance, notwithstanding that condition, yet do I not forget thy law.

First, Let me speak of the condition he was now in, in that expression, 'My soul is continually in my hand.' The soul in the hand is a phrase often used in scripture; it is said of Jephthah, Judges 12:3, 'I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon.' So Job 13:14, 'Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in my hand?' And when David went to encounter Goliath, 1 Sam. 19:5, it is said, 'He put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine.' In exposing ourselves to any hazard and dangers in any great attempt, it is called the putting of our life in our hand. And the witch of Endor, when she ventured against a law to please Saul, and so had exposed her life, this form of speech is used concerning her, 1 Sam. 28:21, 'I have put my life in my hand.' Briefly, then, by soul is meant life, and this is said to be in his hand; I go in danger of

my life day by day; as if he should say, I have my soul ready divorced when God calls for it. It not only notes liableness to danger, but resolution and courage to encounter it. In a sense, we always carry our souls in our hands; our life hangs by a single thread, which is soon fretted asunder, and therefore we should every day be praying that it may not be taken from us, as the souls of wicked men are, Job 27:8; Luke 12:20, but yielded up, and resigned to God. But more especially is the expression verified when we walk in the midst of dangers and in a thousand deaths: 'My soul is in my hand;' that is, I am exposed to dangers that threaten my life every day.

Secondly, Here is his affection to God's word, notwithstanding this condition, 'Yet do I not forget thy law.' There is a twofold remembrance of things—notional and affective; and so there is a twofold forgetfulness:—

1. Notional. We forget the word, when the notion of things written therein has either wholly or in part vanished out of our minds.

2. Affectively. We are said to forget the word of God when, though we still retain the notion, yet we are not answerably affected, do not act according thereunto, and this is that which is understood here, 'I do not forget thy law.' Law is taken generally for any part of the word of God, and implies the word of promise, as well as the word of command. As for instance:—

[1.] If we interpret it of the promise, the sense will be this: I do not forget thy law; that is, I take no discouragements from my dangers to let fall my trust, as if there were no providence, no God to take care of those that walk closely with him. Heb. 12:5, when they fainted, they are said to have forgotten the consolation which spake unto them as unto children.

[2.] If we interpret this word 'law' of the commandments and directions of the word, and so I do not forget it; that is either by way of omission, I do not slacken my diligence in thy service for all this; or by way of commission, I do not act contrary to conscience; and the effect of the whole verse is this: Though I walk in the midst of dangers and a thousand deaths continually, yet at such a time, when a man would think he should not stand upon nice points, even then he should keep up a dear and tender respect to God's law. And he doth the rather express himself thus, I do not forget it, because great temptations blind and divert the mind from the thought of our duty. Our minds are so surprised with the dangers before us, that God's law is quite forgotten as a thing out of mind, and we act as if we had no such comfort and direction given us. The points are two:—

1. That such things may befall God's children that they may carry their lives in their hands from day to day.
2. When we carry our lives in our hands, no kind of danger should make us warp and turn aside from the direction of God's word.

Doct. 1. That such things may befall God's children that they may carry their lives in their hands from day to day.

That this is often the lot of God's people, we may prove: 1 Cor. 15:31, 'I protest, by our rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.' How can that be, I die daily, since we die but once? The meaning is, I go still in danger of my life. Such times may come when we run hazards for Christ every day, so that in the morning we do not know what may fall out before night: 2 Cor. 11:23, 'In deaths often;' that is, in danger of death. So 1 Peter 4:19, 'Let those that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.' Let them commit their souls, that is, their lives; the soul is sometimes put for life, for life

spiritual or life eternal, but there it is put for life natural; so let them commit their souls to God, that is, in times of danger and hazard. Let them go on in well-doing cheerfully, and though there be no visible means of safety and defence, let them commit their lives to God in well-doing; when they carry their lives in their own hands, let them be careful to put them into the hands of God. Let God do what he pleaseth, for he is a faithful Creator; that is, as once he created them out of nothing, so he is able to preserve them when there is nothing visible, nothing to trust to. Often this may be the case of God's people, that they carry their lives in their hands from day to day. That you may take the force of the expression, consider when the people of God are in the midst of their enemies, then they carry their lives in their hands: Mat. 10:16, 'Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves;' when they are among men no better affected to them than wolves to sheep, and when men have them in their power, and there is no outward restraint of laws and government; for whatever enmity they have or act against them, laws and government are a great restraint; as Gen. 27:41, 'The days of mourning for my father are at hand, then will I slay my brother Jacob.' Till Isaac was dead, there was a check upon him; but sometimes it is in the power of their hands to do them mischief: Micah 2:1, 'They practise iniquity, because it is in the power of their hand.' When men are ill affected, no restraint upon them, no impediment in their way, yea, when they begin to persecute and rage against the servants of God, and we know not when our turn comes, then we are said to have our lives in our hand; as Rom. 8:36, 'For thy sake are we killed all the day long;' that is, some of that body killed, now one picked up, then another; in these cases they are said to carry their lives in their hands, when they are in the power of men that have no principle of tenderness to us, no restraint upon them, these begin to vex, molest, and trouble the Church.

For the reasons why God permits it so, that his people should carry their lives in their hands.

1. God doth it to check security, to which we are very subject. We are apt to forget changes; if we have but a little breathing from trouble, we promise ourselves perpetual exemption therefrom; as Ps. 30:6, 'My mountain stands strong, I shall never be moved.' When we have got a carnal pillow under our heads to rest upon, it is hard to keep from sleep, and dreaming of temporal felicity to be perpetuated to us; then we forget by whom we live, and by whose goodness we subsist; yea, this may be when trials are very near: the disciples slept when their master was ready to be surprised and they scattered, Mat. 26:40; when we are in the greatest dangers, and matters which most concern us are at hand. Now, to prevent this security, God draws away this pillow from under our heads, and suffers us to be waylaid with dangers and troubles everywhere, that we might carry our lives in our hands, for this makes us sensible of our present condition in the world, and that we subsist upon God's goodness and providence every moment.

2. To wean us from creature confidences and carnal dependences: 2 Cor. 1:9, 'We received the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.' Paul, that went up and down everywhere to hunt the devil out of his territories, and to alarm the carnal sleepy world, this Paul was very prone to trust in himself; a man that was whipped, imprisoned, stoned, opposed everywhere by unreasonable men, what had he to trust to but God's providence? And yet he needs to be brought to this, to take his life in his hands, that he might learn to trust in God that raiseth from the dead. The best are prone to trust in themselves, and to lean to a temporal, visible interest. We would fain have it by any means, therefore sometimes we take a sinful course to get it. Well,

now, God, to cure his people of this distemper, breaks every prop and stay which they are apt to lean upon, breaks down the hedge, the fence is removed, and lays them open to dangers continually, so that from day to day they are forced to seek their preservation from him.

3. To check their worldliness. We are very apt to dote upon present things, and to dream of honours and great places in the world, and seek great things for ourselves, when we should be preparing for bitter sufferings. As the two sons of Zebedee employed their mother to speak to Christ; being near of kin to him, she comes in a cunning manner, under pretence to worship him, and propounds a general question to him; she does not at first propose the particular, but says in general, 'I have a certain thing to request of thee.' And what was her request? 'That one of my sons may sit on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.' Saith Christ, 'To sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my father.' Mark, out of this story you learn how apt Christ's own disciples are to dote upon worldly honour and greatness. The sons of Zebedee, James and John, those two worthy disciples, employ their mother to Christ in such a message; they were dreaming of earthly kingdoms and worldly honour that should be shared between them, notwithstanding Christ taught them rather to prepare for crosses in this world. Do but reflect the light of this upon your own hearts. Do we think we are better than those apostles? and that it is an easy thing to shut the love of the world, and the honour thereof, out of our hearts, since they were so enchanted with the witchery of it? Therefore Christ tells them, Mat. 20:22, 'Alas! poor creatures, ye know not what ye ask: can you pledge me in my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' We know not what we do when we are hunting after high places in the world; we are to pledge Christ in his bitter cup before our advancement come. Nay, to prove this is not only the worldling's

disease, but it is very incident to the choicest of God's people; for after Christ had suffered and rose again, the apostles were not dispossessed of this humour, but still did dream of worldly ease and honour, therefore they come to Christ with this question, Acts 1:6, 'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' meaning, in the Jewish sense, break the Roman yoke, and give them power and dominion over the nations, hoping for a great share to themselves when this work was done. Thus you see human weakness and the love of worldly honour bewrays itself in Christ's own disciples. One instance more, in Jer. 45:5, of Baruch, 'Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not.' Baruch, he was Jeremiah's scribe, had written his prophecy, and believed it, that dreadful roll, written it over, yet he was seeking some great thing for himself. The best are apt to think they shall shift well enough for themselves in the world; therefore saith Jeremiah, For thou to have thoughts of honour and credit, and a peaceful and prosperous estate, when all is going to rack and ruin, never dream upon such a matter. Now judge whether there be not great cause that God should bring his people to such a condition that they should carry their life in their hands from day to day, that he might cure them of this distemper.

4. That they may value eternal life the more, which they would not do if they had a stable condition here in the world. After death there will be a life out of all danger, and a life that is not in our hands, but in the hands of God; none can take that life from us which God keepeth in heaven. Now that they might look after this life, and value and prize it the more, they are exposed to hazards and dangers here. The apostle saith, 1 Cor. 15:19, 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.' When they find the present life encumbered with so many sorrows, and exposed to so many dangers, then they conclude surely there is a better and safer estate for the people of God elsewhere in heaven. God's people cannot be of all

men most miserable; there is another life; they have hopes in Christ, and for other things; therefore they long for it, and look for it: Heb. 13:14, 'Here we have no abiding city, but we seek one to come.' All things are liable to uncertainties and apparent troubles, that we might look after that estate where the sheep of Christ shall be safely lodged in their eternal fold. Now God by their condition doth, as it were, say to them, as Micah 2:10, 'Arise, this is not your rest.' Your stable comforts, your everlasting enjoyments are not here; here all our comforts are in our hands, ready to deliver them up from day to day.

5. God doth by his righteous providence cause it to be so, that his people carry their life in their hands, to try their affections to him and his word. When we sail with a full stream of prosperity, we may be of God's side and party upon foreign and accidental reasons. Now God will see if we love Christ for his own sake, and his ways as they are his ways when separated from any temporal interest, yea, when exposed to scorn, disgrace, and trouble. It is easy to be good when it costs us nothing, and the wind blows in our backs rather than in our faces, the state of affairs is for us rather than against us. Halcyon times and times of rest are times of breeding the church, but stormy times are times of trying the church: 1 Peter 4:12, 'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.' God will put us into his furnace, there will a fiery trial come, to see if we have the same affection to truth when it is safe to own it, and when it is dangerous to own it, when it is hated and maligned in the world. Few professors can abide God's trial: Zech. 13:9, 'I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried.' When two parts fall away, there is a third part refined and tried by trials. When the generality proves dross, or chaff, or stubble in the furnace, there is some good metal preserved, to shine



brighter, for trial as their zeal is increased and their grace kept more lively, and their faith and dependence upon a continual exercise. God will try whether we can live upon invisible supports, and go on cheerfully in the performance of our duty in the midst of all difficulty, without these outward encouragements. They are proved that they may be improved.

6. God doth cause such things to befall his people, to show his power both in their preservation and in overruling all those cross providences for their good.

[1.] His power in their preservation; when they have no temporal interests to back them, God will show he can preserve his people: Ps. 97:1, 'The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.' It is well that the Lord reigns, else how could his people stand? The Lord reigns, and the multitude of isles they have a share in the joy and benefit. One benefit that we have by his reign is this, ver. 10, compared with ver. 1, he preserveth the souls of his saints; that is, their lives; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked. There is an overruling, a secret and invisible providence, by which they are kept and hidden as in a pavilion, so they have often experience of wonderful preservation in the midst of all their troubles.

[2.] God shows his power for overruling all these accidents for the increase and benefit of his church and people. When the believers were scattered, and driven up and down, when exposed to hazards and inconveniences, it is said, Acts 11:21, 'The hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord.' God can make their loss turn to their increase. Christ often gets up upon the devil's shoulders, and is beholden more to his enemies than to his friends in this sense, because that which would seem to stop

his course, and to obscure his glory, doth advance it so much the more: Phil. 1:12, 'The things which happened unto me, have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.' The gospel was not extinguished by Paul's imprisonment, but propagated. I say, Paul's sufferings were as necessary as Paul's preaching, that the truth might gain, and that it might be known and heard of. God overrules all these actions for his glory, and for the benefit of his church.

Use 1. First, if we be not in this condition, let us look for it and prepare for it. Religion is a stranger in the world, and therefore it is often ill-treated; we have a stable happiness elsewhere, and here we must expect changes. All the comforts and hopes of the scriptures is suited to such a condition; a great part of the Bible would be needless, and would be but as bladders given to a man who stands upon dry land, and never means to go into the waters; the comforts and provisions God hath made for us in the word would be useless, if such things did not befall us. Why hath God laid in so many supports, if we think never to be put to distress and troubles? Oh! then, think of these things beforehand, and make them familiar to you. 'The evil which I feared is come upon me,' saith Job. When the back is fitted, the burden will not be so dreadful. Think of these things beforehand, that you may provide and prepare for them. Now, that you may not be strange at such kind of providences, consider four things:—

1. The world will be the world still. There is a natural enmity between the two seeds, which will never be wholly laid aside, between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, Gen. 3:15; as natural an enmity as between the wolf and the lamb, the raven and the dove: 1 John 3:12, 'Cain was of that wicked one, and slew his brother; and wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.' Separation and estrangement in course of life is

a provoking thing. Men that live in any sinful course are loath any should part company with them, that there might be none to make them ashamed; therefore when they draw from their sins, and do not run with them into the same excess of riot, they think it strange; your life is a reproof to them: John 7:7, 'The world hateth me, because I testified of it that the works thereof are evil;' and Heb. 11:7, 'Noah condemned the world; being moved with fear, prepared an ark.' Strictness is an object reviving guilt. Every wicked man loves another—*Velut factorem, adjutorem et excusatorem sui criminis*, as one that favours his actions, and helps to excuse his actions. One wicked man doth not put another to the blush. It is no shame to be black in the country of the negroes. But when there is a distinction, some walk with God humbly and closely, certainly your life is a reproach to others that do not so, therefore they will hate you.

2. This enmity hath ever been working: the prophets and holy men of God have had experience of it. Abel was slain by Cain, Gen. 4:18; Isaac scoffed at by Ishmael, Gen. 21:11; which example the apostle allegeth, Gal. 4:29, 'He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit.' So it was then, so it is now, and so it will ever be to the world's end. Ever it hath been the lot of God's children to suffer hard things from the men of this world, though they are related to them in the nearest bonds of kindred and acquaintance. Jacob, because of the blessing and birthright, was pursued to death by Esau, and driven out of his father's house, Gen. 27; Moses driven out of Egypt by his unkind brethren, Acts 7:25–27; David hunted up and down like a partridge upon the mountains; Jezebel sought Elijah's life; Micaiah thrown into prison, and hardly used; Elisha pursued by Jehoram for his head. Instances are endless of this kind; ever there hath been an enmity, and ever will be.

3. Persecutions are more, greater, and longer in the New Testament than in the Old. Why? Partly because the Old Testament church was under tutors and governors, Gal. 4:1, 2; neither for light of knowledge, nor ardour of zeal to be compared with the New Testament church, when 'the kingdom of heaven suffers violence,' Mat. 11:11. Look, as Christ spared his disciples until they were fit for greater troubles, till fit for the new wine, Mat. 9:17, so God spared that church. The church then had troubles, but for the most part they were not for religion, but for defection from God, for their sins. And partly, too, because the church of the Old Testament was not so dispersed, but confined within the narrow bounds of one province or country, not mixed with the profane idolatrous nations, nor exposed to their hatred, contradiction, and rage; but of Christians, the apostle tells us, this sect is everywhere spoken against. And partly because Satan then had quiet reign over the blind world for a long time; but now, when Christ comes to dispossess him, to turn out the strong man—the goods were in peace before, and now he hath but a short time—he hath great wrath, Rev. 12:11. When Christ came to seize upon the world, it was quick and hot work, his force and violence was greater. Again temporal promises were more in the eye of the covenant, where all things were wrapped up in types and figures; when prosperity signified happiness, and long life signified eternity, there were not such exercises and trials then. But now, 'All those that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution,' 2 Tim. 3:12. But since Christ hath set up his church, and brought light and immortality to the world, now troubles are greater.

4. Persecutions from pseudo-Christians will also be hot and violent: Rev. 14:13, 'Write from henceforth, saith the Spirit, Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.' Why, the dead that die in the Lord? they were always blessed from the beginning of the world; why such a solemn notice from heaven? Why from henceforth? The meaning is

this: those that suffered under pagan persecutions, all Christians would call them blessed that died in the Lord. Ay! but now, when the persecutions began under the pseudo-Christians, blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth still. Nay, the persecutions here are greater than the pagan, and of longer continuance. Why? Because they have a show of Christ's authority, as the beast in the Revelations had horns like a lamb; that beast which spake like a dragon, deceived the nations, enchanted the world with her witchery and sorcery, that beast had a pretence of the authority of Christ, Rev. 13:11. And the purity of Christians is greater, and so more enraging; and the great quarrel in the latter ages of the world is about a temporal interest. The spirit of the world is the spirit of antichristianism, and all those that hang upon her are of the spirit of the world: 1 John 4:5, 'They are of the world, therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.' Now, when these are contending for the world, this doth exceedingly inflame and heighten the rage against those that would endanger their worldly interest. You see there is cause to think that God will expose us also to our trials; therefore we should be forewarned and prepared for these things that they may not come upon us unawares.

Use 2. If God's people are put into such a condition that they carry their lives in their hands, then learn from hence, that if we have greater security for our lives and interests, we ought more to bless God and to improve the season. It is a great mercy that we have laws to secure our religion and our interests, that we have Christian and Protestant magistrates to execute those laws, that we may in safety worship God in the public assemblies, and we ought to bless God. But then, if this be our condition, there are three duties required of us:—

1. To acknowledge God in this mercy, for it is he that hath the hearts of magistrates in his own hands: Prov 21:1, 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; as the river of waters, he turneth it whithersoever he will.' Their thoughts, their designs, inclinations and aversations are in God's hands. And as God hath power, so hath he promised this blessing, Isa. 49:23, that he will give 'kings to be nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers.' Well, there is a power and a promise. What follows then? Only that we praise God for so much of it as we have, and that we pray to God still for more, that we may, under our kings and governors, 'lead godly and quiet lives,' 1 Tim. 2:1, 2; and therefore, if we have greater security for our lives and interests, God must be acknowledged.

2. Be so much the more in active obedience: Acts 9:31, 'Then had the churches rest.' And what then? 'And they walked in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.' When you have a good day, you should improve it well; when we may walk up and down in the security of laws, and serve God freely, oh! let us serve him much; we are not called to renounce our interests, therefore let us mortify our lusts. Fires are not kindled about us to consume our bodies, therefore let the fire of God burn up our lusts. If the saints are to quit their well-being, certainly it should not be grievous to us to part with our ill-being, with our sins for God's service. Look, as Salvian de Gub. lib. iii., saith, when our kings are Christians, and religion is not troubled by them, now God calls us to be more pure and holy in our conversations; now we do not shift for our lives, let us avoid occasions of evil; now we are not cast into prisons, let us confine ourselves to our closets, that we may serve God more cheerfully there.

3. Bear the lesser troubles with more patience, when this is not our condition, that our lives are carried in our hands from day to day. It

was never so well with the people of God, that if not in kingdoms, yet in families, in parishes, in lesser societies there will be some conflict; now these we should bear with more patience, because the children of God are exposed to that condition that they have carried their lives in their hands from day to day: Heb. 12:3, 'Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.' You are not called unto a 'resistance to blood.' As Julian the apostate said to one, If he was so offended with their taunts, what would he be with the darts of the Persians? If we cannot suffer a reproach, and an angry word for Christ; if we murmur when we are a little slighted and forgotten by men, and left out of the tale of the world, oh! what would we do if we were called to suffer greater things? Jer. 12:5, 'If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horsemen?' that is, if thou canst not endure the scorn, reproach, and opposition of a few private wicked men that stand upon even ground with thee, how canst thou contend with horses, when there are other manner of oppositions?

Use 3. If this should now befall you, as it hath befallen God's choicest servants, and very likely so to do for those reasons I gave, then shrink not, but resolve to endure any extremity rather than take any sinful course for your ease; nay, be not dejected if it should happen: Acts 21:13, 'I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus.' There was one that had his life in his hand indeed, that had the courage to lay it down. To quicken you hereto, let me give a few considerations:—

1. God hath given you greater things than possibly you can lose for his sake; though we should lose life and all, yet he hath given us his Christ. Saith Ambrose, We are indebted for a person of the Godhead; and shall we stick at our personal interests and concernments? Shall

we not die for his honour who died for our salvation? die temporally for him who maketh us to live eternally? and give that body as a sacrifice to the honour of Christ, which otherwise by the law of nature will become meat for the worms? therefore every Christian should carry his life in his hand, Phil. 1:20, either by martyrdom or ministerial labours.

2. No evil is like to that evil which will befall us in forsaking God: Mat. 10:28, 'Fear not them which can but kill the body,' &c. Shall we, rather than run hazards with the sheep of Christ, be contented to howl with wolves in everlasting darkness, when we for a little temporal danger refuse to run hazard with Christ's sheep, shall be cast into hell-fire for evermore? If we are so tender of suffering, what will it be to suffer hell-fire?

3. All that we can lose is abundantly made up in the other world. Heb. 11:35, it is said, they 'would not accept deliverance, having obtained a better resurrection.' There is a resurrection from death to life, when we come out upon ill terms, by accepting the enemy's deliverance. Ay! but there is a better resurrection when we come out upon God's terms, a resurrection to life and glory hereafter. Violence doth but open the prison door, and let out the soul that long hath desired to be with Christ; and therefore we should endure, as expecting this better resurrection.

4. Consider upon what slight terms men will put their lives in their hands for other things, and shall we not run hazards for Christ? Many venture their lives for a humour, a little vainglory, to show a greatness of spirit; or they venture their lives upon revenges, upon a punctilio of honour. Some will venture their lives in the wars for one shilling a day, and shall we not carry our lives in our hands for Christ? Scipio boasted of his soldiers, that they loved him so as to



venture their lives for him, to leap into the sea, and cast themselves down a steep rock: There are none of these but if I spake the word, shall go upon a tower, and throw himself down into the sea if I bid him. So Fulgentius' story of those that would obey their chief, whom they called Vetus, the old man of the mountain, if he bid them fall down a steep rock, to show their obedience; and shall not we venture our lives for Christ?

Doct. 2. That when our souls are continually in our hands, no kind of danger should make us warp and turn aside from the direction of God's word. Why?

1. A Christian should be above all temporal accidents; above carnal grief, carnal joy, worldly hope, worldly fear; he should be dead to the world, or else he is not thoroughly acquainted with the virtue of Christ's cross, Gal. 6:14.

2. God can so restrain the malice of wicked men, that though we carry our lives in our hands, we shall be safe enough for all that: Prov. 16:7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.' Mark, the Lord can secure you against men, when a man pleaseth the Lord; but when a man pleaseth men, they cannot secure you against the Lord, they cannot save you harmless from the wrath of God, or answer for you to the Almighty, nor give you safety from the terrors of conscience. But on the other side, many a man by pleasing God finds more safety and comfort in opposing the lusts and the humours of men than in complying with them. God's providence is wonderfully at work for his children when they are reduced to these extremities; either he can allay their fury, turn in convictions upon their consciences of the righteousness of those whom they molest and trouble, as when Saul hunted for David, 1 Sam. 24:17, 'Thou art more righteous than I.' God

puts conviction upon him. Nay, sometimes such a fear and reverence that they dare not: Mark 6:20, 'Herod feared John because he was a strict man.' Or some check or bridle, some contrary interest that God can set up, that their hands are withered when they are stretched out against them, as was Jeroboam's hand; and therefore a Christian, though his life be in his hand, he should not warp. Why? For God can mightily provide for him as to his temporal safety: 1 Peter 3:13, 'Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?' It is an indefinite proposition, sometimes it will be true. Let a man follow that which is good, who dares harm him? There is an awe, and he is kept safe, though not always.

3. We renounced all at our first coming to Christ. Estate, credit, liberty, life, it was all laid at Christ's feet, if our hearts were really upright with him. A man must lay down self, whatever it be, else he cannot be Christ's disciple, Mat. 16:24; Luke 14:26. This was done in vow, in a time of peace; therefore it must be actually done and made good in a time of trouble. Your interests are God's, and are only given back to God again; your estate, life, liberty, and credit, all given up. Why? That you may have something of value to esteem as nothing for Christ.

4. Our sufferings shall be abundantly recompensed and made up in the world to come: Rom. 8:18, 'I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.' For a man to stand comparing his interest or sufferings here in this world with the glory revealed, is as foolish a thing as if a man should set a thousand pound weight with a feather. So 2 Cor. 4:17, 'Our light affliction,' &c. We are often saying, If we lose this and that, what will become of us? what shall we have? Mat. 19:27–29, 'We have left all.' A great all they had left for Christ; it may be a net, a fisher-boat, a cottage; yet he speaks magnificently of it,

and 'what shall we have?' Have! You shall have enough; 'in the regeneration you shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'

5. You should not warp, though you carry your lives in your hands, because constancy is necessary. How necessary? For our credit and good name as we are men: 'Do I use lightness?' saith the apostle, 2 Cor. 1:17. Men lose their authority and esteem, they are not accounted grave, serious, and weighty, when they shift and change, and appear with a various face to the world; and certainly it is for our comfort, for our right to everlasting blessedness is most sensibly clear by constancy in God's cause: Phil. 1:28, 'And in nothing terrified by your adversaries, which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.' Oh! what would a man give for to clear this, that he is an heir of God? This is an evident token; and it is necessary for the credit of the truth which we profess. When we shift, turn, and wind, we bring a dishonour upon it; but, saith the apostle, Phil. 1:14, 'They waxed confident by my bonds;' this puts heart and courage. And it is for the honour of God: 1 Peter 2:14, 'On your part he is glorified;' and John 21:19, 'Signifying by what death he should glorify God.' Since constancy is so necessary, either we should not take up principles, or suffer for them if called thereunto.

Use 1. Caution to the people of God. Take heed you do not forget the word, when you carry your lives in your hand. Many of God's people may do so sometimes, as when we deny the truth: Mat. 26:72, 'Peter denied before them all, saying, I know not the man.' Or when we take any sinful course for temporal safety, as when David feigned himself mad before Achish, 1 Sam. 21:13. Or when our spirits are filled with passion against the instruments of our trouble, and with uncomely heats, as Peter drew a sword in a rash zeal, and had no thanks for it,

but a rebuke from Christ. Or when we suffer in a heartless and comfortless manner, as God's children sometimes are in dejections of spirit. David took notice of his drooping and disconsolateness, Ps. 42:5; when he flitted up and down in the wilderness, pursued with Saul's army, he had his droopings and discomforts. In these cases we forget the word of God.

Use 2. To press you to courage and constancy in a time of danger; to endure all extremities, rather than do anything against the word of God. Here I shall inquire:—

1. What is this Christian courage? There is military valour and Christian valour. The one consists in doing, the other in suffering, great things. Peter, at Christ's death, had more of the military valour and fierceness than of the passive valour, for he that could venture on a band of men was foiled by a damsel's question. The one dependeth on hastiness of temper, greatness of blood and spirits; the other upon faith and submission to God's will: Acts 7:55, 'He being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.' It is spoken when the people gnashed on him with their teeth, then full of the Holy Ghost. There is the habit of fortitude, and the act of it when led on. There is a great deal of difference between the courage of wicked men, and the faith and fortitude of good Christians. We see rude men are undaunted in the face of danger, but the fortitude of Christians consisteth in lifting up their eyes and hearts to heaven; others not, for as soon as they think of God, their courage faileth; the more brave, the more they shut out the thought of divine things, all sense of God and immortality: 1 Cor. 15:32, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die.' It is a brutish fury, inflamed by wine, stirred up by trumpets and drums, not stirred up by the consolations of God,

or remembrance of his covenant; then they are dejected, Rev. 6:15–17.

2. To remove such objections as may hinder your courage and constancy.

[1.] It is a sore temptation to keep our service, but we must stand to God's providence, to honour him by service or suffering, as he shall think good. We are to honour God in his own way, we are not to stretch conscience in the least degree to continue it. God hath no need of thy sin; when God hath a mind to lay you aside, submit.

[2.] The smallness of the difference is another objection. If it were to turn Turk, or heathen, or papist, men will say, they would not do so and so. God standeth upon every peek of his word, every dust of truth is precious.

[3.] Another objection is this, we shall be interpreted to hinder the public peace.

I answer—'If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men,' Rom. 12:18. But be sure not to betray the cause of God, nor lose the interest of Christ; that is not possible which is not lawful in a moral sense.

[4.] Another objection is, that we shall be accounted peevish, rash, stubborn.

I answer—We must be led to credit. There is a difference between men stubborn and obstinate and zealous. Many may sacrifice a stout body to a stubborn mind, but be courageous and constant in the service of God.

3. What is necessary to this well-tempered courage, that we may suffer not out of humour, but out of conscience towards God? Not because formerly engaged by profession, or out of a desire of a name and esteem among religious persons, but out of obedience to God, who commandeth us to choose afflictions, rather than sin. To this resolution there is necessary—

[1.] A heart weaned from the world, Mat. 6:24, otherwise a man will act very uncertainly, and his zeal for God be very uneven.

[2.] A heart entirely devoted to God. Every one that cometh to Christ must be thus resolved, Luke 14:26.

[3.] A heart purged from sin, or else our zeal is not uniform, besides that our lusts will weaken our courage. A carnal person, suffering in a good cause, is of no account with God. The priests were to search the burnt-offering if sound, or had any defect or blemish upon them. He that keepeth the commandments is best able to suffer for them: Mat. 5:10, 'Blessed are they that suffer for righteousness' sake.' A martyr must have all the precedent graces.

[4.] A heart that lieth under a deep sense of eternity, and things to come: 1 John 5:4, 'This is the victory we have over the world, even our faith.' Not any looking backward, but forward.

## **SERMON CXX**

## **The wicked have laid a snare for me; yet I erred not from thy precepts.—VER. 110**

HERE is the second assault made upon David's integrity, the secret snares laid for him. The enemies of God's people do not always go to work in the way of open persecution, and directly for righteousness' sake; but then they lay snares; what they cannot do by open force, they seek to do by fraud. Many that have stood out with courage against the shock of violence, have been taken in a snare; as the prophet that resisted the king was enticed by the blandishments of the old prophet, 1 Kings 13. Persecution is a more gross way, and liable to exception, and therefore they must go secretly to work. Sometimes this life is a continued temptation, and a Christian that walketh in the world walketh in the midst of snares set for him, by his enemies bodily and spiritual. The devil is the great snare-layer, and wicked men learn it of him: 'The wicked have laid a snare for me,' &c. In the words observe—

1. David's temptation, a snare laid for him.
2. The persons who managed the temptation, the wicked.
3. The success and issue, yet I erred not from thy precepts.

Doct. The godly have often snares laid for them, not only by Satan, but by wicked men.

Now snares are to entice, or endanger, or of a mixed nature.

1. Snares to entice them from their duty. Thus the blandishments of the whorish woman are called a snare: Prov. 7:23, 'As the bird

hasteth unto the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.' Of this nature are crafty insinuations, baits of preferment, profit, pleasure, or any carnal advantage, to pervert our judgments, and draw us off from our duty.

2. Snares to endanger their safety, clogged with some spiteful condition to entrap others, or when there is a plot laid to endanger others, as Jeremiah complaineth, Jer. 18:22, 'They have digged a pit to take me, they have hid snares for my feet;' secretly conspired and practised his destruction. And David, Ps. 140:5, 'The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside, and set gins for my feet. Selah.' Hunters and fowlers did never go more cunningly to work to catch the prey, than those proud men had laid their design to bring his life under their power. And in Ps. 35:7, 'For without cause they have hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul;' and Ps. 57:6, 'They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit for me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. Selah.' Now of this sort are St Bartholomew's matins, and the plot and contrivance to out the Protestants in France, when they were invited to a wedding, that they might destroy them; and of this nature was the Gunpowder Treason; there was a snare laid. When Orestes had plotted Clytemnestra's death, Euripides expresseth it, καλῶς ἀρ' ἄρκυν ἐς μέσην πορεύεται—she fitly cometh into the snare.

3. Of a mixed nature, both to entice by endangering, and endanger by enticing.

[1.] As when they put them upon such conditions as may tempt them to folly and sin. Some think the text verified in David, at that time when he said, 1 Sam. 26:19, 'They have driven me out from abiding in



the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go serve other gods;' meaning, they excited Saul to pursue him and persecute him, and forced him to flee into an idolatrous country, and so a snare laid to endanger his steadfastness in the true faith. It is a great temptation. *Necessitas cogit ad turpia*—necessity is but an evil counsellor; and this joined with the other temptation of bad company: Ps. 120:5, 'Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar.'

[2.] When they enact a law or statute, whereby to force them to sin or trouble; as they had a plot against Daniel, either to make him neglect his God, or render him obnoxious to authority, Dan. 6:7, 8. When they burden them with such laws and statutes as the godly cannot obey without sin, or refuse without danger; they have their ends either to draw them to sin or suffer.

Now snares are laid by the wicked:—

1. Because usually they excel in policy, craftiness, and worldly wit, are superior to God's children therein; their whole hearts run that way, and their principle is entire and unbroken; and therefore our Lord Christ telleth us, Luke 16:8, 'For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.' They applaud themselves in their artifices, idolise their wit: Hab. 1:16, 'Sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their drag;' therefore use it to the saints' destruction.

2. Because they are acted by Satan, who will ever be doing against the church, though to little purpose. Luke 22:3, the devil entered into Judas when he plotted against Christ. They learn their wiles from Satan, and conceive mischief by copulation with the great incubus of hell.

3. Their own hatred and malice against the people of God. Malice is a laying snares. Anger vents itself in a storm of words, or in some sudden violent action; but hatred lurketh in the soul, and puts them that harbour it upon plots and contrivances of revenge. The historian observeth of Tiberius, *In malitiam statim invectus est*, &c. When Absalom hated Amnon, because he forced his sister, he plotteth how to take away his life, 2 Sam. 13:22.

Now, whence cometh this malice against the children of God? Either by envy at their interests, or hatred at their holiness.

1. Envy at their interests, their esteem and respect in the world, when they come to be of any regard among men. Esther 5:9, Haman plotteth against Mordecai, because he sat in the king's gate: Ps. 112:9, 10, 'His horn shall be exalted with honour; the wicked shall see it, and be grieved, and gnash with their teeth.' When the gospel was like to get credit, Acts 17:5, the envious Jews raised an uproar. Pride is loath to stoop; to see opposites in glory and power whets their malice, and they contrive how to root them out. Every man would have himself and his own faction admired and magnified. The Pharisees conspired to take Christ: John 12:19, 'All the world is gone after him.' When religion prevaieth, and groweth in credit and fashion, it is deeply resented by naughty men.

2. Hatred at their holiness. Men cannot endure to be outstripped in religion, and therefore hate what they will not imitate. Hatred, is quick-sighted in revenge, full of plots and contrivances, and tickleth the soul with a delight in them; but especially religious hatred, when a man hateth another for his godliness, when religion, instead of a party, becomes a judge, that which should restrain our passions feeds them; no hatred so great as that against the power of godliness. Cain, when he saw Abel so punctual in God's service, he plotteth to

draw him into the field, 1 John 3:12, and beginneth a discourse with him about providence and judgment to come, and rewards and punishments, and while Abel maintained God's part, Cain fell upon him and slew him.

To apply this. As these snares tend to our temporal destruction, so there is a double use to be made of them.

1. To trust God with our safety in the midst of so many snares. What shall we do? Whatever remedy we have against violence, no man by his own foresight can find out all the snares that are laid for him; therefore commit your safety spiritual and temporal to the Lord; go to him and say, Ps. 141:9, 'Keep me from the snare they have laid for me, and the gins of the workers of iniquity.' Constant dependence upon God is necessary, for there can be no snare hidden from him who watcheth over us and our safety by night and by day. There is a double argument why we should trust God with our safety; because of his wisdom, and because of his watchful providence. Because of his wisdom. Alas! we are foolish and simple, and often betray ourselves into an evil condition; but God is wise for them that are foolish: Ps. 37:12, 13, 'The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth: the Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth that his day is coming.' There is a wise God acting for a foolish people. I tell you, the wisdom of God for us is much greater than the wisdom of God in us. Where enemies deal proudly, God is above them; where they deal craftily, God is beyond them. The wisdom of God for us is greater than the wisdom of any against us. And also because of his watchful providence; he hath a waking love and care of us night and day: Ps. 121:4, 'Behold he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.' He will be so far from sleeping, that he will not so much as slumber. When we know nothing, his providence finds out the secret contrivances that are against us. I tell you, God is

our father; he will maintain us and take care for us, when we live by faith, and not by shifts, in a good plain downright course of honesty: Gen. 17:1, 'I am God all-sufficient: walk before me, and be thou perfect;' that is, they should go on doing their duty, and refer the care of their safety to God. Oh! then, cast yourselves upon the Lord; he will either direct your way to eschew these snares, or pluck your feet out of them if you be taken therein: Ps. 25:15, 'Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord; he shall pluck my feet out of the snare.' Look to him for direction and counsel.

2. Bless God for your safety and preservation; it is a mercy to have a being, in the midst of so many dangers and snares as waylay us everywhere; especially should we bless God when we have escaped some notable trap and pit that was digged for us: Ps. 124:7, 'Our soul is escaped like a bird out of the snare of the fowler: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.' This is a passage we may use to God this day. There are two grounds usually of thanksgiving for this deliverance:—

[1.] That their devices came to nought: Job 15:35, 'They conceive mischief and bring forth vanity.' It discovereth the wisdom, power, goodness, and watchfulness of God, that this dark and hellish machination, that they thought so wisely laid that all devils in hell could not discover it, yet the God of heaven brought it to light: Prov. 21:30, 'There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord.'

Those three words set out the quintessence of parts. Wisdom noteth a quick apprehension; understanding a wise foresight grounded upon experience; counsel a designation of some rare artifice: Isa. 8:9, 10, 'Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be

broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us.'

[2.] The mischief returned back upon themselves: Ps. 7:15, 'He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. Higgaion. Selah.' Their instruments; it is a high note that we may observe it. An iron heated red-hot burneth their fingers that hold it; they are taken in their own pit, poisoned in their own cup, holden in cords of their own vanity, so that in the issue it appeareth they laid a snare for themselves rather than for us.

Use 2. As they are enticements to sin; so we may make many uses of it.

1. You ought to ask God's counsel, for you walk in the midst of snares, that he would guide you and lead you: Ps. 27:11, 'Teach me thy way, O Lord; lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.' Those that watch for our halting are many, their craft is great; therefore go to the wise God for counsel; ask of him what your way and course shall be, for he seeth that which you see not.

2. Get spiritual wisdom and understanding. An ignorant, credulous heart is soon seduced, but a man of understanding, that seeth his danger, is not easily drawn and allured into it: Prov. 1:17, 'In vain is the snare laid in the sight of any bird.' The vain, credulous, simple young man is soon enticed by the lewd woman, in the 7th of the Proverbs.

3. Keep the highway of duty, and walk by a sure rule, and then you are safe. David saith here, 'I erred not from thy precepts.' In a time of snares, often consult with your rule. It is Satan's aim to put us out of our way; as when the fisherman would get the fishes into the net, he seeketh to rouse them out of their place. Take a man out of God's

way, and he becometh a ready prey to Satan. In doubtful cases there is no man chooseth the worst, but first he breaketh some known rule and clear moral precept. Therefore be punctual, and keep close to God's directions in clear and known cases, and you are safe.

4. There needs a mortified heart to worldly interests; our temporal interest is to be shaken off. A man of carnal affections seeketh out the snare: Job 18:8, 'He is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare.' If we will find the sin and disposition of heart, God will find the occasion; and a man that hath a commodity to put off (faith and a good conscience), will soon find a chapman to truck with him. Judas was thinking of betraying Christ, and the high priests were plotting how to do it just at the same time. Worldliness layeth us open to the snare: 1 Tim. 6:9, 'But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.' But he that is dead to worldly interests remaineth firm, whatever bait be proposed.

Secondly, We come to the persons that managed the temptation, the wicked: 'The wicked have laid a snare for me.'

Doct. It is the property of a wicked heart to plot and lay snares for the mischief and ruin of others, especially God's people. David saith here, 'The wicked have laid snares for me.'

1. It is a deliberate, voluntary sin; and the more will and advisedness in any sin, the greater it is. Laying of snares is not a thing done in passion, but in cool blood; there is art and cunning in it, and the heart dwelleth long upon it. The will sets the wit a-work, to weave the net and frame the device. *Involuntarium minuit de ratione peccati*—when a thing is involuntary it lesseneth sin; a man may be overtaken with a fault, Gal. 6:1. But when he studieth it, it is much the worse. God's children are surprised through unwariness, and made to

stumble in a fit of temptation; but when men's wits are bended to project and plot sin, it is not an infirmity but an iniquity: Prov. 6:14, 'Frowardness is in his heart; he deviseth mischief continually, he soweth discord.' It is the description of a naughty heart; so the prophet, Micah 2:1, 'Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds: when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hands.' Their wickedness is premeditated, then woe to them.

2. It is a sign that evil is connatural to them, when they are plotting, as poison is to a spider; they are always working it, never out of their way by night and by day, their hearts run upon it: Prov. 4:16, 'Whenever they are abroad, they sleep not unless they have done mischief, and their sleep is taken away unless they cause some to fall.' Then when others cannot rest, they examine themselves. Ps. 4:4, 'Commune with your hearts upon your beds.' When our reins should instruct us, and suggest wholesome thoughts to us, Ps. 16:7; or when we should direct our prayer to God in the morning, Ps. 5:3, then they employ their thoughts and musings on evil. The apostle maketh it to be their disposition that are given up by God to a reprobate sense, to be 'inventors of evil things,' Rom. 1:30.

3. They that plot evil, they are of the devil's trade, whose work it is to hurt and mischief those who are broken loose from him; it is his business to lay snares: 2 Tim. 2:26, 'And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.' When Judas plotteth against Christ, the devil entereth into him. So Acts 13:10, it is said to Elymas the sorcerer, 'O thou full of all subtlety and mischief, the child of the devil.' They are like the devil in their hatred of God and the truth, and the persecution of the church, and like him for subtlety and politic contrivance. Bloody designs and inventions are the venom and

poison of the old serpent sunk into men's hearts; there are both cruelty and lying: John 8:44, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him: when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it.'

4. It is a sin contrary to the love of God and man, against double light and double obligations, from both the tables: grace and nature condemneth it. It is against God, for if we did love him, we would love his image; the saints that are so near and dear to him, they are 'his jewels,' Mal. 3:17; they cost him dear; he gave an infinite price for them, the blood of Christ: they are the apple of his eye; to strike at them is to strike at God himself. And it is against man; if reasons of grace do not restrain such, yet reasons of nature should. To plot mischief against one that is of the same nature with us, natural light will teach us we should do as we would be done by. Oh! what a cruel creature is man to man, when God lets him alone to the sway of his own heart and natural fierceness!

5. It is contrary to the gentleness and simplicity of the Christian religion. Christian religion is a simple and harmless thing: Phil. 2:15, 'That ye be holy and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation;' 2 Cor. 1:12, 'This is our rejoicing, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.' It is a sign men have drunk in a false religion when their spirits are efferated, and grow monsters in wickedness. Men addicted to false worship are subtle and cruel; subtle, for where there is real worth there is no dissimulation; they carry things open and fair; they have a God and conscience to bear them out, and this is worth all the world; and if things do not suit to their minds, they can tarry God's leisure, without base and creeping



acts, and underhand designs and machinations; but a false religion, that hath not a God to depend upon, breedeth fears, and fear and pusillanimity puts men upon plots and bloody designs, as Herod, when afraid, seeketh craftily to murder Christ, Mat. 2. And as a false religion is crafty, so it is mischievous and cruel: Jude 11, 'These walked in the way of Cain;' for a false religion cannot subsist without the plots of blood and tyranny and cruelty. When Judaism began to fall, the Jews bound themselves under an oath that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. False worships put men upon a blind zeal, that breaketh out in tragical effects. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.* So much of truth, so much of meekness, openness, and plainness, as the other is of spite and malice.

Use. Oh! then, let the children of God abhor this hateful disposition; take heed of those kind of sins that have subtlety and malice in them; these are the devil's sins, the cursed old serpent, that hath been a murderer from the beginning; take heed of plotting mischief, and secretly designing the ruin of others. I would have you Christians, that are of the true religion, carry it meekly towards others; beware of deliberate sins. It is possible in some great temptation the children of God may fall into these kind of sins, as David plotted Uriah's death; but that sin was laid to his charge more than all the sins that ever he committed. These sins are accompanied with some notable affliction and judgment, as on David's sad house; they leave an indelible stain and blemish, and cost us dear: 1 Kings 15:5, 'David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all his days, save in the matter of Uriah.'

How many failings have we left upon record? His distrust: 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' His dissimulation, with his rash

vow to destroy Nabal; his injustice in the matter of Ziba and Mephibosheth; indulgence to Absalom, numbering the people, wherein he showed his carnal confidence. All these are passed over in silence, as his infirmities, save only in the matter of Uriah. And they will cost dear; there is always some eminent trouble and affliction that accompany such sins. When David had sinned in the matter of Uriah, what troubles were there in his house; his daughter ravished, Amnon slain in his drunkenness, Absalom driveth him from his palace royal, and then, poor man, his subjects deserted him, he forced to go weeping up and down, and shift for his life; all Israel came to Absalom, his wives defiled by his own son. Thus you see what is the fruit of deliberate sins.

These sins cost us a great deal of bitter sorrow, sighs, and tears, to recover our peace and God's love and favour. Again, how bitterly did David remember his sin, and beg that God would 'restore to him the joy of his salvation!' Ps. 51. Therefore take heed of deliberate sins, when we have time enough to have serious and sufficient consideration of the evil, and yet do it; when a man knoweth a thing to be evil, and yet resolveth to go forward with it. Sin is not done suddenly, in heat of blood, but at leisure; not limited to a minute, or an hour, or any short space of time; and yet to do it, this grieves the Spirit, and will cost us dear.

## SERMON CXXI

**Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.—VER. 111**

IN this notable psalm there are many independent sentences expressing David's affection to the word of God. In this verse you have—(1.) David's choice, 'Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever.' (2.) The evidence of that choice, 'For they are the rejoicing of my heart.' I call it the evidence, for so it is a proper demonstration that he took God's precepts for his heritage; this is the mark and sign of it, 'They are the rejoicing of my heart.' It did his heart good to think of his heritage, and what an ample portion he had in his God.

First, Let me speak of his choice, whence this observation. It is the property of believers to take God's testimonies for their heritage. In the management of which truth, I shall show—

1. What are God's testimonies.
2. What it is to take them for an heritage.
3. The reason why it is their property to do so.

1. What are God's testimonies. Any declaration of his will, in doctrine, precepts, threatenings, promises. The whole word, it is the testimony which God hath proposed for the satisfaction of the world. It is God's deposition or testimony, to satisfy men what is his mind and will concerning their salvation. God's testimony is the public record, that may be appealed unto in all cases of doubt, Ps. 19:8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart,' &c.; 'The testimonies of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.' By the statutes of the Lord, is meant in general the whole counsel of God delivered in the word. But then more specially and chiefly they imply the evangelical or gospel part of the word, the promises of the covenant of grace, Isa. 8:20, 'To the law and to the testimonies.' Testimony in this sense is contradistinguished to the law or God's

precepts, what is required of us; thus 'the ark of his testimony' is called by that name. Mark this notion of calling the word God's testimony; it shows us what regard we should have to the precepts and promises of God; you need regard them, it is God's testimony to you and then against you. Christ would have his word preached 'as a testimony against them,' Mat. 24,—a testimony to them that they might know God's mind, and then, if it were not received, a testimony against them at the last day; when God comes to judgment, the sinner will be without an excuse, but will not be without a testimony; every sermon will rise up against him in judgment; it will be a testimony for their conviction.

And as we should regard his precepts, so it shows in what regard his promises are, which are chiefly his testimony; therefore it is said, John 3:33, 'He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.' You give God the glory of his truth by venturing your souls upon his testimony, whereas otherwise you 'make him a liar,' a blasphemy which is most contrary to the glory of his being: 1 John 5:10, 'He that believeth not makes God a liar.' Look upon the promises as God's testimonies, you may urge it to your own heart and to God. We may urge it to our own heart when we are full of doubts and troubles; here we have God's testimony to show for it, 'Why do ye doubt, O ye of little faith?' Here is God's testimony. Nay, it is a testimony under an oath, that the heirs of promise might want no satisfaction, Heb. 6:18. If we had but God's bare word it should beget faith, for God stands much upon his truth; but we have his oath, his hand and seal. Why! after such a solemn assurance shall I make God a liar, as being in doubtful suspense? And they are a testimony which you may produce to God himself: Lord, thou hast said, and here is a promise wherein thou hast caused me to hope; I expect nothing but what thou wilt perform. Look, as Tamar showed the tokens to Judah when he was about to condemn her, showed him

the ring and the staff as a testimony, and said, Whose are these? Gen. 38:25, you put God in mind of his promise; here is the testimony he hath called you to these hopes whereby you should wait upon him. How shall we take it here? for the precepts of God, or the promises, or both? Surely the precepts of the word are the heritage, or the gospel and treasure of the church, a treasure not to be valued; and every single believer is to take up his share, and count them his treasure and his heritage. No man can take the promissory part of the word for his heritage, but he is to take the mandatory part also; as in every bond and indenture the conditions must be kept on both sides. So if you should take it for the whole covenant of God, wherein God is bound to us and we to God, there were no incongruity. Yet the notion of an heritage is most proper to the promises, and these are the rejoicing of our soul, the foundation of our solid comfort and hope. The promises are a witness in our hearts how he stands affected to us, of which we are most apt to doubt through our unbelief. Natural light will convince us of the justice and equity of his precepts; therefore by the special use of the word the promises of God are called his heritage. Again, the promises are put for the things promised, and testimonies for the things contained and revealed in them; for the promises properly are not our heritage, but they are the evidences, the charters which we have to show for our heritage. The blessings of the covenant are properly our heritage, and the promises are the assurance and conveyances by which this heritage is made over to us. As we say a man's estate lies in bonds and leases, meaning he hath these things to show as his right to such an estate; so the promises, that is the blessings contained, or the testimony revealed there, they are the things a believer takes for his portion. Thus I have showed what is meant by the testimonies of God.

2. What is it to take them for our heritage? There are two words, heritage, and I have taken them. The word heritage first notes the

substance of our portion, or what we count our solid and principal estate; secondly, it notes our right and propriety in it; thirdly, the kind of tenure by which we hold it; fourthly, many times actual possession. Now saith David, I have taken; that implies actual choice on our part. We are not born heirs to this estate, but we take it, we choose it for our portion. And mark, he doth not say they are, but I have taken them for my heritage. Every believer cannot say, These are mine, they are my heritage, for every one hath not assurance; but yet every one should say, 'I have taken them,' there I look for my happiness; for every believer is alike affected, though not alike assured. David doth not here so expressly mention his interest, though that is implied, as his choice. Briefly, to take God's testimony for our heritage implies four things:—

[1.] To count them our choicest portions. Let others do what they will, this is my share, my lot, my portion, saith David; that which I esteem to be my happiness; this is as lands, goods, treasures to me, dearer and nearer than all temporal things whatsoever. Look, as a believer in the duty part of religion takes the precepts for his counsellor, so David saith, Ps. 119:24, 'Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors,' or the men of my counsel. Answerably in the happy part, they are my heritage and the rejoicing of my soul; it is my wealth, my treasure, my chief estate. Every man is known by the choice of his portion; now David was not taken up with any worldly thing, so as to make that his heritage, or account it his solid happiness, wherein his soul could find complacency and contentment.

[2.] It signifies to make it our work to get and keep up an interest in God's testimonies; this is to take them for our heritage. Esteem is manifested by prosecution. That which is our chiefest work, that shows us what we take to be our heritage. What! is it to grow great in

the world, to shine in pomp, to flow in pleasure, or to get and maintain an interest in the covenant? What do we seek first? Is it 'the kingdom of God and his righteousness'? Mat. 6:33. The main care is to make sure an interest in the covenant, to get a right and propriety in it.

[3.] To hold all by this tenure: heritage is a child's tenure. We do not come to this right by our own purchase, but as heirs of Christ; not by our own merits, but by adoption, God making us children and 'joint-heirs with Christ,' Rom. 8:17; 'and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.' Adam's tenure was that of a servant; the blessings that he expected from God, by virtue of the covenant of works, he looked upon them as wages of obedience; but now we take the promises as an heritage, as a right devolved upon us as heirs of Christ, because believers are called the seed of Christ, and upon the account of that are possessed of the privileges of the covenant: Isa. 53:10, 'He shall see his seed, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands.' This is a heritage purchased for us before we were born, before we had done either good or evil; and we have the right and title of sons, John 1:12; he hath given us this privilege to be the sons of God. Whatever we receive, we receive it from God as a child's portion.

[4.] Heritage signifies actual use and possession, and living upon them; and so I have taken thy testimonies for my heritage; that is, I mean to live upon them, and fetch all my comforts thence. A believer's interest is not an imaginary thing. We do enjoy somewhat by virtue of the promises. It is true our full fruition is suspended till hereafter, but we begin here. The testimonies of the Lord they are of present use in the present life; therefore we are said to be 'Heirs according to the hope of eternal life,' Titus 3:7. God doth not take us to heaven presently upon our spiritual nativity or new birth. It

pleaseth God to exercise us for a while in our nonage, under tutors and governors, and to make us differ little from servants; but for the present we have maintenance, we live by faith, Gal. 2:20. We live upon our heritage, and fetch thence not only peace and righteousness and grace, but meat, drink, and clothing, protection, and defence. So that to take God's testimonies for our heritage is to live upon them as far as the present state will permit, to fetch out all our supplies from the covenant; otherwise we should make the promises to be but a conceit and imagination, if they did not afford present support. A believer doth not live upon outward supplies only, but upon the covenant; not upon meat and drink, food and raiment, but he fetcheth all from the covenant, by the exercise of faith, and so these things are sanctified to him. So that to take them as our heritage is to make them the grounds of our future hopes, and the storehouse from whence we receive our present supply. And this is that which is called living by faith, fetching all our supports and supplies out of the promises: Gal. 2:20, 'All that I live in the flesh' (so in the original), 'I live by the faith of the Son of God.'

3. For the reasons, why it is the property of believers to take the testimony of God for their heritage; before I come to that, first, I must show what kind of heritage it is; secondly, How believers only, and no others, can take them from their heritage.

[1.] What kind of heritage it is. It is a heritage which exceeds all others in three particulars—it is full, it is sure, it is lasting; therefore we must pitch upon it for our solid happiness.

(1.) It is a full heritage, and nothing can be added to the completeness of our portion; for in the promises here is God, heaven, earth, providences, ordinances, all made ours, and all inward comforts and graces they are a part of our portion; and what can a



soul desire more? Here is God made over to us; the great blessing of the covenant is, I am thy God. Other men say (and they will think it a great matter when they can say), This kingdom is mine, this lordship is mine, this house, these fields are mine; but a believer can say, this God, this Christ, this Holy Spirit is mine. Alas! riches and honour and worldly greatness are poor things to a God made ours in covenant. Nay, mark the emphasis; God is not only ours, but ours as an heritage: Ps. 16:5, 'The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance.' They may claim a title to God, and enjoy the possession of God as freely as a man would do his own inheritance. I say, they have as sure a right to God, and all that he is and can do, as a man can have to the patrimony whereunto he is born. And as the Lord is theirs, so heaven and earth are both theirs. Heaven is theirs: let a believer be never so despicable in the world, yet he is an heir-apparent to the kingdom of heaven, James 2:15. Though, it may be, you are poor persons, nothing to live upon; poor apprentices, nothing to set up withal, yet 'God hath chosen the poor of this world to be heirs of a kingdom.' Poor believers are but princes in disguise, princes in a foreign country, and under a veil; they have a large patrimony; it lies indeed in an unknown land to the world, it is in terra incognita to them; but believers know what an ample portion God hath laid up for them, heirs of a kingdom. If that be not enough, take that other expression, Rom. 8:17, 'Heirs, co-heirs with Christ.' Christ as mediator, and we as members of his body, possess the same God, one father, one husband, one estate; we dwell together, live together; where he is we are. Besides God and heaven there is the world too. Here is the difficulty, how a Christian, that hath not a foot of land, yet should be heir of all the world. All things are theirs, saith the apostle, 1 Cor. 3:21. And it is said of Abraham, who was 'the father of the faithful,' and whose blessing comes upon us, that through the righteousness of faith he became 'heir of the world.' He was re-established in the right which Adam had before the fall, that wherever God should cast his

portion, he should look upon it as made over to him by grace, as a sanctified portion belonging to the covenant; and in this sense he was heir of the whole world. All creatures are sanctified to a believer, and the comfortable enjoyment of them fall to our lot and share; and therefore, 1 Tim. 4:5, it is said, 'commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving, to them that believe and know the truth.' Mark, believers only have a covenant right to meat, drink, land, money, and the things that are possessed in the world, to make use of the good creatures God hath bestowed upon them. Others are not usurpers; I dare not say so. All men have a providential right; it is 'their portion God hath given them in this world;' but they have not a covenant right. Whatever of the world falls to their share comes to them in a regular way of providence, that shall be sanctified, and truly without this covenant right, if we had all earthly possessions, it would be a mere nothing, and no blessing. Once more, providence is theirs, even those things which are against us, afflictions, death; not only life, but death, 1 Cor. 3:22, as part of their portion. Ordinances are theirs, all the gifts of the church, Paul, Apollos, Cephas, all for their benefit. And graces are theirs; the righteousness of Christ and the graces of the Spirit, they are all a part of their portion, made over to them by virtue of God's testimony. As to the righteousness of Christ, it is said of Noah, Heb. 11:7, that he 'became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith.' The great legacy which Christ hath left is his righteousness. As Elijah when he went to heaven left Elisha his cloak or mantle, so when Christ went to heaven, he left the garment of his righteousness behind him as a legacy to the church, in confidence whereof we appear before God. Look, as fathers leave lands to their children, and such as they have, so Christ hath left us what he had. In the outward estate we are despicable. Silver and gold he hath not left us, that is no solid portion; but he hath left us his righteousness and obedience, as a ground of our acceptance with God. No monarch in the world can

leave us such a portion; it cost Christ very dear to purchase it for us. Then the graces of the Spirit; we have grace enough to maintain our expenses to heaven, and carry us on till we come to the full enjoyment of our portion. Thus God in covenant, heaven, earth, whatever is great and magnificent, the ordinances of the church, the graces of the Spirit, all these belong to our heritage; it is a full portion.

(2.) It is a sure portion, both on God's part and ours. On God's part, there we have his word, and that is better than all the assurance in the world: 'He hath magnified that above all his name,' Ps. 138:2. If we had but God's single word, that is enough, for God is very tender of his word, more than of heaven and earth; and all things he hath made: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away.' Then we have it confirmed with an oath, Heb. 6:6, 7. God thought our heritage could never stand upon terms sure enough, therefore he condescended to give us an oath over and above his word. An oath is given in a doubtful matter. But now because unbelief possibly might not be satisfied with God's bare word, he hath interposed by an oath, and pawned all his holiness and glory, laid them at pledge with the heirs of promise, 'that they might have strong consolation,' for that is the effect of God's oath, when the Lord swears, 'As I live, saith the Lord;' as if he should say, Take my life in pawn, count me not an excellent, glorious, holy God, if I do not accomplish this for you: I will make good this promise. There is no inheritance in the world so sure as this, made over to the heirs of promise. And then on our part, there it is made sure. God will maintain our right to this inheritance. We should embezzle our inheritance, lose it every hour, if it were wholly committed to us; but mark, 'Thou art the portion of mine inheritance, thou shalt maintain my lot, O Lord,' Ps. 16:5. A heritage is either wasted by the prodigality of the owner, or else wrested from us by the violence and

cunning of others. Now, for the prodigal disposition of the owner: indeed we should spend our patrimony apace, soon embezzle our portion, if we had the sole keeping of it, for we are prodigals. But mark, under the law, Exod. 25:23, an Israelite, though he might alienate his inheritance for a while, till the year of jubilee came, yet God forbids him to sell it away for ever. So we blot our evidences often, we cannot read our title; there is an interruption of comfort, a kind of sequestration from the privileges of the covenant for a while; but Jesus Christ is our guardian to look after them that take the promises for their heritages. And then it cannot be wrested from us by the violence of others. All heritages in the world are liable to violences. Princes have been driven from their kingdoms, and men from their heritages; but this is a heritage God will maintain; he hath engaged his own power: John 10:28, 'No man is able to pluck them out of my hand.' It shall not be wrested from us by any pleas in law. The devil would soon pick a flaw in our title, there are so many temptations and accusations; but now God will maintain our right and possession of the privileges of the covenant. He is deeply engaged to maintain their right whose hearts depend upon him: they may take away life, but not the favour of God.

(3.) It is a most lasting and durable inheritance, as being eternal: 'I have taken thy testimonies for my heritage for ever.' You know all estates are valuable according as they last. A lease for years is better than to be tenant at will, an inheritance is better than a lease. Our inheritance lasts for ever and ever. All other heritages determine with life, but then ours begins—this heritage of God's testimonies. A worldly portion may crumble away and waste to nothing before we die, but these testimonies will give us a good estate when all things else fail. A believer, when he is stripped of all, and reduced to bare promises, is a happy man; and when he is reduced to exigencies, then is the time to put the bonds in suit. God by promise hath made

himself a debtor: 'As having nothing, yet possessing all things,' 2 Cor. 6:10. They have all things in the promise, though nothing in sense. If we have but one gracious promise left to subsist upon, we cannot be poor; it is better riches than all the world, for then our right to God and eternal life still remaineth. If an estate here should last till death, yet then certainly men try the weakness of their portion. When other men find the worthlessness and baseness of their portion, you find the sweetness, fulness, and comfort of yours. Carnal men have but an estate for life at best: Luke 16:25, 'Son, in thy lifetime thou receivedst thy good things;' when they come to die they can look for no more; then they find the gnawing worm of conscience prove matter of vexation and torment; but then your heritage comes to the full: Ps. 73:26, 'My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.' Not only when all outward comforts fail, all creatures in the world have spent their allowance, but when the flesh begins to fail, when we consume and faint away, and hasten to the grave: Lord, then thou failest not, thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. We have an interest in the eternal God, and we shall live eternally to enjoy him. God lives for ever, and we live for ever, that we may enjoy God.

[2.] Now I come to give the reasons why it is the property of believers to choose this for their portion, and why no others can do it. It is the property of believers to do so upon two grounds:—

(1.) Because of the wisdom that is in faith. Faith is a spiritual prudence. You shall see faith is opposed not only to ignorance, but to folly, because it teacheth us to make a wise choice. Reason makes us wise to choose a good portion in this world: 'The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light,' Luke 16:9. But faith is for the inward and spiritual life. Worldly men are wise in worldly employments, to make a wise choice, and accomplish

such things they affect, turn and wind in the world; there they excel the children of God; but faith makes us wise for eternity, and therefore it chooseth the better portion. Faith is a spiritual light, and seeth a worth in other things. It is a notable saying, Prov. 23:4, 'Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom.' How came these two things to be coupled? If we had no better wisdom than our own, we should spend our time, strength, and care to labour to be rich. Human wisdom doth only incline and enable us to the affairs of the present life, but God infuseth a supernatural light into the saints; they have counsel from the Lord: Ps. 16:7, 'I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.' As if he had said, Ah! Lord, if I am left to myself, and the workings of my own natural spirit, I should be as vain and foolish as others are; but thou hast given me counsel.

(2.) The next reason is, because of the nobleness and height of spirit that is in faith. Faith will not be satisfied with any slight fancies; it must have better things than the world yieldeth. The great privilege of the covenant and work of grace is to give us a new heart; that is, another manner of spirit than we had before. Our natural spirit is the spirit of the world, a cheap, vile, low spirit, that will be satisfied with every base thing. Every man seeketh something for his portion, for no man hath sufficiency in himself, but seeketh it without. Natural men go no further than the world, riches, honour, pleasure; they seek it some in one thing, some in another. There is none more unsatisfied than a worldly man, for his heart cannot find rest, and yet none are sooner satisfied. A worldly man is not dainty, but taketh up what is next at hand. You think there is no such excellent-spirited men as they that have high designs in the world, and can achieve greatness and honour. But a poor Christian is of a more excellent spirit; these things will not give him contentment, nothing on this side God. Faith yieldeth a man a choice spirit, it maketh us take the

testimonies of the Lord for our heritage. A renewed soul it hath its aspirings; it gets up to God, and will not be satisfied with worldly delights; but 'thou art my portion, saith my soul,' Lam. 3:24. Others hunt after other things beneath God, heaven, the graces of the Spirit, the righteousness of Christ. Therefore thus it must needs be the property of God's children, because they have another understanding and another heart. And then none but the children of God can have these privileges. Why? Because though they are very magnificent and glorious, yet they are invisible, and for the most part future and to come; they make no fair show in the flesh; this is hidden manna, meat and drink the world knows not of. Carnal men look upon an estate that lies in the covenant to be but a notion and mere conceit, and they cannot believe they shall be provided for if God bears the purse for them; they cannot live immediately upon God, they must have something visible, outward, and glorious: and partly this inheritance is to come, therefore they cannot have this property: Heb 6:12, 'Be ye followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' The testimonies of the Lord are an inheritance we cannot come at presently, there needs a great deal of faith and patience in waiting upon God: as a hired servant must have money from quarter to quarter, and cannot with the child expect when the inheritance will befall him. A carnal heart dares not trust God, cannot tarry his leisure; wicked men 'have their reward,' Mat. 6:2; they must have present wages, glory, honour, and profit here; they discharge God of other things, because it is a thing which costs them much waiting. A humble dependence upon God conflicts with many difficulties and hardships. Carnal men see no beauty in it, and because it is to come, it turns their stomachs.

## **SERMON CXXII**

## **Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.—VER. 111**

USE 1. It informs us what is the reason why a believer, that hath nothing in hand, nothing to live upon, yet is not only patient, but comfortable and joyful, as the men of the world when their corn, wine, and oil increase. Whence are these men maintained, supplied, and kept at such a rate of cheerfulness? Their inheritance lies in the promise. As Christ said, 'I have meat and drink the world knows not of;' so they have land and estate the world knows not of; they have all in God. You account him a richer man that hath much land, and a thousand pounds in bonds, than he that hath only a hundred pounds in ready money; so a child of God that hath one promise is richer than all the world: he hath bonds, and his debtor cannot fail him. Let me tell you, a man may not only live by faith, but he may grow rich by faith. You read of living by faith, Gal. 2:20; this is that which supports and keeps up a believer in heart and life. This will not only keep body and soul together, but help us to grow rich.

Use 2. For examination. You have heard much what it is to have an heritage in the testimonies of the Lord. Oh! but who is the man? Try yourselves. Let me propound a few plain questions.

1. Were you ever chased out of yourselves in the sense of the insufficiency of your worldly portion, and the curse due to you? Are you driven out of yourselves? Heb. 6:18, there is a comfortable place: 'God, willing to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation.' Oh! who are these heirs of promise? If we could find out



that, we are sure there is enough in God; there they are named who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us. There is none ever took the testimony of the Lord for their portion, but they came first to take hold of it as men in danger, ready to sink and perish and be undone. Our first redress is to take sanctuary in the covenant, to flee to Christ, represented there as a city of refuge, that we may be safe. It is an allusion to a man which fled from the avenger of blood. When taken out of the city of refuge, under the law he was to die without remedy. So a poor soul that first takes hold of the covenant runs for sanctuary there first, before he comes to take possession of the comforts of it.

2. What do you take to be your main and your great work? Do you make it your main care to keep up your interest in the promises? the great business you drive on, you would sit down in as your work and employment? What do you wait upon as your great project and design in the world? Mary chose the better part, Luke 10:42; do you make this your choice, your work and business you drive on, that you may be possessed of the whole land of promise, and enjoy eternal life, and clear up your right and title to heaven? 1 Tim. 6:19, 'Laying up in store a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life.'

3. Are you very chary of your interest? Oh! you would not hazard it upon such easy terms. This is that all your happiness depends upon. What! shall I break with God for such a trifle? Are you afraid to lose your inheritance by sin, as a man his treasure by theft? Are you careful and wary in this kind, that you may not hazard your interest? 1 Kings 21:3, said Naboth, 'God forbid that I should sell mine inheritance.' Mark, there was a king would traffic with him, and that inheritance was but a poor vineyard of the earth, but it was that which was descended from his father: now God forbid I should sell it.

Thus will be the disposition of God's children. Oh! here lies my all, my happiness, my daily supplies from God. God forbid that upon every trifle and carnal satisfaction I should break with God. It was a great profaneness in Esau, Heb. 12:16, 'who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.' It is an argument that God is little valued, or the covenant and testimony of the Lord, when you can part with them for a mess of pottage, when the consolations of God are so cheap, and you can part with them for a little temporal satisfaction, and sell your part in Christ at a very easy rate.

4. What respect do you bear to the promises of God? Do you often meditate upon them? Have you recourse to them in straits? Do you keep them up as the choicest things upon your heart, upon which all your comfort depends, as a man would keep the key safe which opens to all his treasure? Do you carry the promises as a bundle of myrrh in your bosom? Because this is the key that gives you admission to the blessings promised. A man will keep his bonds chary, and will be often looking over them and considering them. So are you meditating upon the promises? Are they the rejoicing and delight of your souls? Do you keep them near and dear to you? When alone, do your hearts run upon them? For a man may know his heritage by his musing and imagination. When Nebuchadnezzar was alone, 'Is not this great Babel which I have built for the honour of my majesty?' He was thinking of his large territories. So if you have taken the testimonies of the Lord for your heritage, your heart will be running upon them. Oh! what a happiness is it for God to be my God, and my interest cleared up in eternal life, and the great things of the covenant! Many times the flesh interposeth: Ps. 144:15, 'Happy is that people that is in such a case.' You will be admiring carnal excellency sometimes, but then you will check your souls: 'Yea, rather, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.'

5. If the testimonies of the Lord be your heritage, then you will live upon them, and make them the storehouse from whence you fetch all your supplies, as righteousness, peace, comfort, and spiritual strength; nay, all your outward maintenance. This will be comfort in straits, strength in duty, provision for your families. There are two sorts of the children of God, either those that are in prosperity, or those that are in want, and both live on the covenant. A child of God that hath a plentiful affluence of outward comforts, yet he doth live upon God, 1 Tim. 4:5, to them that believe, for everything is sanctified by the word and prayer. Though God hath supplied them with mercy, yet they have their right; all comforts and blessings owe their rise from the promise. I take them immediately out of God's hand, from a God in covenant with me; and so I use the blessing and praise God. Otherwise, if you look only to present supplies, you live by sense, not by faith. Every one is to say, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' to fetch out his supplies from God every day, rich men as well as others, when you see you have a right and liberty by Christ. So God's leave and God's blessing go along with all; by this means rich men live upon the covenant. Ay! but chiefly in want; the word quickened and strengthened him when he was in distress and in want of all things. Do you find the word afford maintenance in distress and want of all things? The covenant is a storehouse that never fails. When all else fails, God is alive still, and the promises are the same; when the field yields no meat, when there are no calves in the stall, &c., yet then you can live upon your covenant interest, and comfort yourselves in the Lord your God, Hab. 3:18. Though the course of nature may fail, yet the covenant of God doth not fail, for that is beyond the course of nature, or beyond the common providence of God. When you can see that all the accidents which fall out in the world can never take your portion from you, you have enough to live upon; when you see more in the promises than the creature can take away from you, and can see all made up in God. As

the children of Israel in the wilderness had no house, but, Lord, 'thou art our dwelling-place,' Ps. 99:1. Faith gets a living from promises when nothing comes to hand in sense and outward feeling; and nothing can be taken from us but what the covenant can restore again, and to fetch quickening and support from heaven.

Use 3. For exhortation, to press you to take God's promises for an heritage; the poorest, that are born to nothing, may put in for a share. Take those motives:—

1. Consider every man hath an heritage, he hath a chief good: Ps. 4:6, 'Many say, Who will show us any good?' There is something that man takes to be his happiness. The soul in itself is a chaos of desires; like a sponge that sucks and thirsts, it hath not sufficiency in itself; it was made for something without ourselves. Now man, being such a needy creature, is always looking abroad for a happiness, for a portion to maintain and keep him up in comfort and life, Every man must have a portion. Men are not men without looking after something to maintain them as a portion. Now there is no portion like this, like the testimony of the Lord; there is none so full as this, God's covenant notion is all-sufficiency; here is all things to be found in God. When God came to indent with Abraham, 'I am God all-sufficient.' He that hath the testimony of the Lord for his portion, hath God's all-sufficiency engaged to give him everything he stands in need of.

2. This is a portion will go along with you wherever you go. If you go into exile, a foreign land, into prison, into the grave, your heritage will follow you there. Your estate, though it lay in jewels, cannot be carried safe with you; but this portion you may carry with you, they cannot plunder and deprive you of it. There is a notable expression: Prov. 14:14, 'A good man shall be satisfied from himself.' A very strange expression: it is the highest sacrilege and usurpation that can

be to be sufficient to ourselves; it is an encroachment upon God. Man, when he first fell from God, self was the next pretender. To seek that in ourselves which is only found in God, how is it meant a good man shall be satisfied from himself? What! shall the Lord be laid aside? shall he be sufficient to his own happiness? No; it is not meant in opposition to God, but in opposition to external things that lie without him. He is satisfied from himself; that is, from the comfort God lets into his own heart. A godly man is independent, his comfort doth not hang upon the creature; if you take away the creature, you do not take away his portion. As the philosopher could say, when all were bewailing the loss and spoil of the enemy, I carry all mine with me; so a Christian carries all his treasure about him. There is the same expression, Heb. 10:34, 'Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.' A Christian hath a substance that is out of the reach of spoiling, since inward comfort is far better than riches, and all this lumber that is without.

3. All other things will never give you satisfaction. A worldly heritage may give us a bellyful, but cannot give us a heartful: Ps. 17:14, 'Their bellies are filled with hid treasure.' They which are rich and great in the world have more dishes at their tables, but those have a more delicious feast in their souls that have chosen God for their portion. All other heritages do but yield more matter for sin, more fuel for wickedness, to be spent upon lust, pride, luxury, appetite; that is all the difference. The heart of man is not satisfied with these things; and yet if the heart could be satisfied, conscience could not, for that is a sore place; still our sore will run upon us. Thus you see there is no heritage like this, that lieth out of the reach of the world, and that will fill up the whole heart, and yield satisfaction. You know all other things cannot help us in many worldly cases. In sickness spiritual comfort doth only relish of sweetness. A man doth never relish the

comfort of the covenant as when he is under sickness, and deprived of other things. For all other heritages, we know the best of them at first, but this is a heritage that grows upon us; here we have the pledge and earnest of our inheritance: an earnest is a small thing to bind the bargain in lieu of a greater sum.

4. This heritage sanctifies all our heritages. Oh! it is a sad thing to enjoy a heritage with a curse and the wrath of God. 'First seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added;' then they are cast in over and above, as paper and packthread into the bargain, and are cast in in a sanctified way. A man may grow worse for every other portion, all the world will not bring one dram of grace; but this improves the world, and betters us.

5. Again, this is a good sign of adoption, when we have the spirit of God's children, both in God's gift and our choice. When men take the promises for their portion, it is a sign they have a good spirit. There is no mark put upon them that have an excellent disposition and dexterity to grow great in the world; but to be labouring and striving after an interest in the testimony of the Lord, it is a sign we have a child's spirit.

6. Again, this is a peculiar portion, and always goes along with the favour of God. Other things a man may have with the hatred of God; God giveth gifts to all his creatures. Isaac had the inheritance, but the children of the concubines had gifts. So every creature may have common gifts, a common portion, abundance of supplies in outward things, but no right in the promises of God; and all this may be without the love of God.

7. Again, they that refuse this heritage the Lord will cause his vengeance to seize upon them. It is not arbitrary whether you will take the testimony of the Lord for your heritage or no. God cannot

endure to be despised. When Nabal despised David's kindness, 'I will cut off every one that pisseth against the wall.' So when the Lord hath made such an offer of himself and his Christ in covenant, and love hath gone to the uttermost to save, and we turn back, then 'snares, and brimstone, and a horrible tempest, this shall be the portion of their cup,' Ps. 11:6. It would make a man's heart tremble to think of the heirs-apparent of the land of darkness, that is, wicked men: God will give them their portion with hypocrites in 'everlasting burnings.' Therefore take heed of refusing this portion; you can look for nothing but terrible things from God, for his love is despised. Well, then, go in God's name, and take hold of the covenant.

Again, this may be of use to press believers to live answerable to such an heritage. Am I an heir of heaven, and so uncomfortable and dejected? Can I have an interest in the promises and be no more affected? This returning upon our hearts, Rom. 8:31. When the apostle had spoken that we should be co-heirs with Christ, and laid forth the privileges of the covenant, he concludes, 'What shall we say to these things?' So, Christians, go home, return upon your heart, and say, Have I an interest in him, and live at such a low rate both for comfort and grace? Do I walk in such a low and unsuitable manner? Do I look upon this as the only sure heritage for my soul. Urge your heart with such questions as these.

Doct. 2. The taking of God's testimonies for our heritage breeds joy and rejoicing in the heart.

Now this joy ariseth partly from the portion itself, partly from the disposition of the saints, and partly from the dispensation of God.

1. From the portion itself. It is a portion that deserves to be rejoiced in, it is so full, and God cannot be possessed without great joy. A man cannot think of a little pelf and worldly riches that is his own without

some comfort; and can a man think of these great things without comfort? Consider both what we have in hand and hope, and still it is matter of joy. In hand, there is reconciliation with God. Oh, to have God in amity with us! Rom. 5:1. If one have but a great man to his friend, it comforts him that he hath such a prop and stay. Oh, but now to have God reconciled! And then to have the care of providence, to have God engaged as a father—God caring for us—to be under a promise that he will never fail us till he hath brought us to heaven. And then to have heaven kept for us, those glorious things: 'We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.' Joy is pitched upon our hopes in many places, something in possession, and something in reversion; this must needs breed a joy in our soul: Heb. 3:6, 'The rejoicing of hope;' and Rom. 12:12, 'Rejoice in hope.' A Christian hath cause to rejoice for what he hath in hand. God is at peace with him, he can go to him as a friend, as a God in covenant with him; he is bound to provide for him as a father; and then, at the end of all, a glorious happiness that is to be enjoyed.

2. It ariseth from the disposition of the hearts of God's people; partly from their esteem, their faith, their assurance; they take it for their heritage, they esteem it as their portion, they believe it, and reflect upon their own interest; and all this causeth joy. It comes from their esteem; that which I esteem I will delight in: Mat. 6:21. 'Where the treasure is, there will the heart be.' Affection follows esteem, and above all the affection of delight. A man may desire a thing that is nothing worth; when he comes to enjoy it, then he slights it. We are not acquainted with the imperfection of all worldly things until we come to enjoy them; but delight, that is an argument of esteem, the choicest affection. And then it comes from faith. Many hear of such great promises, but they hear like men in a dream. But now a believer, that hath a piercing sight, that seeth the reality and truth of them, his heart leaps within him. Heb. 11:13, it is said, 'These all died



in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.' When a man is persuaded of the truth, the reality, and goodness of the promise, oh! his heart leaps. They hugged the promises. Here is a promise that will yield glory, heaven, and happiness, and all that I stand in need of. Spiritual sight makes way for spiritual persuasion, and spiritual persuasion for holy rejoicing; that is the order: 'In whom believing, we were filled with joy.' Faith is the immediate ground; and that is the reason why carnal men do not feel such lively joy, they do not believe it. Then it comes, too, from assurance and reflection upon their own interest, when they can challenge it as theirs, when it is made over to them. The rejoicing of faith is not only good in common, but propriety is a ground of rejoicing, and delight is nothing but a complacency in our portion: 1 Sam. 30:6, 'David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.'

3. It comes from the dispensation of God; for when we esteem the promises and delight in them, then the Lord fills the heart with sweetness: Rom. 15:13, 'The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.' The Lord rewards delight with delight. Thou shalt 'call the Sabbath thy delight' in one place, then, presently 'Thou shalt delight thyself'—there is the promise. There is a delight and rejoicing that is our duty, and a delight and rejoicing that is God's dispensation. God loves to reward grace with grace. Look, as in a way of judgment he punisheth sin with sin, as when security is punished with sottish obstinacy and hardness of heart; so it is a sweet mercy when grace is rewarded with grace, when our delight in the promises is rewarded with a sweetness and taste of the promises.

Use 1. The portion of God's children and religion is no dark gloomy thing. The people of God have hidden joys. As the sun shines many times when it rains, so, though they be under affliction, yet they have

the shine of God's face, the comfort of God's promises. Let me show the excellency of the spiritual heritage above the carnal. A carnal heritage, alas! that is a poor thing; there is no strong consolation in it. The comforts of wicked men are poor, weak comforts, they cannot comfort us in any affliction, poor things soon overcome; but to God's people their heritage affords strong consolation, in overcoming worldly lusts, in spoiling the relish of other pleasures, overcoming worldly care and worldly sorrow, in bearing us out in all afflictions; nay, the strength of it is seen in overcoming the terrors of the Lord, death, hell, judgment to come, the fears and doubts of our own conscience. It will not only swallow up the sense of poverty, disgrace, and affliction, but will bear us out in life and death; they have a joy that will make them to do and to suffer the will of the Lord. When once they have tasted the comforts of God's presence, other things will go down easy. I might press you to look after this rejoicing of heart. It makes much for the glory of God, for the honour of our portion, that we do not repent us of our choice, that we bear up cheerfully. And it is of abundant profit: the joy of the Lord is a Christian's strength; it bears him out in doing for God. To this purpose you should beware of sin; that is a clouding, darkening thing. Men or angels cannot keep their hearts comfortable that sin against God. Sin takes away all joy, peace, and the whole strength of men; and an angel cannot make the conscience of a sinner rejoice: therefore the children of God must take heed that they do not allow sin. In Acts 9:31, 'They walked in the fear of God and comfort of the Holy Ghost.' Usually these two go together, and the oil of grace makes way for the oil of gladness; and usually obedience concurs to the establishing of our joy. Above all, look after communion with God, for he is the fountain of joy; and the more communion we have with him, the more we rejoice. The more communion in prayer: 1 Sam. 1:6, when Hannah prayed, 'she was no more sad.' Prayer hath a pacifying virtue in it. And then in the use of the seals, for these are

assuring ordinances. Now the more we revive the grounds of assurance, the stronger the consolation; that appears Heb. 6:18, Acts 8:39. The eunuch when he was baptized 'went away rejoicing.' When a man hath an inheritance made over to him, passed in court, all things done, the title not to be made void, then he goes and rejoiceth. So when the promises have been confirmed by a solemn ratification, it makes joy. Then meditation and thanksgiving keep this joy alive; thanksgiving gives vent, and meditation that maintains it.

## **SERMON CXXIII**

### **I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always to the end.—VER. 112**

DAVID did not only feast his soul with comforts, but also minded duty and service. In the former verse he had professed his comfort and joy, resulting from an interest in the promise; now he expresses the bent of his heart to God's statutes. Ephraim is represented as an heifer that is taught, that would tread out the corn, but not break the clods. It is a fault in Christians when they only delight to hear of privileges, but entertain coldly enforcements of duty and obedience. David was of another temper; first he said, 'I have taken thy testimonies for an heritage,' and then, 'I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always to the end.'

In which words you have all the requisites of God's service.

1. The principle of obedience, I have inclined my heart.
2. The matter of obedience, thy statutes.

3. The manner of doing—(1.) Accurately to perform; (2.) The universality and uniformity, always; (3.) Constantly, to the end.

First, That which the Psalmist bringeth in evidence for himself is the frame of his heart; he beginneth there, not with eyes or hands or feet, but my heart. Secondly, This heart is spoken of as inclined, poised, and set, to show his proneness and readiness to serve God; not compelled but inclined. The heart of man is set between two objects; corruption inclineth it one way and grace another; the law of sin on the one side and the law of grace on the other; when the scales are cast on grace's side, then the heart, is inclined to God's statutes. Now he saith, 'I have inclined.' It is the work of God's Spirit to incline and bend our hearts, as David expresseth himself, ver. 36. But it is not unusual in scripture to ascribe to us what God worketh in us, because of our subservient endeavours to grace as we pursue the work of God. *Certum est nos facere quod facimus, sed Deus facit ut faciamus*, saith Augustine. It is our duty to incline our hearts to God's law; which naturally hang sinward, but it is God's work. God beginneth by his preventing grace, and the soul obeyeth the impression left upon it: 'Turn me and I shall be turned,' Jer. 31:18. Yea, he still followeth us with his subsequent and co-operating grace; we do but act under him: I inclined my heart after thou hadst filled it with thy Spirit; when I felt the motions of thy grace, my consent followed; preventing grace made me willing, and subsequent grace that I should not will in vain. Now, what was his heart inclined to? To 'perform thy statutes;' not to understand them only, or to talk of them, but inclined to perform them, to go through with the work; that is the notion of performing: Rom. 7:18, 'How to perform.' We render *κατεργάζεσθαι* by it; to be complete in God's will, to do his utmost therein; this not by fits and starts, but always, a continual care and conscience to walk in God's law, not suffering ourselves for any respect to be turned out of the way. Many have good motions by starts, temporise a little;

their goodness is like the morning dew; it is thus not for a time, but to the end. A holy inclination while the fit lasteth is no such great matter; this was to the last. Some stop in the middle of the journey, or faint before they come to the goal, but David held out to the last. Or this is brought as an evidence of his sincerity (the sum is a bent of heart carrying him out to perform whatsoever God doth command all the days of his life). I shall speak of what is most material, and observe this point—

Doct. They that would sincerely and thoroughly obey God must have a heart inclined to his statutes.

Here I shall show—

1. What is this heart inclined.
2. The necessity of it.

First, What is this heart inclined. God expects the heart in all the service that we do him: Prov. 23:26, 'My son, give me thy heart;' not the ear or the eyes or the tongue, but the heart. The most considerable thing in man is his heart; it is terminus actionum ad intra, and fons actionum ad extra—it is the bound of those actions that look inward. The senses report to the fancy, that to the mind, and the mind counsels the heart: Prov. 2:10, 'If wisdom enter upon thy heart.' It is also the well-spring of those actions that look outward to the life, Prov. 4:23; Mat. 15:19. You have both these in one place: 'Let thy heart keep my precepts, let thine heart receive my words,' Prov. 4:4. In taking in we end with the heart; the statutes of God they are never well lodged till they are laid up in the heart. In giving out duty and service, we begin with the heart; we must go so deep, or else all that we do is of no worth. The heart is the spring of motion, that sets all the wheels a-working: Ps. 45:1, 'My heart inditeth a good

matter, my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer,' ready to praise God and serve him. When the prophet would cure the brackishness of the water, he cast salt into the spring. Our heart is blind: 1 Chron. 22:19, 'Now set your heart to seek the Lord.' There is a setting and fixing the heart which is the fruit of grace and ground of obedience.

1. It is the fruit of grace. By nature the heart is averse from God, desireth not to serve or enjoy him. See what the scripture saith of man's heart: Prov. 10:20, 'The heart of the wicked is nothing worth,' a sty and nest of unclean birds; Gen. 6:5, 'Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart are only evil continually.' The scripture doth much set out the heart of man; it is foolish, vain, deceitful, Jer. 17:9, vain, earthly, unclean, proud. There is a strange bead-roll: Mark 7:21–23, 'Out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.' It was in, or else it would never come out. If a man should vomit nothing but knives, daggers, pistols, and other instruments of destruction, of what a monstrous complexion would you judge that man to be! Oh, no such monster in the world as man's heart! If let alone to its own bent, it would grow worse every day, as putrid flesh grows more noisome every day. But now God by his grace giveth 'a new heart,' that hath other dispositions and inclinations, a heart that loveth God, and delights in God, tends to God. A new heart is the great blessing of the covenant, Ezek. 36:26; a new heart is a new placing of our desires and delights, for by these the heart is known.

2. It is the ground of obedience; for the heart is the main wheel of the soul, that moveth other things: a bowl is made round before it runneth round: Deut. 5:2, 'Oh, that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me!' There must be somewhat to bear up our

resolutions. But more particularly, what is this bent and inclination of heart?

And first negatively.

1. It is not a simple approbation of the ways of God. Many go so far as to approve what is good, to condemn themselves for not doing it, to praise others that are holy, can be content that those that are under their power should take to the ways of God, as dissolute parents would have their children soberly brought up, *video meliora proboque*: Acts 5:13, 'The people magnified them,' yet durst not join themselves with the disciples of Christ. Saul said unto David, 1 Sam. 24:17, 'Thou art more righteous than I;' yet David was fain to go to his hold; as the woman, in Luke 11:27, 28, cried out, 'Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that gave thee suck;' but Christ said, 'Rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.'

2. It is not a bare desire or wish. Many that live ill could wish to live well. Balaam had his wishes, but went on in his course, Num. 23:10. Some flashes they have; a spark is not enough to set the heart on fire in holy things; in carnal things it is enough. Many such languid motions carnal men have, yea, many cold prayers, that God would make them better, but 'the soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing, for his hands refuse to labour;' they do not set themselves in good earnest to get that grace they wish for. Would I were at such a place! but never stir a foot. Would I had written such a task! and never put pen to paper.

3. It is not a hypocritical will; or, as one called it, a copulative will. We would, but with such or such a condition. I would, if it did not cost me so dear; if I were not to mortify lusts, to deny friends, interests, relations. They would come to the supper, Mat. 22., but one had married a wife, another had a yoke of oxen to prove, another

had found merchandise; this is no full and perfect will. No doubt but the chapman would have the wares, but he will not come to the price; a Christian should say, I will whatever it cost me, I will whatever come of it: Ps. 27:4, 'One thing I have desired of the Lord, and this I will seek after.'

Secondly, Positively. Then is the heart inclined:—

1. When the judgment determineth for God, and comes to a full decree about obedience to him. Acts 11:23, Paul exhorted them, 'That with full purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord;' that is the fruit of conversion; not a little liking or hovering or faint resolution, but a full purpose, an absolute positive decree in the will, to own God and his ways whatever it cost us, a full consent to the duty of the covenant.

2. When the will is poised and swayed with love and delight, and the heart is made suitable to obedience: 'Thy law is in my heart, and I delight to do thy will, O God,' Ps. 40:8. Many times the law of God is written in the mind; many have good apprehensions, but the will is not swayed, bent this way. *Amor meus est pondus meum, eo feror quocunque feror*; when there is a natural inclination.

3. When this bent of the will is seconded with constant endeavours to attain what we resolve upon, and there is a continual striving to make good the articles of our perfect resignation or first surrender of ourselves to God: Phil. 3:12, 'I follow after that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ.' God taketh hold of us by his grace, and we carry on this grace in the way of diligent pursuit or constant obedience. It is not one endeavour or two, but such as hath its constant force; hath not its pangs of devotion, but τὸ θέλειν παράκειται, 'to will is present with me,' Rom. 7:18. It is a daily habitual constant will; not a volatile devotion, that cometh upon us



now and then, but such a will as is present as constant as evil is, Rom. 7:21: κακὸν παράκειται. Wherever you go, or whatever you are about, you carry a sinning nature about with you; it is urging the heart to vanity, folly, and lust. So this will is present, urging the heart to good, and stirring up to holy motions.

Secondly, Let me now show you the necessity of this inclined heart, that we may yield to God cheerful, uniform, and constant obedience.

1. That we may yield to God cheerful obedience in all our services. God looketh for a ready mind. God, that accepts the will for the deed, never accepts the deed without the will. The dregs of things come out with squeezing and wringing; duty is best done when, like live honey, it droppeth of its own accord; cheerful and hearty service only pleaseth the Lord. Now, that is cheerful service which cometh not from the influence of by-ends and foreign motives, or the compulsion of a natural conscience or legal fears, but from the native inclination and bent of the heart: 1 John 5:3, 'This is love, to keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.' The work is not grievous, but pleasant, because suitable to the principles that are in us; it is not done against the hair: Cain offered sacrifice, but with a grudging mind. It is somewhere said, 'They offered to the Lord whose hearts made them willing.' When the heart is in it, it is not constrained, forced service, but natural and genuine; not like water out of a still, but like water out of a fountain.

2. For uniform obedience, to serve God in the whole tenor of our lives, that needs a heart inclined, that may be as a constant spring of holiness. A man may force himself now and then to actions displeasing to himself, but his constant course is according to his natural bent and inclination. Haman could refrain himself from murder, but his heart still boiled with rancour and malice. When

men look only to the refraining of outward actions, or the restraining the outward man, it will never hold; the bent of the heart will discover itself, and so they will be off and on with God. The compulsion of conscience will sometimes urge them to God, but the inclination of the heart will draw them to evil; therefore God wisheth that his people had 'a heart to serve him,' Deut. 5:29.

3. Constant obedience; that can never be till the heart be inclined. Judas was a disciple for a while, but 'Satan entered into' his heart, Luke 22:3. Ananias joined himself to the people of God, but 'Satan filled his heart.' Simon Magus was baptized, but 'his heart was not right with God,' Acts 8:22. Here is the great defect. But now, when God gets possession of the heart, there he dwelleth, Eph. 3:17, there he abideth, as in his strong citadel, and from thence commandeth all the faculties of the soul and the members of the body.

Use 1. To press you to get this bent of heart, otherwise all your labour in religion will be in vain, every difficulty will put you out of the way, and make you think of a revolt from God; till this the work of grace is not begun. God's first gift is a new heart: Ezek. 36:26, 'A new heart also will I give unto you, and a new spirit will I put within you.' Without this you can never hold out, but you will be uncertain and mutable in the profession of godliness; whatever restraints are upon you for a time, sin will be breaking out ever and anon with violence; and at length men will 'return with the dog to the vomit, and with the sow to her wallowing in the mire,' 2 Peter 2:20. Oh! then, go to God for it: Jer. 17:10, say, 'Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.' Carry forth the work of God so far as you receive it; follow after to 'apprehend that for which we are apprehended of Christ,' Phil. 3:12.

Use 2. Have we such a heart, a heart inclined to do the will of God?

1. Though there be such a bent and inclination, there will be failings, yea, reluctances and oppositions: Rom. 7:18, 'To will is present with me, yet how to perform that which is good I find not.' There is a ready will asserted, and a weak discharge complained of. Observe, it is a will, not a wish; a weak discharge; not that nothing is done, but not all that good that is required, nor in that purity; the work doth not perfectly answer the will, nor the motions of the spirit by which it is excited; and mark, this weakness is not rested in, but complained of; and not only complained of, but resisted: 'I find not,' that implieth he sought it; for the word 'finding' implieth a diligent search; he laid about him on every side, he did not expect it should come by chance or a lazy inquiry.

2. If wrought:—

[1.] How was it wrought in you? Did God turn thee, and thou wast turned? Were you ever brought to self-resignation? By what steps was this work carried on? Thy heart was naturally wedded to thy lusts and to carnal vanity; did ever God make you see the odiousness of sin, the vanity of the creature, the insufficiency of self? Evil men seek contentment in the world as long as conscience will let them hold out in that way. You cannot cleave to God till you are rent off from the world and self. Was there ever such a separation? such a rending work? Conversion, or the altering the bent of the heart, lieth in three things—in turning from the creature to God, from self to Christ, from sin to holiness. How to God? By making us a willing people, to yield up ourselves to his service. How drawn from self to Christ? To seek all this good in him. How from sin to holiness? By seeing the beauty of God's ways. Paul found it a sensible work before he was brought to this self-resignation. Acts 9:6, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' How did God draw you or drive you to this?

[2.] How is this bent of heart kept up towards God? Nature is apt to recoil, and the heart to return to its own bent and bias again. David beggeth, ver. 36, 'Incline my heart to thy testimonies.' It is a hard matter to keep up a bent of heart towards God; it will cost us much watching, striving, praying, to keep it fixed. The frame of man's heart is changeable and various, doth not always continue at the same pass; and lust will waken, and be pressing and importunate; deadness will creep upon us. The great business of the spiritual life is to keep the bent of the heart steady: neglected grace will suffer decay, and worldly vanities and listlessness and deadness to holy things will inroach upon the soul, and a gracious heart is much discomposed. As a needle that bendeth towards the pole may be jogged and put aside, though it cannot rest there, but turneth thither again, so the bent of the soul towards God may be much disordered, and we may lose much of our free spirit and ready mind, and grow uncomfortable and uncheerful in God's service, and it may cost us much sorrow and deep humiliation to get in frame again. A cold profession is easily maintained, but to keep up a spiritual inclination is the work of labour and cost.

[3.] How doth it work in you? This bent of heart is seen in two things:  
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(1.) In pulling back the heart from those sins to which corrupt nature doth incline us. Nature carrieth us to carnal things. There is something within that puts you on, and something without to draw you forward. Nature thrusteth, occasion inviteth, but grace interposeth and checketh the motion: Gal. 5:17, 'The spirit lusteth against the flesh;' it is against the bent and inclination of the new nature; there is a back bias. Joseph had a temptation; we read of occasion inviting, but not of nature inclining; but presently his heart recoiled. The heart of man is seldom without these counterbuffs. It is

an advantage to have the new nature as ready to check as the old nature to urge and solicit: 1 John 3:9, 'He cannot sin, for his seed remaineth in him.'

(2.) In putting on the heart upon duties that are against the hair and bent of corruption. Such acts of obedience as are most troublesome and burdensome to the flesh, as are laborious, costly, dangerous. Laborious, as private worship, wrestling with God in prayer, holding the heart to meditation and self-examination; sluggish nature is apt to shrink, but 'love constraineth,' 2 Cor. 5:14. Spiritual worship, and such as is altogether without secular encouragement, that is tedious; to work truth into the heart, to commune with God, to ransack conscience, it is troublesome, but thy striving will overcome it. So there is costly and chargeable work, as alms, contributions to public good; there must be a striving to bring the heart to it. Then for actions dangerous, as public contests for God's glory, or keeping a good conscience, though with cost to ourselves. Our great work is to keep the will afoot, nature is slow to what is good. A coachman in his journey is always quickening his horses, and stirring them up; so must we quicken a sluggish will, do what we can, though we cannot do all that we should; the will must hold up still. A prisoner escaped would go as far as he can, but his bolts will not suffer to make long journeys, but yet he thinketh he can never get far enough; so this will is a disposition that puts us upon striving to do our utmost for God.

Secondly, The matter resolved on, to 'perform thy statutes always unto the end. Uniform obedience, always, or all his days. As long as life lasteth we must be always ready to observe all God's commands, which notes the continuity of our obedience, sincerity, and perpetuity of it. We are to engage our hearts by a serious resolution to serve him, and that not by fits and starts, but always; not for a time, but to the end. Resolve to cleave to him, to hold him fast that

he may not go, to keep our hold fast that we may not go. Take notice of the first decays, and let us keep our hold fast, and bewail often the inconstancy of our hearts, that we are so inconstant in that which is good. Every hour our hearts are changed in a duty. What a Proteus would man be, if his thoughts were visible, in the best duty that ever he performed! Rom. 7:18, 'Evil is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.' Our devotion comes by pangs and fits, now humble, anon proud; now meek, anon passionate; not the same men in a duty and act of a duty, unstable as water. Compare it with God's constancy, his unchangeable nature, his love to us, that we may be ashamed of our levity. From everlasting to everlasting, God is where he was, the same; the same to those that believe in him. Secondly, This 'to the end.' God's grace holdeth out to the end; so should our obedience: 'He that hath begun a good work will perfect it,' &c. Consider how unreasonable it is to desire God to be ours unto the end, if we are not his: Ps. 48:14, 'He is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide till death.' He doth not lay down the conduct of his providence. So Ps. 73:24, 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.' We can give nothing to God, our obedience is but a profession of homage. If God be always in our eye, we shall be always in his. We receive life, breath, and motion from him every moment; he sustaineth us, every day and hour yieldeth new mercy. God watcheth over us when we are asleep, yet how much of our time passeth away when we do not perform one act of love to God! The devil is awake when we sleep, to do us a mischief, but the God of Israel never slumbereth nor sleepeth. How can we offend him? Let us then take up this serious resolution, to perform God's statutes always to the end.

## **SERMON CXXIV**

**I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.  
—VER. 113**

THERE are in men two great influencing affections—love and hatred; one serves for choice and pursuit, the other for flight and aversion. The great work of grace is to fix these upon their proper objects. If we could but set our love and hatred right, we should do well enough in the spiritual life. Man fallen is but the anagram of man in innocency; we have the same affections, but they are misplaced; we love where we should hate, and hate where we should love; our affections are like a member out of joint, out of its proper place, as if the arms should hang backward. If men knew how to bestow their love and hatred, they would be other manner of persons than now they are. In the text we are taught what to do in both by David's example. See how he bestowed his love and hatred: 'I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.' Love was made for God, and for all that is of God's side, his law, his ordinances, his image, &c.; but hatred was made for sin. All sin must be hated, of what kind and degree soever it be. Every drop of water is water, and every spark of fire is fire; so the least degree of sin is sin. Thoughts are but a partial act, a tendency towards an action, and yet thoughts are sin. Of all the operations of the soul, the world thinketh a man should be least troubled about his thoughts; of all actual breaches of the law these are most secret; therefore we think thoughts are free, and subject to no tribunal. Most of the religion that is in the world is but man's observance, and therefore we let thoughts go without dislike or remorse, because they do not betray us to shame or punishment. These are most venial in man's account, they are but partial or half acts. What! not a thought pass but we must make conscience of it? this is intolerable. Once more, of all thoughts, vain thoughts would escape censure. A thought that hath apparent wickedness in it, a

murderous or an unclean thought, a natural conscience will rise up in arms against it; but vain thoughts we think are not to be stood upon. Oh! but David was sensible that these were contrary to the law of God, transgressions as well as other thoughts, and therefore inconsistent with his love to God: 'I hate vain thoughts.' Secondly, He bestows his love on the law. Naturally men hate God as a lawgiver and as a judge; they cannot hate him as a creator and preserver; under that formality they do not hate God, but the ground of our hatred to God is his law: Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' But now, saith David, 'I love thy law;' I do not fear it, but love it. I do not only keep it, but love it. A child of God will bless God for his commands as well as his promises; he owns God in the holiness of his law, and looks upon it as a copy and draught of God's own perfection; it is a good law; there is a suitableness between it and a renewed heart, and therefore I love thy law. The one of these is inferred out of the other, his love to the law is mentioned as a ground of his hatred against vain thoughts. Love is the great wheel of the soul, that sets all a-going. Therefore sin is hated because the law is loved. He that hath a true respect to the law of God is sensible of the least contrariety to it, for hatred is uniform. The philosopher tells us it is to the whole kind; as Haman, when he hated Mordecai, sought to destroy all the people of the Jews; and when a man hates sin, he hates all sin, even where he finds it, in thoughts, words, speeches: love will not allow it.

Well, then, I love thy law, therefore do I hate vain thoughts; that is, though I cannot wholly keep them out of my heart, yet I hate them, resist them, watch against them, they are not allowed there. Without further glossing, the point is this:—



Doct. It is a sign of an unfeigned love to the law of God when we hate vain thoughts.

I observe it, because a man never begins to be really serious and strict till he makes conscience of his thoughts, his time, and is sensible of his last account. Of his thoughts, for that is a sign he minds an entire subjection to the law of God, that he may obey it from his very soul. Of his time, that it may not pass away before his great work will be done. Of his account, that is not far off; the Christian that lives in a due sense of his great account is always preparing to reckon with God. The one of these doth enforce the other. A man that is sensible he shall be called to a reckoning will be careful how he spends his time, and he that is careful how he spends his time will make conscience of his thoughts.

1. To give a taste of the vanity of thoughts.
2. Show what sins most occasion vanity of thoughts.
3. The reasons why a godly man will make conscience of his thoughts.

First, Some taste of the vanity of thoughts. There are three solemn words by which the New Testament expresseth thoughts:—

(1.) Λογισμοὶ, discourses with its compound διαλογισμοὶ, which we render imaginations. (2.) Θυμήσεις, and sometimes ἐνθυμήσεις, musings. (3.) Νοήματα, which we render devices. These three ways the dunghill of corruption reeks out by our thoughts; sometimes in our vain arguings and reasonings, by way of image and representations in our musings, sometimes by way of foolish inventions and devices that are in the heart of man.

1. Λόγισμοι, carnal discourses of the mind, come under the notion of vain thoughts. If our more refined reason came to scan them, how light and vain would they be found! Our reasonings are usually against the sovereignty of God: Rom. 9:20, 'Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?' We cannot see how it is just that by one man's transgression all should be made sinners, that God should choose some and endow them with grace, and leave others in their corruption; how he should have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and harden whom he will harden. Man would be free from God, but would not have God free; and therefore, contrary to these reasonings and vain discourses, the scriptures plead the sovereignty of God, Mat. 20:15, to show he may do with his own as pleaseth him. And as against the right and sovereignty of God, so there are strange discourses against the providence of God, many anxious traverses and debates in our minds; and therefore the scripture takes notice how distrust works by our thoughts: Mat. 6:25, 'Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink,' &c.; and ver. 27, 'Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?' We are tortured with many suspensive workings and discourses of mind within ourselves, whereas a little trust in God would save many of these vain arguings: Prov. 16:3, 'Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.' He showeth that want of trust in God, and his word and providence, and committing all to his dispose, is the cause of a great deal of confusion and darkness in our thoughts, and breedeth such perverse reasonings against the providence of God. So against the truth of the gospel. The law is natural, and runneth in by its own light, with evident conviction upon the heart; but the gospel is suspected, looked upon with prejudice, received as a golden dream, and as a well-devised fable. We have reasonings in ourselves against that which is discovered concerning the salvation of sinners by Christ; therefore the apostle saith, 2 Cor. 10:5, 'Bringing into captivity every thought,'

imaginings, or λόγισμοί, reasonings, those thoughts that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God in Christ. Then disputes against Christian faith, the mysteries of the Trinity, the incarnation of Christ; we are saying, as the Virgin Mary when the angel brought her tidings of it, 'How can these things be?' So we have perverse reasonings against positive institutions: 2 Kings 5:12, 'Are not Abana and Pharpar better than all the rivers of Israel?' We are apt to say, Why is this? The means of grace seems foolish and weak: 1 Cor. 1:19, 'It pleaseth God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' So our arguings in perverting the truth of the gospel and holy principles of the word to the countenance of our lusts, as Deut. 29:19; when we reason thus within ourselves: 'We shall have peace though we walk in the imagination of our own hearts;' we need not be so nice and strict; God will be merciful, he will pardon all: Jude 4, 'Turning the grace of God into lasciviousness;' wresting the truth from its purpose to countenance a laziness. It is good to observe the different arguings in scripture from the same principle. To instance in this principle, our time is short, what doth a holy man argue from it? 1 Cor. 7:29, 'Let those that have wives be as those that have none, those that weep as though they wept not,' &c. Therefore we should be strict, temperate, sober in the use of all these things. Now, let a carnal wretch work upon this principle, and what inference doth he draw? 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die,' 1 Cor. 15:32. See this other principle, 'The grace of God brings salvation' to poor sinners, Titus 2:12. How doth a gracious heart work upon it? 'Teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,' &c. Oh! what shall be done for this God, the grace that offers such salvation by Christ? Let a carnal wretch work upon this principle, and he will take liberty to sin that grace may abound: Rom. 6:1, 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid.' Such kind of reasonings there are in the hearts of the godly: 2 Sam. 7:2, saith David, 'I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.'

God hath fenced me with his providence, what then? Here I may sit down and rest, and take my ease and pleasure, and gratify my sensual lusts? No; he doth not argue so, but what shall I do for God, that hath done so much for me? Now see those ungracious Jews after their return, how they reason: Hag. 1:2, 'The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built;' no matter for God's house. It is the Lord's hand, let Eli work upon that: 1 Sam. 3:18, 'Let him do what seemeth him good;' he draws from it a submissive patience. Oh! the sovereign God will take his own way, and the creature must not murmur, repine, and set up an anti-providence against him. But now saith that carnal wretch, 2 Kings 6:33, 'Behold, this evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?' He murmurs, and frets, and grows impatient. Solomon tells us, Prov. 26:9, 'As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.' A thorn was their instrument of sewing; now when a drunkard should manage his needle, he wounds and gores himself; so is a parable in a fool's mouth: a carnal heart wounds and gores himself with the most holy principle of religion.

2. The second sort of vain thoughts are ἐνθυμήσεις, musings; and here take notice the vanity of our thoughts appears—

[1.] In the slipperiness and inconstancy of them. We run from object to object in a moment, and our thoughts look like strangers one upon another, wandering like those 'vagabond Jews,' Acts 19:13; so they are called because of their uncertain station and frequent removes. Eccles. 6:9. 'Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire;' in the original, it is the working out of the soul. Usually we have a straggling soul, roving, wandering here and there, and all in an instant; especially this roving madness may we take notice of when we are employed in holy things, hearing, prayer, meditation. It is strange to see what impertinent, sudden discursions there are from

good to lawful, from lawful to sinful, and how far the heart is removed from God when we are before him; when a man hath brought his body to God, his heart is turned back again. These vain thoughts pursue and haunt us in duties, so that we mingle sulphur with our incense (it is Gregory's comparison), even in our prayers and holy addresses to God.

[2.] The unprofitableness and folly of our musings. Our thoughts are set upon trifles and frivolous things, neither tending to our own profit nor the benefit of others: Prov. 10:20, 'The heart of the wicked is little worth;' all their debates, conceits, musings are of no value. 'The tongue of the just is as choice silver;' but all their thoughts are taken up about childish vanity and foolish conceits: Prov. 24:9, 'The thought of foolishness is sin;' not only the thought of wickedness, but foolishness. Thoughts are the first-born of the soul, the immediate issues of the mind, yet we lavish them away upon every trifle. Follow men all the day long, and take an account of their thoughts. Oh! what madness and folly are in all the musings they are conscious to! Ps. 94:11, 'The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man that they are vanity.' If we did judge as God judges, all the thoughts, reasonings, discourses of the mind, if they were set down in a table, we might write at the bottom, Here is the sum and total account of all, nothing but vanity.

[3.] The carnality and fleshliness of our thoughts: Phil. 3:19, 'They mind earthly things.' How sweet is it to us to be thinking of worldly matters, how to grow great, to advance ourselves here! This carnal mind is very natural to us. We are in our element, and do with a great deal of savour and sweetness think of these things; it makes our heart merry: but when we come to think of that which is good, we are tired presently, and it is very tedious to spend our thoughts upon them. Good things come upon us like a flash of lightning, soon gone, but on carnal things we can spend our thoughts freely. These carnal

musings are stirred up by carnal desire or carnal delight; sometimes by a desire of worldly things, so they are forming images and suppositions of those things they hope for; as faith works in a godly man, forming images and suppositions of that happy time when they shall be gathered to God, and all holy ones, and rejoice in his presence. He hath a faith, 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. 11:1, which represents his hopes to him. So Carnal men dream of preferment, riches, honours, vainglorious applause; they are looking out after their hopes, they send their thoughts as messengers of the soul to forestall the contentment of those carnal things which they do expect. Sometimes they are employed by carnal delight, when the thing we muse upon is enjoyed. The complacency men take in any carnal enjoyment, it is part of this vanity when we go musing upon our own worth and our own excellency; as that king, Dan. 4:30, 'Is not this great Babel that I have built for the honour of my majesty?' Men take some time every day to worship the idol of self, and dote and gaze upon their own excellencies and achievements, their wisdom and wit: Hab. 1:15, 'They gather them in their drag, therefore they rejoice and are glad.' Or else pleasing themselves in their estates, dialogising within themselves, as the word is, Luke 12:13, 'Soul, take thine ease; thou hast goods laid up for many years,' &c.

[4.] By the impiety and apparent filthiness of them. When men are taken up with sin so as to act it over in their own minds, delighting themselves in fancying of sin, either by way of revenge or lust, or any other such thing, as an unclean person sets up a stage in his own heart: 2 Peter 2:14, 'Eyes full of adultery,' or the adulteress, their fancy is upon the beauty of women, their soul is set upon it.

3. The third thing is νοήματα, devices. There are many devices and carnal inventions in the hearts of men which the scripture takes

notice of; as—

[1.] When men devise, debate in their judgments by carnal means, without complying with God: James 4:8, 'Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.' By vain thoughts they mind carnal projects, how to get from under the judgment without reformation, humiliation, and complying with God, by human means or sinful shifts, without God's warrant and allowance: Isa. 9:10, when it was ill with them they hope to mend it: 'The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars.' The state of our affairs is bad, but we can work it into better.

[2.] When men spend their time wholly to compass their carnal end; as he, Luke 12:18, 'I will pull down my barns, and build greater,' &c. When they sacrifice their precious thoughts to their interest and lusts, and catering and propping how to satisfy carnal nature, making provision for the flesh to fulfil it in the lusts thereof. Or—

[3.] When men's designs are plainly wicked, and tend to the mischief of others: Prov. 16:30, 'He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things; moving his lips, he bringeth evil to pass.' Moving the lips and shutting the eyes are gestures and postures of men that are pensive and musing: Micah 2:1, 'Woe unto them that devise evil upon their beds;' when men seek to spin and weave out a web of wickedness, and carry on their sins with the greatest secrecy. This, in short, is some taste of the vanity of our thoughts.

Secondly, What are the sins that do most usually engross and take up our thoughts? I answer—

1. Uncleaness. Speculative wickedness makes way for active: 'He hath committed adultery in his heart,' Mat. 5:28. There is polluting

ourselves by our thoughts, and this is a sin usually works that way.

2. Revenge. Liquors are soured when long kept; so when we dwell upon discontents they turn to revenge: Prov. 14:17, 'He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly, and a man of wicked devices is hated.' He that is passionate and soon angry is a fool; but when a man is not only angry but malicious, that puts him upon wicked devices; when he doth concoct his anger, he is a fool to purpose. Purposes of revenge are most sweet and pleasant to carnal nature: Prov. 16:14, 'Frowardness is in his heart; he deviseth mischief continually.' When men are full of revengeful and spiteful thoughts.

3. Envy. It is a sin that feeds upon the mind, 1 Sam. 18:9. Those songs of the women that Saul had slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands, they ran in Saul's mind, therefore he hated David. Envy is an evil disease, that dwelleth in the heart, and bewrays itself mostly in thoughts.

4. Pride. Either pride in the desires or pride in the mind, either vainglory or self-conceit; this is entertaining our hearts with whispers of vanity: therefore it is said, Luke 1:51, 'He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.' Proud men are full of imaginations.

5. Covetousness, which is nothing but vain musings and exercises of their heart: 2 Peter 2:14, 'A heart they have, exercised with covetous practices.' And it withdraws the heart in the very time of God's worship: Ezek. 33:31, 'Their heart goeth after their covetousness.'

6. Distrust is another thing which usually takes up our thoughts, distracting motions against God's providence.



Thirdly, Upon what grounds we are to make conscience of our thoughts?

1. Because they are irregularities contrary to the law of God. It is said, Ps. 19:7, 'The law of God is pure, converting the soul'. The law of God differs herein from the laws of men. The commands of the greatest and most mighty potentates upon earth can go no further than the regulating of the conversation, for that is all they can take account of; but the law of God reacheth to the motions of the inward man, and to the reducing of our thoughts to the obedience of God; for God hath a tribunal in the heart and conscience, he searcheth and trieth the reins, knows all our thoughts afar off, and therefore it is proper to him to give laws to our thoughts.

2. God hath declared much of his displeasure against them. The devil's sin, for which he was cast out of heaven, was a sin of thought, an aspiring thought, possibly against the imperial dignity of God. And so great were his judgments upon men, that he doth not so much take notice of outward acts as of inward thoughts; therefore, Gen. 6:5, he threatened the old world for the imagination of the thoughts of their hearts. We look to the stream, but God looks to the fountain. Acts are hateful to men, because liable to their cognisance; so Jer. 6:19, 'I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened to my words, nor to my law, but rejected it.' Nay, in God's process at the last day, when God comes to judge the world, it is said, 'The secrets of their hearts shall be made manifest,' 1 Cor. 4:5. Men's inward debates, counsels, reasonings, and thoughts, they shall be brought into the judgment.

3. Make conscience of thoughts, because among all sins thoughts are most considerable, and that in these respects:—

[1.] In respect of the subject. They are the sins of the highest part of man, the mind, which is the leading part of the soul. The errors and irregularities of the lower part of the soul are not so considerable as the counsels, debates, reasonings, principles that we are seasoned and guided by: Rom. 8:7, 'The wisdom of the flesh is enmity against God.' That which should be the guide to man, his wisdom, puts him upon opposition. If sensual appetite were only in the fault, it were not so much.

[2.] From their nature. They are the immediate issues of the soul, the first-born of original corruption. The free acts of the heart do discover more of the temper of it than words and actions that are more remote. A man may be known by his thoughts, but not so much known by his words and actions, for words and actions may be overruled by by-ends and restraints of fear and shame. Men may speak not as they would, do not as they would, but think as they would. To curry favour with others, a man may refrain his tongue, and do some displeasing actions, or may profess opinions contrary to his own mind; but inward thoughts, being the immediate births of the soul, very much discover the temper of the man. Hereby you may take the best measure of your spirits. A gracious man is full of gracious thoughts, and a wicked man full of wicked thoughts: Prov. 12:5, 'The thoughts of the righteous are right, but the counsels of the wicked are deceit.' Our thoughts we can best judge by, being the purest offspring of the mind, and the freest from restraint: Isa. 32:8, 'The liberal man deviseth liberal things.' The unclean man is devising unclean things, the earthly man is always talking with himself about building, planting, trading; these things take up his mind. You cannot judge of a fountain by the current of water at a distance, six or seven miles off; it may receive a tincture from the channel through which it passeth; but just at the fountain where it bubbles up, there you can judge of the quality, whether sweet or bitter water: so you

cannot judge of the soul by things that are more remote, and where by-ends may interpose: Mat. 15:19, 'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications,' &c. Evil thoughts come first; other things come from the heart, but not so immediately; therefore, thoughts being so considerable, we should make conscience of them.

[3.] They are considerable from their kind, here are the roots of all evils. Everything that we do, every deliberate act that is done by a reasonable creature argueth some foregoing thought, every temptation is fastened upon the heart by some intervening thought. Before sin be formed, brought forth, and becomes a complete sin, there are musings, which are, as it were, the incubations of the soul, or sitting a-brood upon the temptation: Isa. 59:4, 'They conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.' The mind sits a-brood upon sin. It is thoughts that bring the heart and object together. First men think, then they love, then they practise. Beating the steel upon the flint makes the sparks fly out; so when the understanding beats and knocks upon the will by pregnant thoughts, by inculcation, that stirs up the affections. These are the bellows which blow up those latent sparks of sin that are in our souls; therefore, if you would make conscience of acts, you should make conscience of thoughts. It is the greatest imprudence that can be to think to do anything in reformation when we do not take care of our thoughts. See, when God adviseth us to return to him, Isa. 55:7, he saith, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.' In vain do we lop off the branches and let the root live. If we would forsake our way, we must first forsake our thoughts. When certain fowl pestered a man, he asked how he should be rid of them? The answer was, The nest must be destroyed, and they must be crushed in the egg. So here is the best way of crushing the egg, by dashing Babylon's brats against the wall. So much is implied in that place, Jer. 4:14, 'Wash

thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?' Wash thy heart, begin there. Medicines applied to the outward parts will do no good, unless the inwards be cleansed and purged; so until the soul be cleansed and purged from these evil thoughts, outward reformation will be to no purpose.

[4.] They are considerable in regard of their number, they are most numberless acts of the soul, Isa. 57:20. The sea is always working, so the heart of man is always casting forth mire and dirt: Gen. 6:5, 'Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually.' There is a mint in us that is always Working towards that which is evil. This is a means to humble us. The Lord knows the best of our thoughts are but vain; this is that which raiseth the account in God's book of remembrance, which makes us more admire the riches of his grace even to the very last. 'Let him forsake his thoughts,' Isa. 55:7. What then? 'I will multiply to pardon.' Certainly, if thoughts be sins, God must not only pardon, but multiply to pardon.

Use 1. To humble us all, the best of us, from first to last. Vanity of heart sticks to us. Oh, how many carnal thoughts haunt us wherever we go! As thou walkest in the streets up and down, whereupon do thy thoughts run? The common vain thoughts should be laid to heart. Have we not a God, a Christ to think of, sweet and precious promises, heaven and glory, and the great concernments of our souls? and yet with what chaff do we fill our minds! We go thinking of every toy and trifle, grinding chaff instead of corn every day. Oh! how do we throw away our thoughts, rather than God should have them, upon every vain thing! It is very irksome a little to retire and recollect ourselves, and think of God, Christ, and heaven; but what a deal of vanity do we take into our minds! If our hearts were turned inside outward, and

all our thoughts liable to the notice of men, as they are to the notice of God, what odious creatures should we be! and have we no reverence of the great God? The Lord knows our hearts; he knows we have thoughts enough and to spare, more than we know what to do withal, and he knows we are backward to exercise them upon him, and things that lead to communion with him. These thoughts are aggravated from the time, as upon God's day, for then we are not to 'think our own thoughts,' Isa. 58:13; a Christian is then to sequester himself only for God. Nay, our vain heart bewrayeth itself in solemn duties; a man cannot go to prayer but the vanity of his thoughts will trouble him, and run about him when he is hearing the word; how do we course up and down like spaniels hither and thither! Yea, to humble ourselves because of our wicked thoughts, our desperate thoughts against the being of God: Ps. 14:1, 'The fool hath said in his heart there is no God.' Though we cannot open our eyes but the creature presently doth show us something of God, and call upon us whether we look upward or downward, yet how do we vent this thought? If there were no God, then we could live as we list, without check and restraint. Thoughts which arise within us against the truth of the gospel, as if it were but a well-devised fable; thoughts against the purity of God's laws, that we need not be so strict, that it is but nice folly, that we shall do well enough without repenting, believing, minding the work of our salvation. Yea, we have thoughts against the light of nature, filthy, unclean thoughts, such as defile and stain the heart. Of earthly thoughts, how natural is that, in musing upon that esteem, honour, greatness that we shall have in the world! How do carnal thoughts haunt us, and this not only when we are in our natural condition, but even after grace! And Christians are mistaken that do not think those thoughts evil, though there be no consent of the will. I confess there are thoughts cast into the mind by Satan, but these not resisted, these cherished, fostered, they become ours; though they are children of Satan's getting, and may be cast in, as the

tempting of Christ was, by injection of thought; but then we entertain these things; as weeds thrown over the wall are not to be charged upon the gardener, but the envious man; but if the gardener lets them lie there and root there, then it is his fault.

Use 2. Do we love the law of God? Do we aim at a complete and entire subjection to the will of God? Do we desire to serve him in spirit? Here is the evidence. Do we hate vain thoughts? We cannot be free from them, but are they your burden? A child of God is pestered with them, though he hates them.

1. Do we give them entertainment? Jer. 4:23, 'How long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?' They may rush into a gracious heart, but they do not rest there. Wicked men may have good thoughts, but do not give them entertainment; take a snatch and away, but do not make a meal upon any spiritual truth; there is an occasional salute sometimes in wicked men of good things, but their heart doth not dwell upon them.

2. Do you make conscience of them? Do they put you upon remorse, caution, watchfulness, frequent recourse to God for pardon and grace? Acts 8:22, 'Pray, if perhaps the thoughts of thine heart may be forgiven thee.' Are you humbled for them, as well as for other sins, because these grieve the Spirit of God, are conceived there where he hath his residence, chiefly in the heart? Doth this trouble you, that the Spirit should be grieved?

Use 3. It presseth us to take care of our thoughts. Thoughts fall under the judicature of God's word, Heb. 4:12. Thoughts are hateful to God: 'The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord,' Prov. 15:26. And as they are hated of him, so he knows them all, it is his prerogative to tell man his thoughts; he understands our thoughts afar off, Ps. 139:2. What thoughts we have when we are walking,

praying, employed in our calling, what comes in, what goes out; there is not a thought but God regards, and God will reckon with us about our thoughts.

1. Look more earnestly after a principle of regeneration, Rom. 8:5. They that are after the flesh, employ their wisdom about the flesh, they are contriving for the flesh, savouring the things of the flesh; and they that are after the Spirit savour the things of God, savour spiritual things. We must be renewed by the Spirit. The ground brings forth weeds, but not flowers of itself; so our hearts naturally bring forth vain thoughts, but they must be cultivated and dressed. We must be renewed in the spirit of our mind. There is nothing discovers the necessity of regeneration so much as this, that we must take care of our thoughts. Moral restraints may prevent the excesses of life, or regulate the outward man. If sin did lie only in words and deeds, human laws and edicts would be enough, and we needed no other discipline to bring us to heaven. There are excellent laws for bridling man's speech and practice, for these things man can take notice of; but he that is only good according to the laws of man, his goodness is too narrow, is not broad enough for God. It is the peculiar privilege of that judicature God hath set up to bring the thoughts under. Look that there may be within you a spring of holy thoughts.

2. Get a stock of sound knowledge. The mind of man is always working, and if it be not fed and supplied with good matter, it works upon that which is evil and vain. If there be not a plenty of good matter wherein to exercise yourselves, the soul will necessarily spend itself in vanity of thoughts. Now abundance of knowledge supplies and yields matter. It is a good thing when our reins instruct us in the night season, Ps. 6:7, in the darkness and silence of the night; when we are taken off from all company, books, worldly employment, and

distractions of sense, and the soul is left to itself, to its own operations, then to draw out knowledge, and have our reins instruct us. But men are barren of holy thoughts, and so are forced to give way to vanity: Deut. 6:6, 7, 'Bind them upon thy heart.' What then? 'When thou awakest it shall talk with thee;' that is, as soon as you awake, before you have received images from abroad, a man is to parley with his soul about the course of his service that day. Words and thoughts are both fed by abundance in the heart. Thoughts are but verba mentis, words of the mind, and words are but thoughts expressed and languaged. Now if a man would have these things present when he is lying down and sitting up, then these words must be in his heart. A man must have a good treasure within, that he may bring forth out of his treasure things both new and old, Mat. 13:52. When the mind is the storehouse of truth, he will ever be drawing forth upon all occasions. He that hath more silver and gold in his pocket than brass farthings, brings forth gold and silver oftener than brass; so he that is stored with divine truths, and full of the knowledge of the Lord, his mind will more run upon these things, and will often out of the treasure of his heart bring forth things that are good.

3. Inure yourselves more to holy meditation. There must be some time to wind up the plummet, and lift up our hearts to God, Ps. 25:1. For want of this, no wonder if men's thoughts are loose and scattered, when they are left at random, when they are never solemnly exercised in consideration of divine truth; ver. 99 of this psalm.

4. Begin with God: Ps. 139:8, 'When I awake,' saith David, 'I am still with thee.' As soon as we awake, our hearts should be in heaven; we should leave our hearts with God over-night, that we might find them with God in the morning. We owe God the first-fruits of our



reason before we think of other things, for every day is but the lesser circle of our lives. We should begin with God before earthly things encroach upon us. Season your hearts with the thoughts of his holy presence; that is the means to make the fear of God abide upon us all the day after; and it is some recompense for those hours spent in sleep, wherein we showed not the least act of thankfulness to God, to exercise our reason again; and when we are awake we should be thinking of God.

## **SERMON CXXV**

### **Thou art my hiding-place and my shield: I hope in thy word.—VER. 114**

IN these words you have—(1.) A privilege which believers enjoy in God, and that is protection in time of danger. (2.) David's right to that privilege, 'I hope in thy word.' From both the note will be this:—

Doct. They that hope in God's word for the protection which he hath promised, will find God to be a shield and a hiding-place to them.

1. I shall speak of the nature of divine protection, as it is here set forth under the notions of a shield and hiding-place.
2. Of the respect which the word hath to these benefits.
3. Of the necessity and use of faith and hope in the word.

First, For the nature of this protection; it is set forth in two notions, a hiding-place and a shield. Upon which I observe:—

1. David was a military man, and therefore often makes use of metaphors proper to his function; when he wandered in the wilderness and the forest of Ziph, and they yielded to him many a lurkinghole, and so he knew the benefit of a hiding-place; and being a man of war, he was more acquainted with the use of a shield in battle. That which I observe is this, that it is good to spiritualise the things that we often converse with, and from earthly occasions to raise heavenly thoughts. You will ever find our Lord Jesus so doing. When he sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, he discourseth of eating bread in his Father's kingdom, Luke 16:14. When he was at the well of Samaria, he falls a discoursing of the well of life, of the water that springeth up to eternal life, John 4. Again, when he was at the feast of tabernacles, you will find there it was the fashion of the people at that feast to fetch water from the pool of Siloam, and to pour it out until it ran in a great stream; and then at the feast of tabernacles Christ cried out, 'He that cometh to me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,' John 7. He spiritualiseth that occasion. Thus should we learn to turn brass into gold, and by a holy chemistry to extract useful thoughts from these ordinary objects that we are cast upon. Thus doth David; he had been acquainted with the use of a hiding-place and with a shield, and accordingly expresth his confidence by these notions. The Septuagint renders it simply and without the metaphor, My help and my undertaker; but we, from the Hebrew, My hiding-place, my shield.

2. Observe, again, both the notions imply defence and protection. A shield is not a weapon offensive but defensive. Indeed elsewhere, Deut. 33:29, God said to Israel, 'I am the shield of thy strength, and sword of thy excellency.' God is a sword as well as a shield, a weapon offensive as well as defensive, in behalf of his people. But here both metaphors imply only defence and protection. It is not here a hiding-place and a sword, but a hiding-place and a shield. Why? The godly

are subject to many dangers and perils, from adverse powers, spiritual and bodily, and therefore need much preservation and defence.

[1.] The soul is in danger of Satan and his temptations. There are spiritual enemies, that will put us upon the need of a shield and a hiding-place: Eph. 6:12, 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood,' &c.; that is, not principally. We do not wrestle against bodily or human powers; outward agents are not principals but instruments. Our chief war is with devils and evil spirits, who have a mighty power over a great part of the world; they are the rulers of the darkness of this world, the ignorant and carnal part of the world; and they assault us with much cunning and strength; and invisible enemies are the worst, none like to them for craft, for strength, for malice, for number. They easily get the advantage over us by their crafty insinuations, and applying themselves to our humours, and feeding every distemper with a bait suitable; and they are always about us, unseen and unperceived; they lie in ambush for our souls, and assault us in company and alone, in business and in recreations, in the duties of religion, and in our ordinary affairs; they follow us in our retirements, and pursue us with unwearied diligence. No such enemies as these for craft and subtlety of address. And then for their power and strength, they have their fiery darts to throw upon us, ver. 16. They inject and cast in blasphemous thoughts, and enkindle and awaken in us burning lusts, or fire us with rage and despair; their power is exceeding great, because they have the management of fiery darts. And their malice is great; it is not to hurt our bodies chiefly, that is but the shell of the man, but the chiefest part, our immortal soul; and therefore we need a hiding-place and a shield when we have to do with spiritual wickednesses, that are always assaulting us in this manner upon all occasions. And for their number, there are many of them, and all engaged in this spiritual warfare against the

saints: we cannot dream of ease if we would be Christ's soldiers. In the Gospel we find one man possessed with a whole legion of them: Mark 5:9, 'My name is legion, for we are many.' They cease not in this manner thus continually to assault and vex us, and therefore we need a hiding-place and shield.

[2.] The bodies of God's people and their temporal lives are exposed to a great deal of hazard and danger from evil men, who are ready to molest and trouble us, sometimes upon one pretence, and sometimes upon another. They that indeed would go to heaven, and have a serious sense of the world to come upon their hearts, they are a different party from the world, and therefore the world hates them, John 17:14; and Rom. 12:2, 'Be not conformed to this world.' It was never yet so well with the world but they were forced to stand upon their defence; and usually, as to any visible interest, they are the weakest when their enemies are mighty and strong; and therefore they had need of a hiding-place to run to, and a shield to defend them, to run to the covert and defence of God's providence.

3. Observe the difference between these two notions, hiding-place and shield. Sometimes God is said to be our strength and our shield, Ps. 28:7. He furnisheth us within and without; he strengthens and fortifies the heart, then shields us and keeps off dangers. And sometimes again he is said to be a sun and a shield, Ps. 84:11. We have positive and privative blessings, or a sun to give us light, and a shield to give us strength. He promiseth to be both; but usually he so attempereth his providence, that where he is more a sun there he is less a shield; that is to say, the more sparingly he vouchsafeth the knowledge of heavenly comforts, the more powerfully doth he assist his people in their weakness by his providence. As the Jews that were conversant about the shadows of the law, and lived under the darkness of that pedagogy, God was less a sun to them than he is to

us; but yet they knew more of his powerful providence, of his temporal protection. Now here it is a hiding-place and a shield; what is the difference between these? God is a hiding-place to keep us out of danger, and a shield to keep us in danger. Either we shall be kept from trouble, that dangers shall not overtake us; or, if they do overtake us, they shall not hurt us; they shall only serve for this use, to make us sensible of God's defence, and to increase our thanksgiving for our protection: for God hides us, and as a shield interposeth himself between us and the strokes of our adversaries, those fiery darts which are flung at us. Well, then, they imply, either God will keep us from seeing the evil, or fortify us that the evil shall not hurt us. One of these notions was not enough to express the fulness of God's protection: a hiding-place, that is a fixed thing; but a shield and buckler, we may constantly carry it about with us wherever we go, and make use of God's power and love against all conflicts whenever we are assaulted. Again, on the other side, a shield were not enough to express it, for that only respects actual assaults; but God saves us from many dangers which we are not aware of, prevents troubles which we never thought of, Ps. 21:3.

4. Let us view these notions apart, and see what they contain for our comfort.

First, Let us look upon God as a hiding-place. Men in great straits, when they are not able to make defence against pursuing enemies, they run to their hiding-place, as we shall see the Israelites did from the Philistines: 1 Sam. 13:6, 'When the men of Israel saw that they were distressed, they hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in high places, and in pits;' and so God's children, when they are too weak for their enemies, seek a safe and sure hiding-place: Prov. 22:3, 'A wise man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself.' Certainly there is a hiding-place for the saints, if we had but skill to find it out; and

where is it but in God? Ps. 32:7, 'Lord, thou art my hiding-place, thou shalt preserve me from trouble.' I do not delight to squeeze a metaphor, and to make it yield what it intends not; yet these four things are offered plainly in this notion of a hiding-place—there is secrecy, and capacity to receive, and safety, and comfort.

1. Secrecy. It is not a fortress wherein a man does profess himself to be, and to stand out assaults, but it is a hiding-place: Ps. 27:5, 'In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me upon a rock.' God's protection of his people is a secret hidden mystery, as every thing is to a carnal man. The person hidden is seen abroad every day following his business, serving his generation, doing that work which God hath given him to do; yet he is hidden while he is seen, by the secret power and love of God dispensing of all things for his comfort and protection; the man is kept safe by ways which the world knows not of. So Ps. 31:20, 'Thou shalt hide him in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man.' There is a secret power of God by which they are upheld and maintained by one means or other, which they see not and cannot find out.

2. The next thing considerable in a hiding-place is capacity to receive us; and so there is in God; we may trust him with our souls, with our bodies, with our peace, with our goods, with our good name; with our all. Our souls, all that concerns us between this and the day of judgment, as St Paul did, 2 Tim. 1:12, 'I know whom I have believed; and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.' He calls his soul and all the concernments of it a thing that was left, and that he durst trust, in the hands of God. Our soul is much sought after. Satan, that hath lost the favour of God himself, envies that others would enjoy it, therefore maligns the saints, pursues them with great malice and

power; but put it into the hands of God, he is able to keep it. And so for outward things, this hiding-place is wide enough for all that we have, for goods, body, and good name: Ps. 31:20, 'Thou shalt keep them secretly as in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.' As the hearts of men are in the hands of God, so are their tongues. There is the same reason why we should trust in God for all things, when we trust in him for one thing. And indeed, did we truly and upon scripture grounds trust him for one thing, we would trust him for all things. If we did trust him with our souls, we would without anxious care trust him with our bodies and secular interests and concernments also.

3. Here is safety till the trouble be over, and we may be kept as quiet in God as if there were no danger: Ps. 57:1, 'Under the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge until these calamities are overpast.' There is an allusion to a chicken under the dam's wing, when hawks, kites, and birds of prey are abroad; that are ready to seize upon them with their sharp beaks and talons; they run to the dam's wings, and there they are safe. So Isa. 26:20, 'Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut the doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.' There we have an allusion to a storm that is soon over, it is a little cloud that will easily be blown over; but in the meantime here is a covert and a defence. The use of God's protection and love is best known in a time of straits and difficulties.

4. There is not only safety but comfort; as under the dam's wings the chickens are not only protected but cherished. Christians, it is not a dead refuge or hiding-place, but like the wings of the hen, which yield warmth and comfort to the young brood: Ps. 34:22, 'None of them that trust in him shall be desolate.' There is sweet support, and spiritual experience, and inward comforts; so that a believer that is

hidden in the secret of God's presence fares better than all those that have the world at will, and flow in ease and plenty, if he would judge of his condition by spiritual considerations. Thus we have seen the first notion, God is a hiding-place.

Secondly, God is a shield. He is often called his people's shield in scripture. Now the excellency and properties of a shield lie in these things:—

1. In the largeness and breadth of it, in that it hides and covers the person that weareth it from all darts that are flung at him, so as they cannot reach him: Ps. 5:12, 'Thou wilt bless the righteous with favour, thou wilt compass him as with a shield.' There is the excellency of a shield, to compass a person round about that the darts flung at him may not reach him. There is a comfortable promise; it runs in other notions indeed, yet I will mention it upon this occasion, because the expressions are so notable and emphatical: Zech. 2:5, 'For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about.' Mark every word, for every word hath its weight. It was spoken when the returning Jews were discouraged at their small number; they had not enough to people their country and build their towns, nor to defend themselves against their numerous and potent adversaries. Now what shall they do? God makes them this promise of a future increase, 'I will be a wall,' &c. And there are three promises included in this one, viz., that he will be a wall, a wall round about them, and a wall of fire round about them, which is a further degree. A wall! there is a promise of that, Isa. 26:1, 'We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.' And a wall that doth encompass them on every side round about, there is a promise of that, Ps. 125:2, 'As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from henceforth even for ever;' he will be instead of all guards and defences. So



likewise a wall of fire; not of brass or of stone, but of fire, that affrights at a distance, and consumes near at hand. Here is enough for a refuge, and to stay our hearts in the Lord's keeping. An allusion to those countries; when they travelled in the wilderness they were wont to make a fire about them, to preserve them from wild beasts. Thus doth God express his all-encompassing protection, he that is our shield.

2. The excellence of a shield lies in that it is hard and impenetrable. So this answers to the invincible power of God's providence, by which he can break the assaults of all enemies; and such a shield is God to his people: Ps. 144:2, 'My strength and my shield, in whom I trust.'

3. Shall I add one thing more? Stones and darts flung upon a hard shield are beaten back upon him that flings them; so God beats back the evil upon his enemies, and the enemies of his people: Ps. 59:11, 'Bring them down, O Lord, our shield.' shall I speak in a word? The favour of God is a shield: Ps. 5:12, 'With favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.' The truth of God is a shield: Ps. 91:4, 'His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.' And the strength and power of God, that is our shield: Ps. 28:7, 'He is my strength and my shield.'

Well, now, you see how this defence and this protection is set forth, 'Thou art my hiding-place and my shield.' God accommodates himself to lisp to us in our own dialect, and to speak in such notions as we can best understand, for the help of our faith. Having opened the nature of this defence, the next thing I am to do is to show—

Secondly, The respect to the word, 'I hope in thy word.'

1. The word discovers God to be such a protection and such a defence to his people everywhere: Ps. 84:11, 'God will be a sun and a shield,

grace and glory will he give.' As a sun, so he will give all things that belong to our blessedness; as a shield, so he will keep off all dangers from us. The scripture shows not only what God can do herein, but what he will do for our sakes. So Gen. 15:1, saith God to Abraham, 'I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.' Abraham might be under some fear that, the kings which he had lately vanquished would work him some trouble, and then God comes and appears to him and comforts him, and tells him, 'I am thy shield.'

2. As the scripture doth discover God under these notions, so it invites us and encourageth us to put God to this use: Isa. 26:20, 'Come, my people, enter into thy chambers, shut the door about thee, and hide thyself as it were for a little moment.' There are chambers where we may rest; where are they but in the arms of God's protection, in the chambers of his attributes, promises, and providence? The word invites us so to make use of God, to enter into him as into a chamber of repose, while the storm is furious, and seems to blow hard upon us. So Ps. 91:1, 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.' He that committeth himself to God for refuge shall not be thrust out, but suffered to dwell there, and enjoy the benefit of a covert and defence.

3. The scripture assureth us of the divine protection, that certainly it shall be so: Prov. 30:5, 'Every word of God is pure; he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.' Do not think that these are careless expressions, that dropped into the scripture by chance. No; they are the sure and pure words of the Lord, that will yield a great deal of comfort, peace, and happiness. So Ps. 18:30, 'As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.' God hath passed his word, which he hath ever been

tender of in all ages of the world; he invites us to depend upon it. Thus it assures us of the divine protection.

4. It directeth us as to the qualifications of the persons who shall enjoy this privilege. Who are they?

[1.] You might observe, all those that believe, and none but those that believe; he is a buckler and a shield to all those that trust in him, Prov. 30:5; Ps. 18:30. Trust and have it. If you will glorify God by faith, and depend upon him according to his word, you will find it to be so. We miss of our protection and defence by our doubts, unbelief, and distrust of God. All those that in time of danger are duly sensible of it, and make use of God as their refuge and hiding-place, shall find him to be that to them which their faith expects from him.

[2.] The qualification which the word directs us unto is this: those that sincerely obey his covenant: Ps. 84:11, 'God is a sun and a shield to those that walk uprightly;' and the same is repeated Prov. 2:7, 'God is a buckler to them that walk uprightly;' and Isa. 33:15, 16, where God saith they that seek him shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of the rocks; they shall be preserved safe that fear him, and walk with him according to the tenor of his covenant. If you will not be faithful servants to God, how can you expect he should be a good master to you? Sincerely give up your heart to walk with God exactly and closely, and he will not be wanting to you. Others may be preserved by general providence, or rather reserved to future judgment; they may be kept until the pit be digged for the wicked, Ps. 94:13, as a malefactor is suffered to live till the place of execution be prepared. But to have this protection in mercy, it supposeth we are in covenant with God, and walk sincerely with him.

5. It directeth us how to expect this blessing, in what manner; only in the way and manner that it is promised, Zeph. 3:3. Seek righteousness, seek meekness, it may be you shall be hid; not absolutely, but as referring it to God's will. There is the keeping of the outward man, and the keeping of the inward man. As to the outward man, all things come alike to all; the Christian is safe, whatever becomes of the man; the Lord will keep him to his heavenly kingdom, 2 Tim. 4:17, 18. That which the Christian desires mainly to be kept is his soul, that he may not miscarry, and blemish his profession, and dishonour God, and do anything that is unseemly. I say, we cannot absolutely expect temporal safety. The righteous are liable to many troubles, therefore in temporal things God will not always keep off the temporal stroke, but leave us to many uncertainties, or at least hold us in doubt about it, that we may trust his goodness. When we trust God we must trust all his attributes, not only his power, that he is able to preserve, but his goodness, that he will do that which is best, that there may be a submission and referring of all things to his will; as David, 2 Sam. 15:26, 'If he say, I have no delight in thee; behold here am I, let him do unto me as seemeth good unto him.' God will certainly make good his promise, but this trust lies not in an absolute certainty of success. However, this should not discourage us from making God our refuge, because better promises are sure enough, and God's keeping us in suspense about other things is no evidence he will not afford them to us; it is his usual course, and few instances can be given to the contrary, to have a special regard to his trusting servants, and to hide them secretly. They that know his name will find it, that he never hath forsaken them that put their trust in him, Ps. 9:10. It is the only sure way to be safe; whereas to perplex our souls with distrust, even about these outward things, that is the way to bring ruin and mischief upon ourselves, or turn aside to crooked paths. Well, then, you see what respect the word hath to this privilege, that God is a shield and a

hiding-place. The word discovers God under these notions, the word invites and encourageth us to put God to this use, the word assures us of the divine protection, it directeth us to the qualification of the persons that shall enjoy this privilege, they that can trust God, and walk uprightly with him; and it directeth us to expect the blessing, not with absolute confidence, but leaving it to God.

Thirdly, The third thing I am to do is to show this word must be applied by faith, 'I hope in thy word.' Hope is not strictly taken here, but for faith, or a certain expectation of the blessing promised. What doth faith do here? Why, the use of faith is—

1. To quiet the heart in waiting God's leisure: Ps. 33:20, 'Our soul waiteth for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.' If God be our help and shield, then faith is quietly to wait the Lord's leisure; till he sends deliverance, the word must bear up our hearts, and we must be contented to tarry his time: Isa. 28:16, 'He that believeth shall not make haste,' will not outrun God.

2. In fortifying the heart against present difficulties, that when all visible helps and interests are cut off, yet we may encourage ourselves in the Lord. When they were wandering in the wilderness, and had neither house nor home, then Moses, the man of God, pens that psalm, and how doth he begin it? 'Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations,' Ps. 90:1. What was wanting in sense they saw was made up in the all-sufficiency of God. And so here is the use of faith, when in defiance of all difficulties we can see an all-sufficiency in God to counterbalance that which is wanting in sense. So doth David, Ps. 3:3, 'Lord,' saith he, 'thou art my shield and glory, and the lifter up of my head.' Look to that psalm; it was penned when David was driven from his palace royal by Absalom: when he was in danger, God was his shield; when his kingdom and

honour were laid in the dust, God was his glory; when he was under sorrow and shame, and enemies insulting over him, when the people rose against him, and he was in great dejection of spirit, God was the lifter up of his head. This is getting under the covert of this shield, or compass of this hiding-place.

3. The use of faith is to quicken us to go on cheerfully in our duty, and with a quiet heart, resting upon God's love, power, and truth. So David, Ps. 131:5, 'Into thy hands I commit my spirit, for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.' David was then in great danger; the net was laid for him, as he saith in the former verse; and when he was likely to perish, what doth he do? He casts all his cares upon God, and trusts him with his life, 'Into thy hands I commit my spirit,' that is, his life, safety, &c.

Use 1. Admire the goodness of God, who will be all things to his people. If we want a house, he will be our dwelling-place; if we want a covert, he will be our shield, our hiding-place; whatever we want, God will supply it. There is a notable expression: Ps. 91:9, 'Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation.' Mark that double notion; a habitation is the place of our abode in time of peace, a refuge the place of our retreat in a time of war. Be it peace or war, God will be all in all; he will be a fountain of blessing to us in a time of peace, he will be our habitation there where we have our sweetest comforts; and then in time when dangers and difficulties are abroad, God will be a refuge and a place of retreat to our souls.

Use 2. To persuade us to contentation in a time of trouble. Though we have not a palace, yet if we have but a hiding-place; though our condition be not so commodious as we do desire, yet if God will vouchsafe a little liberty in our service we must be content, if he will

give us a little safety though not plenty, for here is not our full reward. And therefore it is well we can make this use of God, to be our shield and hiding-place, though we have not that ample condition which a carnal heart would fancy. God never undertook in his covenant to maintain us at such a rate, nor thus to enlarge our portion; if he will vouchsafe a little security and safety to us during the time of our pilgrimage, we must be content.

Use 3. This should more encourage us against the evil of sin, since God assures us of protection and defence against the evil of trouble. If God did leave us to shift for ourselves, and never expressed himself in his word for our comfort, then we were more excusable, though not altogether, if we did shift and turn aside to crooked paths, because we are under an obligation to obey, whatsoever it cost us. But when he hath offered himself to be our shield and our hiding-place, to stand by us, be with us, carry us through fire and water, all dangers and difficulties, shall we warp now and turn aside from God? Gen. 17:1, saith the Lord, 'I am God all-sufficient; walk before me, and be thou perfect.' There is enough in God; why should we trouble ourselves, or why should we run to any practices which God will not own?

Use 4. It presseth us to depend upon God's protection. Shall I urge arguments to you?

1. This is one. Every one must have a hiding-place. Saith Solomon, The conies are a feeble folk, yet they have their burrows and holes. All creatures must depend upon somewhat, especially the children of God, that are exposed to a thousand difficulties. You must expect to have your faith and patience tried if ever you come to inherit the promises, and during that time it is good to have a hiding-place and a shield.

2. Your hearts will not be kept in safety unless you make God your strong defence. When Phocas fortified cities to secure his ill-gotten goods, a voice was heard, Sin within will soon batter down all those walls and fortifications. Unless God be our hiding-place and shield, the strongest defences in the world are not enough to keep us from danger. All the shifts we run into will but entangle us the more, and drive us the more from God, and to greater inconvenience: 2 Chron. 28:20, as the king of Assyria to Ahaz; he distressed him, but helped him not. So many run away from God's protection, and seek out means of safety for themselves, and will not trust him, but seek to secure themselves by some shifts of their own. They do but plunge themselves into troubles so much the more, and draw greater inconveniences upon themselves. There is a great deal of sin and danger in departing from God, and he can soon blast our confidences. All those places of safety we fancy to ourselves can soon be demolished and battered down. God will blast our carnal shifts.

3. It is a thing that we owe to God by virtue of the fundamental article of the covenant. If you have chosen God for your God, then you have chosen him for your refuge. Every one in his straits runs to the God he hath chosen. Nature taught the heathens in their distress to run to their gods. You may see the pagan mariners, a sort of men usually not much haunted with religious thoughts, yet when the storm arose, the sea wrought and was tempestuous, danger grew upon them, and they were afraid: 'They called every man upon his god,' Jonah 1:5; they were sensible that some divine power must give them protection. It immediately results from the owning of a God, that we must trust him with our safety; and so, if we have taken the true God for our God, we have taken him for our refuge and hiding-place: Ruth 2:12, 'A full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.' When Ruth came to profess the true God, by taking the God of Israel for her God, it is



expressed thus; she did commit herself to his providence and protection: and therefore covetousness, because of its trust in riches, is called idolatry; it is a breach of the fundamental article of the covenant, taking God for our God.

4. This trust ever succeeds well. It will be of great use to you to still and calm your thoughts, and free you from many anxious cares, and in due time it will bring deliverance according to his promise. How may we thus trust in God? Why! commit and submit your persons and all your conditions and affairs to his providence. This is to trust in God, to make him your hiding-place and your shield. These notions are often used in scripture, 2 Tim. 1:12; Prov. 16:3; Ps. 37:5. If there be a thing to be brought about for you, commit it and submit it to God; he is able, wise, loving, and faithful; he will do what shall be for the best. Commit your comforts, your health, liberty, peace, your all into God's hands, for he is the author of all; let the Lord do what he will. This is to trust in God, when you can thus without trouble or anxious care refer yourselves to the wise disposal of his providence.

[1.] No hurt can come to you without God's leave. No creature can move or stir, saving not only by his permission, but by his influence. Others may have a will to hurt, but not power unless given them from above, as Christ told Pilate. The devil is a raging adversary against the people of God, but he is forced to ask leave to touch either Job's goods or his person; he could not touch his skin, or anything that belonged to him without a commission from God, Job 1.; nay, he must ask leave to enter into the herd of swine, Mat. 8:31. And Tertullian hath a notable gloss upon that. If God hath numbered the bristles of swine, certainly he hath numbered much more the hairs of the saints; if he cannot enter into a herd of swine, he cannot worry a friend of Christ's, without God's leave.

[2.] Consider how much God hath expressed his singular affection, and his care and providence over his people. There are many emphatical expressions in scripture; that is one, Mat. 10:29, 30, 'The very hairs of your head are numbered.' Mark, he doth not speak of the heart, or hands, or feet, those that we call parts which are necessary to the conservation of life; but he speaks of the excrementitious parts, which are rather for convenience and ornament than necessity. What is more slight than the shedding a hair of the head? Thus he expresses the particular care of his people. Again, Zech. 2:8, 'He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.' No part is more tender than the eye; and the apple of the eye, how hath nature guarded it, that it may receive no prejudice! So Isa. 49:15, 'Can a mother forget her sucking-child?' &c. See how his tender affection and yearning bowels are expressed; passions in females are most vehement, therefore God alludes to mothers' affections. And mark, it is not a child that can shift for itself, but a sucking-child, that is wholly helpless, that was but newly given her to draw her love. Nature hath left tender affections on the hearts of parents to their tender-infants; yet if a woman should be so unnatural, 'Yet will I not forget thee,' saith the Lord. Now, shall we not trust him, and make him our hiding-place? Isa. 27:3, 'I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.' God will keep his people by day, lest by force they break in upon his heritage; and keep them by night, lest they steal in privily, and by secret machinations hurt them.

[3.] Again, consider how many arguments there are to work us to this trust. Sometimes the scripture teacheth us to argue from the less to the greater: Mat. 6:30, 'If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?' Sometimes the scripture teacheth us to argue on the contrary; from the greater to the less,

Rom. 8:32. If God hath given us his Christ, will he not with him freely give us all things? Sometimes the scripture teacheth us to argue from things past. God hath been your shield and helper, he hath delivered from the mouth of the lion and bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, 1 Sam. 17:37. Sometimes from things past and present to things to come: 2 Cor. 1:10, 'Who hath delivered from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver.' Sometimes from things to come to things present: Luke 12:32, 'Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' Anne dabit regnum, et non dabit viaticum? If he give a kingdom, will he not give daily bread? Will he not preserve you while he hath a mind to use you? Thus our unbelief is overpowered by divers arguments to press us to this trust. Well, then, run to your security. How so?

First, In defiance of all difficulty, own God as your hiding-place and shield. David when he was driven from his palace royal, and wandered up and down for his life, and when his enemies began to say, Now there is no help for him in God, Ps. 3:3; all Israel were against him. Many there be which say thus: his son drives him from his palace; now there is no safety, nor defence; but saith he, 'Lord, thou art my shield and my glory, and the lifter up of my head.' This is the way to get under the covert of his wing, when in the face of all difficulties we will own God as our hiding-place.

Secondly, Sue out your protection by earnest prayer. God hath given us promises as so many bonds upon himself, and we must put these bonds in suit. Our necessity leads us to the promises, and the promises lead us to the throne of grace: Ps. 141:9, 'I fly to thee; hide me, O Lord; keep me from the snare which they have laid for me.' Plead with him, and say, Lord, thou hast said thou wilt be my refuge and hiding-place; whither should a child go but to its father? and

whither should I go but to thee, for thou art my God? Challenge him upon his word. See how David expresseth himself: Ps. 17:7, 8, 'Show thy marvellous loving-kindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee. Keep me as the apple of thine eye: hide me under the shadow of thy wings.' Go challenge God upon his word: Lord, thou hast said thou wilt save those that trust in thee, those that depend upon thee. The eye is offended with the least dust, and nature hath provided a fence and covert for it. Thus may we go to God, and challenge such kind of protection: Keep me as the apple of thine eye, hide me under thy wings. As the dam is ready to flutter and spread her wings over the young brood when they fly to her, so will God.

Thirdly, Take notice whenever it is made good; give God his honour when he hath been a hiding-place and protection to you, that you may observe his providence: Ps. 18:30, 'As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.' Well, I have waited upon God according to these promises, and lo! it is come to pass as the Lord hath said. So Ps. 28:7, 'The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusteth in him, and I am helped;' Gen. 48:16, 'The angel of the covenant, which hath fed me all my days, and redeemed me from all evil.' He speaks of the faithfulness of God and of the mediator in all those promises of protection.

Fourthly, Constantly make use of God. You may think this discourse may be of no use to you, because you are out of fears and dangers: why, you are constantly to make use of God, be it well or ill, and to live upon God. All our comforts are from God, as well as our support in trouble. Certainly he that lives upon God in prosperity, will live upon him in adversity. Oh! when you are well at ease, and abound in all things, you take these things out of the hand of God; you will learn

better to make him your refuge. But he that lives upon the creature in his prosperity, when the creature fails he will be in utter distress, and know not what to do.

## **SERMON CXXVI**

# **Depart from me, ye evil-doers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.—**

## **VER. 115**

MOST of the passages of this psalm are directed to God himself; but now he speaks to carnal men, shaking them off, as Christ will at the last day. His speech is then, Mat. 7:22, 'Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity;' and so saith David, 'Depart from me, ye evil-doers.' Whether David speaks this for his own sake, or for others' instruction, as he doth many things in this psalm, I will not dispute. But certainly the drift of this verse is to show, that if we intend to walk constantly with God, we should keep at a distance from wicked men. Separation from them is necessary for a conjunction with God. If they be not God's, they should be none of yours, for you are his: 'Depart from me, ye evil-doers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.' Here—

1. Take notice of the persons to whom he speaks, ye evil-doers.
2. What is said; he renounceth all commerce with them, depart from me.

The reason of this renunciation, for I will keep the commandments of my God.

Where you may note—

[1.] The fixedness of his resolution, I will.

[2.] The matter resolved upon, I will keep the commandments, which they broke or made light of, and so their friendship and company

was a hindrance to him.

[3.] The inducing consideration, my God; he is the comfort and refuge of my soul, more than all men are to me. Friends are dear, but God should be dearer. None is ours so much as he is; he is my God, therefore it is him that I will please; my God's commands I will conform myself to.

All the business is to show on what grounds David bids the evil-doers depart from him.

1. It is either because of his confidence in God; as ver. 114, 'Thou art my hiding-place and my shield,' therefore depart. He did not fear their disturbance or persecution, because God would protect him, so as he should peaceably and cheerfully attend his service. This form of speech is so used, Ps. 6:8, 'Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity, for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping;' that is, Now I reckon not of your assaults and molestations; my God will carry me through his work. Or—

2. It is a renouncing of their aid and assistance offered upon ill terms; and so the meaning would be, that he would not stand by their interest, or cry up a confederacy with them, and admit of any other ways of Safety but what were fully consistent with his duty to God. Depart from me, as repelling their temptations and carnal counsel. Christ saith to Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan, when he came with carnal counsel; so David saith, Depart from me; you labour in vain to draw me to commit wickedness with you: I must keep in with my God, not with you: do his commandments, not follow your fancies. Or—

3. It is a renouncing of all society with them, lest he should be corrupted by their evil examples or their carnal suggestions and

enticements. He seems to speak this as fearing a snare and hindrance by their company and intimacy. This is the consideration that I prefer. The points may be two:—

1. That they which would have God for their God must keep his commandments.
2. They that would keep his commandments must avoid the company of the wicked.

Doct. 1. They that would have God for their God must keep his commandments.

This point I shall soon despatch, for it often comes in this psalm.

1. A covenant relation inferreth a covenant duty. You know the tenor of the covenant runs thus, 'I will be your God, and ye shall be my people,' Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 11:20; Zech. 13:9; and other places. Where observe this: the stipulation is mutual; there is something which God offers, and something which God requires. A covenant is not made up all of promises; there is a stipulation of obedience, as well as a promise of happiness; and both must concur: a keeping the commandments must be, as well as taking hold of the privileges of the covenant: Ps. 103:18, 'To such as keep his covenant, that remember his commandments to do them.' Both must concur.

But let us observe distinctly what God offers and what God requires.

[1.] What God offers: He offers himself to be our God; that is, to be a God to bless, and a God to govern and rule; and so the offer of God infers not only dependence upon him as he will be a God to bless, but subjection to him as he will be a God to rule and govern. Those that would have God's blessing must be under his dominion, for the



notion of our God implies a sovereign as well as a benefactor; he doth not leave us to our liberty to live as we list, for then he is not God nor supreme. Therefore it is but equal and reasonable he should rule and govern, and we obey.

[2.] But what he requires; that maketh it the more plain. You shall be my people; that noteth separation from all others, and a dedication to God's use, and a walking according to the tenor of that dedication: Deut. 29:9, 10, 'This day thou art become the people of the Lord thy God; therefore obey the voice of the Lord thy God, and keep his commandments, to love him, obey him, fear him, trust in him.' Well, then, as God offers himself to be a God to rule and govern us according to his will, so we, in giving up ourselves to be his people, resign ourselves up to his government.

2. In point of gratitude as well as covenant obligation. If God, the other contracting party, were our equal, as he is our superior, yet the kindness we receive from our God should move us to do him all the service we can. His kindness and grace in the covenant should make us fearful to offend: 'They shall fear the Lord and his goodness,' Hosea 3:5; and careful to please God: 'To walk worthy of God unto all well-pleasing,' Col. 3:10. And therefore love is said to keep the commandments: love, which is enkindled by a sense of God's love to us in the covenant of grace, will put us upon obeying and careful pleasing of God.

Use 1. Information, to show us how we should make sin odious to us, both by way of caution and humiliation; caution against the admission of sin, and humiliation because of the commission of it.

1. Caution. When thou art sinning, remember it is against thy God, who hath made thee, who hath kept thee, who hath bought thee, whom thou hast owned in covenant, who never showed any

backwardness to thy good. Is this thy kindness to thy friend, as he said, to sin against God, thy best friend? See, the covenant interest is produced to stir up indignation against the offences of others: Jude 4, 'They turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness.' There is very much in that, that the grace of our God should be abused. So Isa. 7:13, 'Is it nothing to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?' Wilt thou grieve the spirit of thy God, and violate his holy law? If we cannot endure an offence in another, much less in ourselves.

2. For humiliation. This should wound us to the quick, to sin against the Lord our God, Jer. 3:25. Every sin is a breach of covenant. What is simple fornication in others, is adultery in you, or breach of marriage vow: Luke 15, 'I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.'

Use 2. To press us to behave ourselves to God, as he is the Lord our God. Why?

1. Otherwise you do but mock him: Luke 6:46, 'Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?' Cui res nomini subjecta negatur, nomini illuditur, saith Tertullian—it is but a mockery of God to give him the title, and deny him the duty included in that title. As the soldiers which saluted Christ with, Hail, king of the Jews, yet at the same time spat in his face and buffeted him; so for us to say, My God: Mal. 1:6, 'If I be a lord, where is my fear? If I be a father, where is mine honour?'

2. Consider, God will not be mocked, but will avenge the quarrel of his covenant, Lev. 26:25. A people that profess God to be their God, all the judgments that shall come upon them, they come in pursuance of God's quarrel, because they give God the covenant title, and do not perform the covenant duty. There is hypocrisy in them, in that they call him Our God, and make a show to be his peculiar

people, and in the meantime do neither serve him, love him, nor obey him as our God. And there is plain treachery, in that we set up another god, the lust and sin which we would gratify with the displeasure of God; so that we are not a people for him according to the covenant.

3. This God will bear us out in our work: Dan. 3:17, 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us.' You may promise yourselves all that a God can do for you; therefore let this persuade you to do as David, firmly to resolve, and exactly to observe, all that he hath required of us. First, Firmly to resolve upon a strict course of obedience. I will, saith David in the text; I am resolved of it, whatever cometh on it, or whatsoever temptations I meet with to the contrary. Many are convinced of their evil courses, and that there is a necessity to leave them, but want resolution, therefore are inconstant in all their ways. Secondly, Exactly to observe; I will keep the commandments of my God. He that is our God, it is fit he should be obeyed in all things: Micah 6:8, 'Walk humbly with thy God.' You deny his sovereignty by interpretation, if you stick at any precept of his.

Doct. 2. They that would keep the commandments of God must avoid the company of the wicked.

1. I shall show how far the company of the wicked is to be avoided.

2. Why they that would keep the commandments of God are to do so.

First, How far the company of the wicked is to be avoided. On the one hand—

1. There is necessary civil converse allowed; for otherwise, as the apostle saith, we must needs go out of the world, 1 Cor. 5:10.

Necessary converse in buying, selling, trading, performing the duties of our relations, it is allowed.

2. We must not forsake the church because of some wicked men therein. In God's floor there is wheat and chaff. Saith Augustine, *Fugio paleam, ne hoc sim; non aream, ne nihil sim*—I fly from the chaff that I may not be it; but I may not, I do not fly from the floor, lest I be nothing. Christ maintained communion with the church wherein there were men corrupt in manners, and bids us to hear those that sit in Moses' chair, though they say and do not, Mat. 23:1, 2.

3. We are not hindered from endeavouring the good of their souls; whilst there is hope and opportunity to gain them, we may converse with them for their good. Thus Jesus Christ did converse with sinners to gain them: Luke 15:2, 'The Pharisees murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.' It is one thing to converse with sinners to harden them in their sins, another thing to converse with them to gain them to God; as physicians to heal the sick, not as their associates to delight in their company. So we may converse with them with all gentleness, remembering that we ourselves were sometime foolish, disobedient, deceived, &c. Thus we must not avoid them.

But yet we should avoid them so—

1. That we should not be familiar with them. Eschew all unnecessary voluntary fellowship and familiarity: Ps. 26:4, 'I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers.' We are not to choose them for our companions, lest we be corrupted and deadened by their example.

2. We are not to enter into a durable relation with them, such as will put us upon continual converse. When we are at liberty, 2 Cor. 6:15, 'Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.' Parents, upon any conveniences of estate or outward emoluments, are not to dispose of their children there where they may necessarily converse with wicked persons: Exod. 34:15, 'Thou shalt not take of their daughters to thy sons, lest they go a-whoring after their gods.' Instances there are many of the great mischief that hath come by entering into these durable relations with wicked men: Gen. 6:2, 'The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.' Men in the visible church are called the sons of God, they that were of the line of Seth; and they that were of the line of Cain are called the daughters of men: to go in to them, because they are fair, or they are noble, or because they are of our rank, this was the provoking sin that helped to bring the flood upon them. So Ps. 106:35, 'They were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.' Solomon gave an instance that he was corrupted by his wives. So it is said of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, 2 Kings 8:18, 'That he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab; for the daughter of Ahab was his wife, and he did evil in the sight of the Lord.' In ecclesiastical stories we read of Valence the emperor, who married with an Arian lady, and so was ensnared thereby, and became a cruel persecutor of the catholics; as the best metals, mixed with baser metals, are embased thereby.

3. If necessitated to keep company with them, because of our dwellings, relations, and business, let us not comply with them in their sins: Eph. 5:11, 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.' We may freely converse with such as we are bound to by the laws of necessity, but we must converse with them with a great deal of caution, that we may not be

ensnared. David had no great liking to his companions, yet he was forced to abide with them in the deserts: Ps. 120:5, 6, 'Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar; my soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace.' The apostle would have the wife to abide with the husband, 1 Cor. 7:12, and servants to abide with their masters, 1 Peter 2:18, and children with their parents, Eph. 6:1; but no tie of that kind doth bind us to partake with them in their sins. And being thus necessitated to their converse, we ought to have the more fear and caution. And thus Joseph lived in Egypt untainted, and Nehemiah in Ahasuerus's court, and Lot in Sodom, and Daniel in the court of Persia; necessity forced them thither, but all their care was to keep themselves unspotted from the world in the places where they lived.

Secondly, Why they that would keep the commandments of God are to do so.

1. Because it is hard to keep familiarity with them, and avoid and escape the contagion of their example. Example in general hath a great force, especially evil example; the force of example is great. Why? Seneca gives the reason. *Homines plus oculis credunt, quam auribus*, because an example strikes more upon the heart than a bare word. Man, being a sociable creature, is mightily encouraged to do as others do, especially in an evil example; for we are more susceptible of evil than we are of good. Sickness is sooner communicated than health; we easily catch a disease one of another, but those that are sound do not communicate health to the diseased. Or rather, to take God's own expression, that sets it forth thus, by touching the unclean the man became unclean under the law, but by touching the clean the man was not purified. The conversation of the wicked hath more power to corrupt the good, than the conversation of the virtuous and holy to correct the lewd. The prophet tells us, Isa. 6:5, 'I am a man of

unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.' We soon increase our pollution by living among them. Josephus relates that Agrippa at first was a lover of virtue and of his country, that he stood for the liberty of the people of the Jews; but by conversing with Caligula the Roman emperor, being intimate and familiar with him, learned his manners; and as he affected divine honours, so Agrippa too, and God smites him with lice, Acts 12. In infected places we get a disease, though we feel it not presently; so secretly our hearts are tainted by example. As a man that walks in the sun, unawares before he thinks of it his countenance is tanned, so our hearts are defiled: Prov. 22:24, 'Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go.' The furies of passion are so uncomely and so displeasing, that a man would think that he should not take infection there, that the sight should rather deter than invite him; but insensibly we learn their ways when we make friendship with furious and angry men; for saith Solomon, in the next verse, 'Lest you learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.' Melancthon saith, By converse familiarly with the wicked, insensibly we grow wicked. He that toucheth pitch is defiled, and a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, 1 Cor. 5:6.

2. They will molest and disturb us in the exercise of godliness by their scoffs and persecutions; you can never be acceptable to them if you live as you should. Why? For you will upbraid their consciences by your lives, dart conviction and reproofs into them; as Noah condemned the world, Heb. 11:7. Christ saith, The world hates me because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil, John 7:7. You that live up to your profession, and do not run into the same excess of riot with others, your estrangement of course revives guilt upon their conscience, and therefore not to follow them in all things will be distasteful. As sore eyes cannot endure the light, so they cannot endure you if you are faithful to God. Diversity of humours cannot

long agree together. You must either be like them, or be hated by them. You must either jump with them in all things, or expect a greater trouble. Now there is less danger in the flight than fight. Now a total with-drawment is better than a partial compliance.

3. They will seek to pervert us by carnal suggestions and counsels; as the Psalmist speaks, Ps. 7:1, 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.' Like troublesome flies, they will always be buzzing about us to take share and lot with them, and importunate suitors will prevail at length, Prov. 1:10–15, the enticings of the wicked are spoken of: 'My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not; walk thou not in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path,' &c.

4. Familiarity with them will be a blemish and scandal upon your good name. Every man's company declares what he is. Birds of a sort flock together. So that, if they rob not the conscience, they wound the reputation, and we are polluted and defiled by being of the same society, which a Christian should be tender of. When a scandalous sin breaketh out in the church, the blot lies upon all. The apostle tells us in Heb. 12:15, 'When any root of bitterness springs up, thereby many are defiled;' many are defiled, not only by the contagion of the example, but the imputation of the fault; much more in private and intimate familiarity doth this hold good. A carnal man delights in such as are like him, and run with him in the same folly and sin. But when a man is changed, he will change his company: Ps. 119:53, 'I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.' That is one thing David avoucheth for his innocency. One wicked man falls in with another, as the tenon doth into the mortise, and their spirits suit frequently: Ps. 50:18, 'When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers.' There is no such outward sign to discover our temper.



5. If we have any love for God, and zeal for his glory, their company must needs be grievous and offensive to us; for how can they that love God delight in their company that are always grieving the Spirit of God with unsavoury speeches and a vain conversation? Ps. 139:21, 'Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.' So 2 Peter 2:8, Lot's 'righteous soul was grieved from day to day.' It is not only said his righteous soul was vexed, which is passive, but he is said to vex himself at their wickedness, which is an active word. Injuries done to God should touch us no less nearly than injuries done to ourselves; it will be a continual grief and vexation of heart to us. Well, then, how can their company be acceptable to us, unless we have a mind to vex and bring trouble upon ourselves?

6. Our familiarity with them may be a means to harden them in their sin, and our withdrawing a means to humble them: 2 Thes. 3:6, 14, 'Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly: and if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.' While you company freely with them, you seem tacitly to approve their doing, and make them more obstinate in their way. An alien from the faith may be melted with kindness, but a brother that walketh disorderly is more ashamed if you withdraw from him, whereas otherwise you seem to show approbation. He that biddeth him God-speed is partaker of his evil deeds, 2 John 10, 11, as he seemeth to countenance them in their damnable errors; but now when a man lives as an outcast from God's people, this may work upon his heart. Society with God's children is not only a duty, but a privilege; by the loss of this privilege we are to make them sensible of the evil course wherein they are.

7. The great judgments that follow evil company; therefore we must not voluntarily cry up a confederacy with them: Rev. 18:4, 'Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.' In conversing with the wicked there is a double danger—infection of sin, and infliction of punishment: Prov. 13:20, 'A companion of fools shall be destroyed; not only fools, but their companions.' Lot, living among the wicked Sodomites, he suffered with them. You know, when Sodom was assaulted. Lot was taken prisoner, and his goods plundered as theirs were, Gen. 14:12. Jehoshaphat being associated with Ahab, was in danger of death, 1 Kings 22:37. The heathens were sensible that wicked men were marked out for vengeance. The Athenians would not wash in the same bath with the persecutors of Socrates; so Polycarp would not go into the same bath with Cerinthus, but said, The enemy of truth is here; let us depart hence, lest the bath fall down upon us.

Use 1. Reproof of their foolhardiness that rush upon evil company, and fear nothing. What! are your hearts so good that you think scorn that any company should hurt you? Consider, is sin grown less dangerous than it was? or are we come to such a height of perfection as to be above temptation to sin? Or have we so good a command of ourselves that we need not take such care of our company? that we shall do well enough though we play about the cockatrice's hole, and run into all companies and societies without fear? Good David here in the text is fain to proclaim, 'Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity,' and to banish them out of his company: and David exceeded us in holiness, and surely we live in more wicked clays than he did. See how it succeeded with Peter: he would venture into the high priest's hall, and sit with the company there, and how did it succeed with him? It brought him to a denial of Christ. Eve was bold with the serpent, and the Virgin Mary shamefaced with an angel, Luke 1:29, 30; and you know how it fell out both with the one and the

other: one was a means to ruin all mankind, and the other to repair it. What is the matter? Is not sin the same as it was? and is not human nature as bad as ever? What spells and charms have we about ourselves that the people of God had not heretofore? Or are we more fortified, and so are less watchful? Shall we be running still upon the pit's brink, and show how far we can go and not fall in? Are all those cautions out of date that bid us shun the occasions of sin? and is not evil company one of the chiefest of them? Yet some men can frolic it in all companies, revel and dance, run to plays, and no harm they think of all this. Solomon says, Prov. 4:14, 15, 'Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.' See how he heaps up words. Did he trifle and speak needlessly when with such earnestness he pressed this, that we would be careful of associating with wicked men? Surely no; and yet men are for all companies, as if there were no danger to their souls.

Use 2. Let us be persuaded to shake off the society of the wicked. Depart from them that depart from God, and would draw you along with them. But chiefly should we shun them, because bad company is the pest and bane of godliness. Under the law, a man that had a running issue, whoever touched him was unclean, Lev. 14:4. And so it is here; you are defiled by your conversing with them. Men of different humours, spirits, interests, how can they agree? Either you must abate somewhat of your zeal, or you can never suit if you enter into friendship with them. You cannot deal so plainly against their sins, or gainsay them in their evil practices, but will wax cold by little and little. If you be in defiance with them, that will make way for calumny and all manner of injuries; therefore it is better never to begin acquaintance with them. Consider, again, if none of this fall out, yet their company will be a loss to you; as it spendeth time and hindereth you of many opportunities of religious privacy and service

of God; so, if no other way you had a loss by them, they would not better you; for they are not company you expect to gain by. As he said, *Nunquam ad te accedo, quin doctior recedam, quin sanctior*—I never came to such an one but I went away more learned and holy. Certainly a Christian should choose such for his company that he might say, I go away more holy, otherwise his company would be a loss to us.

But to pursue this argument a little further. To give some observations, then some helps against evil company.

First, Some observations.

1. This concerns young ones especially, and those that are not in a radicating state of grace. Indeed, it concerns all. If you mean to keep close to God, you must divorce your heart from them; but chiefly young ones, that are either left to choose, or not confirmed in their choice, for the danger to them is greater than to others. Oh! how many young ones are undone by carnal company! Eusebius tells us of a young man that was bred up under St John, who by evil company was not only drawn to be a robber, but the prince and captain of robbers (*Euseb. lib.iii: c. 23*), until St John went out and met him. And Gregory the Great speaks of Gordiana, his own aunt, that was drawn off from the love of God, and the strictness of a holy life, after the death of her two sisters, Tharsylla and Æmiliana, by her companions. And St Augustine, *lib. viii. Confess, cap. 8*, *Quem fructum habui miser aliquando in iis quæ nunc recolligens erubesco, maxime in illo furto, in quo ipsum furtum amavi, nihil aliud; et ipsum esset nihil, et ego eo miserior, et tamen solus id non fecissem. Sic recordor animum tunc meum, solus omnino id non fecissem, ergo amavi consortium eorum cum quibus id feci*—O Lord, what cause have I to be ashamed when I remember these things, especially

the theft, where I loved the theft for the theft's sake! What was the gain but a few apples stolen? And yet, saith he, I had never done it if I had been alone; oh! it was the company of them that drew me to this theft. Then afterwards, It was my companions drew me to this. O nimis iniqua amicitia! seductio mentis investigabilis—O cruel friendship! when they said, Come, let us go and do it; I was ashamed not to be shameless, and as evil as they. When, then, in this waxen age, youth are above all to avoid the company of evil-doers.

2. We must not only take heed that we be not inured to evil, but also that we be not deadened to that which is good. Example may corrupt us either way. Neglect of God will keep us out of heaven, as well as profaneness. Now, alas! how easily are we leavened with deadness and formality by our company! Frequent society with dead-hearted formalists, or persons merely civil and moral, whose conference is empty, unsavoury, barren, may much divert our hearts from heaven, and do us a great deal of mischief. The apostle tells us, Heb. 10:24, we should 'consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.' Our dulness and backwardness is such that we need the most powerful helps.

3. Of all evil company, the company of seducers, those that cause divisions and offences in the church, and broach novel opinions, ought to be avoided: Rom. 16:17, 'Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them;' 2 John 10, 'If any man bring another doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed;' 1 Tim. 6:5, and men that are given to perverse disputings, 'from such withdraw thyself.' Error is more catching than vice, and more spreading. It is more catching, the face of it being represented with the loveliness of some pretence or other; whereas foul actions are found hateful and more contrary to natural conscience; and besides, it is more

spreading. Vice is like a duel; it killeth but one. Error is like a war that destroys many at once; therefore we should not be familiar with these. Erroneous apprehensions in religion carry a marvellous compliance with a man's natural thoughts.

4. It is not enough to avoid bad company, but we must choose that which is good. A man must have friends; the use of them in this life is very great. Man is a sociable creature, as Aristotle speaks; company and friendship we must have. Christ himself was not without his peculiar friends; there was Peter, James, and John, that were the flower of the apostles, that were conscious to his transfiguration and his agonies. We must have our friends and our society, so that the advantage of good company is very great: Prov. 13:20, 'He that walketh with wise men shall be wise;' their example will allure and excite to holy emulation, and their counsel and instruction will be a great help in the business of religion. Even Saul, being among the prophets, had his raptures, 1 Sam. 19:23. So living in the company of godly men, and seeing, hearing, and conferring with them of good things, leaveth some impression.

Secondly, Some helps and considerations.

1. Consider what is our chiefest good. This is principium universalissimum. The last end or chiefest good is the principle which doth influence all our actions. And certainly, if men fix their last end aright, it will have an influence upon all they do; our company, our business, our recreation, our holy duties. Well, now, consider what is your chiefest good and your last end. If pleasure were our chiefest good, and if we had nothing else to do but to pass away the time, and to get rid of melancholy, there would need no great care in the choice of our company. But enjoying the blessed

God, that is our last end and chiefest good: everything must be answerable to help you to heaven.

2. A sincere resolution to walk with God, to keep in with God firmly set; for here David saith, 'Depart from me, ye evil-doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God.' His resolution was set, therefore he shakes them off. When Ruth's resolution was set, Naomi left off persuading. When Paul's company saw his resolution, that he went hound in the spirit, they ceased, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done,' Acts 21:14. So this will fortify against all suggestion; they will be discouraged from haunting you more when you are resolved.

3. Our company will be a great part of our happiness in heaven: Heb. 12:22, 'We are come to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven;' and Mat. 8:11, 'They shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.' Company will be a great part of our happiness, and for the present it will be a great hindrance or a great furtherance; therefore, when we think of this, it will make us choose those with whom we shall converse to all eternity, that we may say, Now I shall change places, but not my company; I shall but go from saints to saints.

4. Bad company can yield you no comfort hereafter when trouble of conscience comes. When your heart begins to wound you, they cannot or will not help: Mat. 27:4, 'What is that to us? see thou to that.' If they draw you to inconvenience, when it comes upon you they will yield you no relief or comfort. Well, he that considers he is to die and give an account, will not displease God to please men.

## **SERMON CXXVII**

# **Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live; and let me not be ashamed of my hope.—VER. 116**

IN the former verse, David had bound himself by a firm resolution to keep the commandments of his God. Now presently he turneth to prayer, 'Lord, uphold me according to thy word, that I may live; and let me not be ashamed of my hope.' Our purposes and resolutions will not hold out without God's confirming grace. David, that would have the wicked depart from him there, would have God draw nigh to him here. Both are necessary if we would keep the commands. The company of the wicked, as a great impediment, must be removed: 'Depart from me, ye evil-doers;' and then the assistance of God must be entreated: 'Uphold me according unto thy word,' &c. Two things he begs of God in this verse:—

1. Confirmation in waiting.
2. The full and final accomplishment of his hope.

In the first request there is—

1. The blessing prayed for, confirmation or sustentation, uphold me.
2. The ground or warrant of asking, according unto thy word. Some translations have it, 'by thy word,' making it the instrument of his support.
3. To what end, that I might live.

In the second request an argument is intimated, that frustration or disappointment of his hope would bring shame.



I begin with the first, the blessing prayed for, sustentation and support, 'Uphold me.' David speaketh not this with respect to his outward man, as if God should keep him alive, maugre the rage of his enemies. Indeed, God doth uphold his creatures in that sense, by his outward providence and divine maintenance. But he speaketh this of his inward man, the support of the soul, that God would support him in a way of faith and comfort. In ver. 114, 'Thou art my hiding-place and my shield: I hope in thy word.' Now, Lord, that I might live, keep up the life of this hope. And ver. 115, 'I will keep the commandments of my God.' And now he desires God would support him in a way of courage and obedience. Hence observe—

Doct. Sustaining grace is necessary to the saints. Confirmation in a state of grace is as necessary to them as conversion to it.

There is a twofold grace which God gives—habitual and actual; either he works upon us per modum habitus, infusing grace, permanentis, or else per modum auxilii transientis.

First, There is habitual grace, called in scripture the new heart and new spirit, Ezek. 36:26; and by St John called σπέρμα αὐτοῦ, 1 John 3:9, the abiding seed; and by St Paul, 2 Cor. 5:17, καινὴ κτίσις, the new creature. All these expressions intend those fixed and permanent habits which are the principles of holy actions.

Secondly, There is actual grace, for the former is not enough to carry us through all duties, and to uphold us in all the varieties of this mortal condition. Why? Quia non totaliter sanat—habitual grace works not a total, but only a partial cure. Though there be the new creature wrought, though there be an abiding seed, yet there is something of sin, and something of the flesh still left in the soul. Therefore we want perpetual supplies of actual grace. Now this kind of grace serveth for divers uses.

1. To direct us in the exercise of grace formerly received. A ship already rigged needs a pilot; so, although God hath renewed the heart, yet there needs direction how to exercise and put forth that grace that we have received; therefore David, Ps. 119:5, 'Oh, that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes;' and 2 Thes. 3:5, 'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God,' &c. In the exercise of every grace we need new directions from God.

2. To excite and quicken the habits of grace. This is like blowing up the sparks of fire that are buried under the ashes. There needs continual excitation, which is often sought by the saints: 'Quicken me, O Lord, according to thy word.' And draw me, saith the spouse, Cant. 1:4.

3. This actual grace serves for this use, to strengthen them in the operation, and to facilitate the work. This is that which is expressed Ps. 119:32, 'When thou shalt enlarge my heart;' that when the inclination of the renewed heart to good things is powerfully set a-work, this is like filling the sails with a good wind, which carries on the ship merrily to its port and haven.

4. Use it to sustain, protect, and defend the grace that we have against the assaults and temptations and varieties and casualties of the present life. And this is that which is meant here, 'Uphold me, Lord, that I may live.' Now this use of God's actual assistance by way of sustentation and protection is necessary for us upon three grounds —(1.) Because of the natural changeableness of our spirits. (2.) Because of daily assaults from Satan. (3.) Because of the great impression which our temporal condition makes upon us.

[1.] Because of the natural changeableness of our spirits. Man of himself is an unstable creature. Take him at the best, he is but a creature, and to be a creature and to be mutable is all one. God found

no stability in the angels; they are creatures, and therefore they might sin. God only is impeccable; and why? Quia Deus est, because he is God. But all creatures may fail; angels fell, and Adam fell in innocency; and how can we hope to stand unless God uphold us? The best of God's children are often troubled with fits of unbelief and decays of love; their faith and love are not always at one stay and tenor, but sometimes more and sometimes less. David felt the waverings, and was afraid of himself; therefore saith to God, 'Uphold me, that I may live.' And so all that have any spiritual experience see that without continual grace they cannot live, and keep body and soul together. They find that often purposes and resolutions are upon them to those things that are good, but within a while their hearts sink again. Such is the inconstancy and uncertainty of their affections; now, they hope, anon they fear; now a great flush of affections, anon dead again; now humble, anon proud; now meek, anon passionate; now confident, then full of fears and anguish; like men sick of an ague, sometimes well and sometimes ill. What a Proteus would even a good man seem, if all his affections and passions were visible and liable to the notice of the world! None differ so much from them as they seem to differ from themselves. Sometimes they are like trees laden with fruit, at another time they are like trees in the winter, which, though they seem to have life in the root, yet to appearance they differ little from those that are stark dead. Nay, in those very particular graces for which they are eminent, how have they failed! Abraham, that was the father of the faithful, so eminent for faith, yet in Abimelech's country he discovered much carnal fear, Gen. 20. Moses, that was the meekest man upon earth, yet in what a froward passion was he when he struck the rock twice, Num. 20:10, 11, 'And he spake unadvisedly with his lips,' Ps. 106:33, which God took so heinously, that he only gave him a sight of Canaan, and would not permit him to enter. Peter is noted to have the greatest fervency and zeal of all the apostles (you

know he had so much courage that he ventures against a band of men that came to attack Christ), and yet how was he surprised with cowardice and sinful fear at a damsel's question! And therefore we need this sustaining grace, and to go to God: 'Lord, uphold me.' The wards of the lock are held up only while the key is turned, so God must uphold us or we fall. Or let me express it thus: As meteors are kept up in the air while the sun stays, that which first drew them up must keep them up, or else they fall to the ground; so we sink presently when this sustaining grace is withdrawn. Or as Moses, when he was but a while in the mount with God, how soon the people fell to idolatry! So if God be but away we shall be found as unstable as water.

[2.] Because of the daily assaults of Satan. When a poor soul is gotten out of his hands, he pursues him with continual malice, 1 Peter 5:8; no less doth he aim at than the utter destruction of our souls, and wrestles to recover the prey, to plunge us in that estate of misery wherein himself lies; therefore we must be defended and protected every day. When cities are besieged, they are not left to their ordinary strength and standing provision, but fresh supplies of men and ammunition are sent to their relief; so God deals with us. As we are unstable creatures, we need the continual assistance of God, for all depends on him, in esse, conservare, and operari. But here is another consideration to help to uphold us under assault. When the disciples were tossed to and fro, and shaken with sundry temptations, then Christ prays that their faith may not fail, begs further assistance, Luke 20:31; so when Paul was buffeted by Satan, God makes him a promise of additional grace: 2 Cor. 12:9, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' We need further help from God, that we may stand against his batteries and assaults.

[3.] Because of the great impression which our temporal condition makes upon us. We are now happy, anon afflicted. Now, as unequal uncertain weather doth afflict the body, so do our various conditions distemper the soul. To abound and to be abased, to be up and to be down, to carry an equal hand in unequal conditions, is very hard, and will call for the supporting strength of God's Spirit. So the apostle, Phil. 4:12, 13, 'I know how to be abased, and how to abound; every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need: I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.' From that place let me observe something.

(1.) That we are subject to change of conditions in outward things; sometimes in credit, sometimes in disgrace; sometimes rich, sometimes poor; cut short by the providence of God; sometimes sick, sometimes in health; sometimes enjoy all things comfortably, at other times reduced to great necessity. Now it is very hard to go through all these conditions, not to be dejected on the one side or puffed up on the other.

(2.) Observe again from that place, either of these conditions have their snares, so that we need all the grace that possibly we can get to avoid them. Some think that snares and temptations lie but on one side, namely, they think it is easy to be rich, and to maintain hope and comfort in God then; but it is hard to be poor, and to be destitute of all things. When they have nothing to live upon, they cannot see how they should live by faith, or keep from murmurings, repinings, or uncomely dejections and sinkings of heart. On the other side, some think it easy to be poor and religious; but how to keep a good conscience in a full estate, where there is so much to draw them from God, to keep down pride and security, and to live under a lively sense

of the comforts of the other world, to do this in the midst of opulency, this is hard. There are indeed temptations on both hands.

(3.) Observe, again, some that have held well in one condition have failed in another. One sort of temptations have a greater force upon some spirits than others have. When God hath kept men low, they have been modest and humble; but when they have been exalted, then they have showed themselves, their pride, their disdain, their forgetfulness of God, their mindlessness of the interest of Christ. On the other hand, others have carried it well in prosperity, yet when the bleak winds of adversity are let loose upon them, they are withered and dried up. Some cannot encounter terrors, others blandishments. As the prophet saith of Ephraim, he is a cake not turned, that is, baked only of the one side, very dough on the other; so it is with many men; on one side of providence they seem to do well, but when God puts them in another condition they have foully miscarried. 1 Kings 13. the young prophet that could thunder out judgment against the king, when the old prophet enticed him, he is gone.

(4.) Nay, and which is more, to have these conditions to succeed one another makes the temptation the greater. To be cast down, after that we have got on the top of the wheel, and have tasted of the world's happiness, is the greater trial. And so on the other side, to be lifted up after extreme misery; sudden changes affect us more. Now, to possess things without love, or lose them without grief; to be temperate and sober in the enjoyment of worldly happiness, or to be meek and patient in the loss of it; or to exercise a Christian moderation as to all these dispensations; it is a very hard thing to keep the heart steady and right with God; and therefore we need the influence of God's special grace, as the apostle presently adds, 'I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me.'

Use. To press us to look after this upholding and sustaining grace, that as we come to God, so we may keep with God. In some cases perseverance is more difficult than conversion; it is a harder thing to persevere than to be converted at first. In the first conversion we are mainly passive, if not altogether, but in perseverance active. It is God that plants us into Christ, but when we are in Christ we ought to walk in him. As an infant in the mother's womb before it is born lives by the life of the mother, and is fed and grows by the mother's feeding, without any concurrence of its own; but when born, indeed it is suckled by the mother still, but the child sucks itself, and applies nourishment to itself; and the more it grows, the more the care of its life is devolved upon itself; so the first conversion is chiefly God's work, and when converted we cannot persevere without his help, but the care of the spiritual life is more devolved upon us than before. God doth give perseverance as well as conversion: 2 Peter 1:5, 'We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation;' but so that more is required to be done by us when converted than in conversion itself. Eph. 2:10, the apostle tells us that we 'are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works;' there is an action required of us. What is conversion? A consent to the terms of the gospel covenant, that is the great act of conversion on our part. But now perseverance is the fulfilling of the duty of this covenant. Now it is more easy to consent to the terms than to make them good. As in the matrimonial contract, the promise of the duties proper to that relation is more easy than the performance; so the consenting to God's covenant, all the business is to make it good, because of our unstable nature, manifold temptations, and great discouragements in the way of holiness. Certainly, to keep in the life of grace in the soul is a very hard thing. The Israelites, after they were brought to consent to receive Moses for their captain to lead them to Canaan, yet when they came out of Egypt, and had trial of the difficulties of the way, and were exposed to so many dangers, they were ever and

anon desiring to return. So it is with us; it is hard to hold out against all assaults; many things will be interposing, and breaking your resolutions, and taking you off from God. The flesh will be interposing, so that you must often say, as Rom. 5:12, 'We are not debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh,' to fulfil it in the lusts whereof. And the world will be threatening, and you must say as they, Dan. 3:16; 'We are not careful to answer thee in this matter.' Dangers will grow upon us and increase, and then we must say, as Esth. 4:16, 'If we perish, we perish.' Friends will be soliciting, and you must say, as Paul, Acts 21:13, 'What mean you to break my heart? I am ready to die for Christ;' or as Christ said to his mother, John 2:4, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee?' 'Must I not be about my Father's business?' Seducers will be persuading, and we must be ready to say, as Acts 4:19, 'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.' Nay, God himself will seem to discourage us, and to be against us; and you must even say to God, as Job 13:15, 'Though thou slay me, yet will I put my trust in thee.' To keep up this life in this vigour of faith and this courage of obedience in the midst of all these interposings, is a very difficult, hard work. What then? Therefore go to God: 'Lord, uphold me, that I may live.'

1. Ask it of God earnestly, because of your necessities. Secondly, In faith, because of his all-sufficiency. First, earnestly, because of your necessities. Without God's upholding a man, he hath within himself no power to withstand any the least temptation or occasion unto sin. There is no evil so foul, nor sin so grievous, but there is a possibility that we may fall into it. Ps. 19:13, David saith, 'Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins.' Mark the expression, 'keep back;' it implies that he felt an inclination and readiness in his heart, and therefore desires God to hold the bridle of grace the more hard upon him: Lord, keep back thy servant. When Satan disguiseth a gross sin with



a plausible and tempting appearance, and when he bribes the flesh with some pleasure or advantage, oh! how soon is lust set agog and the heart overborne by the violence of its own affections! and how soon do we faint and are discouraged when we are exercised variously with divers assaults on this hand and that! Secondly, In faith, because of God's all-sufficiency: 1 Peter 5:10, 'The God of all grace make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you.' Observe the title that he gives to God, 'The God of all grace;' it notes that he hath good store, and hath a gracious inclination to give it. And then he reckons up the several kinds of graces. What would you have? Would you keep that which you have already attained to? The Lord establish you. Would you increase what you have? The Lord perfect you. Would you act what you have with life and vigour, and grow more resolute? The Lord strengthen you. Would you grow more resolute against difficulty? The Lord settle you. So the apostle, 2 Thes. 2:17, 'The God of all grace comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work.' There is an all-sufficiency in God to help you, and carry you through all trials and all your difficulties. Therefore ask it of God.

2. Do not forfeit this assisting grace by presumptuous sins. God withdraws his protection and defence when we provoke him: Isa. 52:2, 'Your sins have separated between you and your God, and made him hide his face from you;' and Hosea 5:15, 'Now I will go to my own place,' I will leave them to themselves, 'till they acknowledge their iniquity.' David prays for this after he had fallen foully: Ps. 51:12, 'Lord, uphold me with thy free Spirit.' He had lost his strength in God, his largeness of love; he wanted the assistances of God's grace; he had been tampering with forbidden fruit: Lord, come again; 'Lord, uphold me with thy free Spirit.'

3. Do not expose yourselves to temptation, for you are weak and cannot stand without confirming grace, which is not at your beck, not given out according to your pleasure, but he giveth us 'to will and to do,' κατὰ εὐδοκίαν, 'according to his good pleasure,' Phil. 2:12. Christians! when we will try mysteries, and run into the mouth of danger, and be dealing with them that are apt to seduce us into evil, God will no more show the power of his grace than Christ would show a miracle to satisfy Herod's curiosity and wanton fancy. Oh! therefore, let us not unnecessarily and unwarrantably throw ourselves upon the enticements of sin. For instance, as if no evil company could infect, or no carnal sports corrupt, or ambitious affectation of high places, when God doth not call us up by the voice of his providence; this doth but increase our temptation. When we will be rushing into places of danger, as Peter into the high priest's hall, we go thither without our defence. A man that is sensible what will do his body hurt is very cautious how he meddleth with it. The like care should we have of our souls.

The second thing in the text is the ground and warrant of his request, 'According to thy word;' or by thy word, as some read it. God hath promised support to those that wait upon him: Isa. 40:29, 31, 'He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.' Before their full and final deliverance come, they shall have present support and strength renewed to them every day. This note should quicken us:—

1. To pray to God for grace to stand with the more confidence. God hath promised to uphold those that cleave to him, and run to him; therefore say, Lord, thy word bids me to hope; though I am an unstable creature, I will hope in thy word: Ps. 31:24, 'Be of good

courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.' Though nothing else be stable, yet this is stable.

2. Bless God and own his grace; look upon it as a fulfilling of his promise, if you have sustentation, or any strength renewed upon you, though your trials and temptations are yet continued to you: Ps. 138:3, 'In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.' It is an answer of prayer, fulfilling of a promise, when we have strength to persevere without fainting; though we be not delivered, to have support before the deliverance come. I thank God, saith St Paul, for the sustentation I have. Great sustentation I have, though spiritual suavities I taste not many. It is matter of thanksgiving and comfort if we have but sustentation, and keep up the life of grace in the soul, though we taste not Christ's banquets and dainties.

The third circumstance is the end, 'That I may live.' David speaks not this of bodily life, not the life of nature, but the life of grace. And then the note is this—

Doct. The children of God do not count themselves to live, unless their spiritual life be kept in good plight.

David, that enjoyed the pleasure and honour of the regal state, he doth not count that to live, though he were king in Israel, of an opulent and flourishing kingdom, and had mighty successes and victories over the people round about him, but when his heart was upheld in the ways of God. So Col. 3:3, 'Your life is hid with Christ in God.' They had a life visible, as other men had; but your life, that which you chiefly esteem, and indeed count to be your life, is a hidden thing.

Here I shall inquire—(1.) What is this spiritual life. (2.) Show that there is a spiritual life distinct from the natural. (3.) The excellency of the one above the other. (4.) When this spiritual life is in good plight.

1. What is meant by spiritual life? It is threefold—a life of justification and sanctification and glorification.

[1.] The life of justification. We are all dead by the merit of sin. When a man is cast at law, we say he is a dead man: 'Through one man's offence all were dead,' Rom. 5:5. We are sensible of it when the law cometh in with power, Rom. 7:9; we begin to awaken out of our dead sleep. God's first work is to awaken him and open his eyes, that he may see he is a child of wrath, a condemned person, undone, without a pardon. When the law came, 'sin revived and I died;' before he thought himself a living man, in as good an estate as the best; but when he was enlightened to see the true meaning of the law, he found himself no better than a dead man. Now, when justified, the sinner is translated from a sentence of death to a sentence of life passed in his favour; and therefore it is called justification of life, Rom. 5:18, and John 5:29, 'He that believeth shall not enter into condemnation, but hath passed from death to life;' that is, is acquitted from the sentence of death and condemnation passed on him by the law.

[2.] The life of sanctification, which lies in a conjunction of the soul with the spirit of God, even as the natural life is a conjunction of the body with the soul. Adam, though his body was organised and formed, was but a dead lump till God breathed the soul into him; so till our union with Christ, by the communion of his Spirit, we are dead and unable to every good work. But the Holy Ghost puts us into a living condition: Eph. 2:4, 5, 'We were dead in trespasses and sins,

yet now hath he quickened us.' There is a new manner of being, which we have upon the receiving of grace.

[3.] Life eternal, or the life of glory, which is the final result and consummation of both the former; for justification and sanctification are but the beginnings of our happy estate; justification is the cause and foundation, and sanctification is an introduction or entrance into that life that we shall ever live with God.

2. Now this life is distinct from life natural, first, for it hath a distinct principle, which is the Spirit of God; the other a reasonable soul: 1 Cor. 15:45, 'The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.' Parents are but instruments of God's providence to unite body and soul together: but here we live by the Spirit or by Christ, Gal. 2:20; God and we are united together. Then we live when joined to God as the fountain of life, whence the soul is quickened by the Spirit of grace. This is to live indeed. It is called the life of God, Eph. 4:18, not by common influence of his providence, but by special influences of his grace. Secondly, It is distinct in its operations, *Unumquodque operatur secundum suam formam*, as things that move upward and downward according to their form; so the new nature carrieth men out to their own natural motion and tendency. Walking as men, 1 Cor. 3:3, and walking as Christians, are two distinct things. The natural and human life is nothing else but the orderly use of sense and reason; but the divine and spiritual life is the acting of grace in order to communion with God, as if another soul dwelt in the same body: *Ego non sum ego*. Old lusts, old acquaintance, old temptations, knock at the same door, but there is another inhabitant. Thirdly, Distinct in supports. Hidden manna, meat indeed, drink indeed, John 6:55. There is an outward man and an inward man; the inward man hath its life as well as the outward. And as life, so taste: *Omnis vita gustu ducitur*. The hidden

man must be fed with hidden manna, meat and drink that the world knows not of; its comforts are never higher than in decays of the body, 2 Cor. 4:16. A man is as his delight and pleasure is; it must have something agreeable. Fourthly, Distinct in ends. The aim and tendency of the new nature is to God; it is from God, and therefore to him, Gal. 2:19. It is a life whereby a man is enabled to move and act towards God as his utmost end, to glorify him, or to enjoy him. A carnal man's personal contentment is his highest aim: water riseth not beyond its fountain. But a gracious man doth all to please God, Col. 1:11, to glorify God, 1 Cor. 10:31; and this not only from his obligations, Rom. 14:7, 8, but from his being, that principle of life that is within him, Eph. 1:12. A man that hath a new principle cannot live without God; his great purpose and desire is to enjoy more of him.

3. The excellency of the one above the other. There is life carnal, life natural, and life spiritual. Life carnal, as much as it glittereth and maketh a noise in the world, it is but a death in comparison of the life of grace: 1 Tim. 5:6, 'She that liveth in pleasure is dead whilst she liveth;' and 'Let the dead bury their dead,' Luke 9:60; and dead in trespasses and sins. None seem to make so much of their lives as they, yet dead as to any true life and sincere comfort. So life natural, it is but a vapour, a wind, and a little puff of wind, that is soon gone. Take it in the best, nature is but a continued sickness, our food is a constant medicine to remedy the decays of nature: most men use it so, *alimenta sunt medicamenta*. But more particularly—(1.) Life natural is a common thing to devils, reprobates, beasts, worms, trees, and plants; but this is the peculiar privilege of the children of God, 1 John 4:13. Therefore God's children think they have no life unless they have this life. If we think we have a life because we see and hear, so do the worms and smallest flies. If we think we are alive because we eat, drink, and sleep, so do the beasts and cattle. If we think we

live because we reason and confer, so do the heathens and men that shall never see God. If we think we have life because we grow well and wax strong, proceeding to old age, so do the plants and trees of the field. Nay, we have not only this in common with them, but in this kind of life other creatures excel man. The trees excel us for growth in bulk and stature, who from little plants grow up into most excellent cedars. In hearing, smelling, seeing, many of the beasts go before us; eagles in sight, dogs in scent, &c. Sense is their perfection. Some see better, others hear better, others smell better; all have a better appetite to their meat, and more strong to digest it. For life rational, endowed with reason, many philosophers and ethnics excel Christians in the use of reason. Our excellency then lieth not in the vegetative life, wherein plants excel thee; nor in sensitive, which beasts have better than thou; nor in the reasonable, which many reprobates have, which shall never see the face of God; but in life spiritual, to have the soul quickened by the spirit of grace. (2.) Life natural is short and uncertain, but this eternal grace is an immortal flame, a spark that cannot be quenched. All our labour and toil is to maintain a lamp that soon goeth out, or to prop up a tabernacle that is always falling; when we have made provision for it, taken away this night, &c.; it is in the power of every ruffian and assassin: but this is a life that beginneth in grace and endeth in glory. (3.) The outward life is short, but yet we soon grow weary of it; but this is a life that we shall never be weary of. 1 Kings 19:4, Elijah requested for himself that he might die. The shortest life is long enough to be encumbered with a thousand miseries. If you live to old age, age is a burthen to itself: 'Days come in which there is no pleasure,' Eccles. 12:1; but you will never wish for an end of this life. (4.) In the preparations and costs which God hath been at to bring about this life at first. Without any difficulty God breathed into man the breath of life, Gen. 2:7; but to procure this life of grace, God must become man, and set up a new fountain of life in our natures, John 10:20. And not only so, but to

die: John 6:51, 'My flesh which I give for the life of the world.' Consider the price paid for it. God would not bestow it at a cheaper rate than the death of his only Son. (5.) In the provisions of it: Isa. 57:10, 'the life of thy hands.' With a great deal of toil and labour we get a few supports for it; but this is fed with the blood of Christ, influences of grace, and comforts from the Spirit; not with gross things, but sublime, high, noble. (6.) In the use for which it serveth. It fitteth us for communion with God, as the other fits us for communion with men. Things can have no communion with one another that do not live the life of one another. We dwell in God, and God dwelleth in us. (7.) Its necessities are greater, which show the value of the life. The higher the life, the more dependence. Things inanimate, as stones, need not such supplies as things that have life. Where plants will not grow, they must have a kindly soil. Among plants the vine needs more dressing and care than the bramble; beasts more than plants; their food appointed God hath most left to man's care, as the instrument of his providence; man more than beasts, saints more than men, much waiting upon God. No creature so dependent, in need of such daily supplies, as the inward man. (8.) Its sense is greater. There is a greater sensibleness in this life than in any other life. All life hath a sweetness in it. As any life exceedeth another, so more sensibleness; a beast is more sensible of wrong and hurt than a plant. As the life of a man exceedeth the life of a beast, so more capable of joy and grief. As the life of grace exceedeth the life of a man, so its joy is greater, its grief is greater, trouble of conscience, a wounded spirit. So the joy of saints is unspeakable and glorious, peace that passeth all understanding.

4. When is this life in good plight? It showeth itself in these two effects—(1.) A comfortable sense of God's love. (2.) A holy disposition to serve and please God. The vitality of it lieth in these two graces—faith and love; when they are kept up in their height and vigour, then



it is a life begun. It lieth in the height of faith, apprehending and applying God's love to the soul: I live by faith; and the height of love swaying and inclining the heart to obedience, 2 Cor. 5:14. Therefore they desire God to uphold them, that they might be kept in heart and comfort, and in a free inclination to serve him. Now when they find any abatement of faith, so that they cannot rejoice in the promises as they were wont to do, they count themselves dead; or when their inward man doth not delight itself in the law of God, but they are dull and slow to good things, they look upon themselves as dead. But on the other side, when they find the vigour of this life in them, they are merry and glad; when they feel their wonted delight in prayer and holy exercises, this is that they mainly prize. That which is not seen and felt is as if it were not to their comfort, not to their safety.

Use. To exhort us all to look after this life, and when you have got it, to be very chary of it. First, look after this life. You that are alienated from the life of God through ignorance and hardness of heart, be invited to come to him; it is for life: Job 2:4, 'Skin for skin, and all a man hath, will he give for his life.' We all desire life; vile things that live excel more precious than are dead: 'A living dog is better than a dead lion,' Eccles. 9:4. A dog was an unclean beast, and of all creatures a lion is the most noble and generous. A worm is more capable of life than the sun. Now, if life natural be so sweet, what is life spiritual? No such life as this; it fits us for communion with God and blessed spirits. Christ chideth them, 'You will not come to me that you might have life.' Better you had never lived, if you live not this life of grace. When beasts die their misery dieth with them, but yours beginneth. Secondly, If you have this life begun, be chary of it. If the bodily life be but a little annoyed we complain presently; but why are you so stupid and careless, and do not look after this, to keep the spiritual life in good plight? Let your prayers and desires be to have this life strengthened; make this your prayer, to be

strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man. A Christian maketh this to be his main comfort and his main care. Oh! how busy are we to provide for the outward man, that we may be well fed, well clothed! Most men's care is for back and belly. Oh! be more careful for the inner man; let that be refreshed with the blood of Christ and the comforts of the Spirit. Be careful for the soul, that you may keep up a lively faith, and a constant sense of blessedness to come, and so rejoice in God. Oh! how much time and pains do men waste in decking and trimming the body, when in the meantime they neglect their souls! We may all fall a-weeping when we consider how little we look after this inner life, to keep that in heart and vigour.

## SERMON CXXVIII

**And let me not be ashamed of my hope.  
Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe; and  
I will have respect unto thy statutes  
continually.—VER. 116, 117**

IN the former verse I observed David begs two things—confirmation in waiting, and the full and final accomplishment of his hopes.

Something remains upon the 116th verse, 'Let me not be ashamed of my hope.' Hope follows faith, and nourisheth it. Faith assures there is a promise; hope looks out for the accomplishment of it. Now David, having fixed his hope upon the mercies of God, begs, 'Let me not be ashamed;' that is, that hope may not be disappointed, for hope disappointed brings shame. Man is conscious of the folly and rashness in conceiving such a hope: Job 6:20, 'They were confounded, because they had hoped; they came thither, and were

ashamed.' They looked for water from the brooks of Tema, but when they were dried up they were confounded and ashamed. That breeds shame when we are frustrated in our expectations. There is a hope that will leave us ashamed, and there is another hope that will not leave us ashamed; for David goes to God, and desires him to accomplish his hope. There is a Christian hope that is founded upon the mercies and promises of God, and encouraged by experience of God, that will never deceive us. I shall speak of that hope that will bring shame and confusion; and that is twofold—worldly hope and carnal security.

1. Worldly hopes, such as are built upon worldly men and worldly things. Upon worldly men, they are mutable, and so may deceive us; sometimes their minds may change, the favour of man is a deceitful thing. As Cardinal Wolsey said in his distress, If I had served God as diligently as I have done the king, he would not have given me over in my grey hairs; but it is a just reward for my study to do him service, not regarding the service of God to do him pleasure: 'Let God be true, and every man a liar.' A man makes way for shame that humours the lusts of others and wrongs his conscience; and first or last, they will find it is better to put confidence in God than the greatest potentates in the world, Ps. 118:8; and therefore it should be our chief care to apply ourselves to God, and study his pleasure, rather than to please men, and conform ourselves to their uncertain minds and interests. To attend God daily, and be at his beck, is a stable happiness; the other is a poor thing to build upon. Men's affections are mutable, and so is their condition too: Ps. 62:9, 'Surely men of high degree are a lie, and men of low degree are vanity.' Whoever trusts in men, high or low, are sure to be deceived in their expectations. And therefore we should think of it beforehand, lest we be left in the dirt when we think they should bear us out: 1 Kings 1:21, 'When my Lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, I and my

son Solomon shall be counted offenders. When the scene is shifted, and new actors come upon the stage, none so liable to be hated as those that promised to themselves a perpetual happiness by the favour of men. This is a hope that will leave us ashamed. And then worldly things, they that hope in these for their happiness will be ashamed. There are two remarkable seasons when this hope leaves us ashamed—in the time of distress of conscience, and in the day of death. In time of distress of conscience: Ps. 39:11, 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth.' When sin finds us out, and conscience goes to work upon the sense of its own guilt, oh! then what will all the plenty of worldly comforts do us good! The creatures then have spent their allowance, and can help us no more. What good will an estate do? And all the pomp and bravery of the world will be of no more use to us than a rich shoe to a gouty foot: Prov. 18:14, 'A wounded spirit who can bear?' But now he that hath chosen God for his portion, in all distress and calamities can revive his hopes. So also in the hour of death: Job 27:8, 'What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God shall take away his soul?' When God puts the bond in suit, though man hath gained, where is his hope, when God delivers him over to the executioner, to chains of darkness?

2. Carnal security will leave us ashamed. Men living in their sins hope they shall do well enough, and expect mercy to bear all and pardon all; though they be not so strict and nice as others, yet they shall do as well as they. This hope is compared to a spider's web, Job 8:12, a poor slight thing, that is gone with the blast of every temptation; when the besom comes, both spider and web are swept away. And it is said, Job 11:20, 'The hope of the wicked is like the giving up of the ghost;' and these in a moment take an everlasting farewell of their hopes. So their hopes fail in the greatest extremity.

This carnal and secure hope in God, presumption of his mercy, it is but a waking dream, as a dream fills men with vain delusions and phantasms. It is notably set out by the prophet, Isa. 29:8, 'They shall even be as when a hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty.' There will an awakening time come, and then the dream of a hungry man torments him more. Carnal men are like dreamers, that lose all as soon as they awake; though they dream of enjoying sceptres and crowns, yet they are in the midst of bonds and irons. Vain illusions do they please themselves with, that make way for eternal sorrow and shame.

Let us see how this false hope of the wicked differs from the true hope of God's children.

1. This hope is not indeed built upon God, God hath the name, but indeed they trust upon other things; as those women the prophet speaks of, Isa. 4:1, 'We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach.' So they call their hope after God's name, but their hearts are borne up with other things, as appears; because when outward things fail they are at a loss, and begin to awake out of their dream, especially in a distressed case when it pincheth hard.

2. It is not a serious and advised trust, but a slight and superficial hope, that grows upon us we know not how, a fruit of ignorance and incogitancy; when they are serious they begin to feel it a foolish kind of presumption, upon which no account can be given, 1 Peter 3:15. How can they give a reason of their hope? But gracious souls, the more they consider their warrant and the promise of God, the more their hope is increased.

3. It is a dead and a cold hope, not a lively hope, 1 Peter 1:3. They have no taste, no groans, no ravishing thoughts about the happiness

which they expect, no strong desires after the thing hoped for: Rom. 12:12, 'Rejoice in hope,' saith the apostle; they have but cold apprehensions of such great things. And the hope that we expect is so excellent, that it should stir up the greatest longings, the greatest waiting, and put us upon earnest expectation.

4. It is a weak inconstant hope, a loose fond conjecture, a guess rather than a certain expectation: 1 Cor. 9:26, 'I therefore so run, not as uncertainly, not at random, but upon sure and solid grounds. A child of God hath a due sense of the difficulty, yet withal an assurance of the possibility and of the certainty of it; and therefore it continues; he presseth on, if it be possible he may attain to his great hopes, the resurrection of the dead.

5. It is a lazy loitering hope. Carnal men would have heaven and happiness, but they make no haste towards it, they give no diligence to make sure of it; it is but a devout sloth. Whereas he that hath a true hope is pressing forward, Phil. 3:13, and hastening and looking for the coming of Christ, 2 Peter 3:12.

But then there is a true hope in God, both for final deliverance, present support, and present mercy, that will never leave us ashamed: Ps. 22:5, 'They that hope in thee are not confounded;' and Ps. 25:2, 3, 'Let none that wait on thee be ashamed: O my God, I trust in thee, let me not be ashamed.' What is a true Christian hope? It may be discovered by the grounds of discouragement, but most sensibly by the effects.

1. By it the heart is drawn from earth to heaven, earthly desires and hopes abated: Phil. 3:20, 'For our conversation is in heaven, whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.' They live as those that within a few days expect to be with God. Christ in heaven hath a magnetic virtue to draw up the hearts of believers thither; as a

man that hath looked steadfastly upon the sun can for a great while see nothing else.

2. By it the heart is enlivened in duty, and quickened with diligence in the business of salvation. Hope apprehends the difficulty, as well as the excellency and possibility, of salvation; therefore what a man truly hopes for in this kind he makes it his business to get it, and look after it: Phil. 3:13, 'This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before.' They mind it seriously, and not superficially, by the by.

3. It engageth the heart against sin, 2 Peter 3:11. We that look for these things, 'What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness.' Holiness implies purity, and godliness dedication to God. Now a false hope is consistent with the reign of sin, suffers a man to be vile, carnal, careless, neglectful of God, full of malice, envy, pride, but without any serious and solid ground; it is but a lying presumption. Now, this hope that is thus fixed upon God will never disappoint us. For—

[1.] The fruition will ever be more than the expectation. God doth for us above what we can ask or think, Eph 3:20. When the prodigal son came and said, 'Make me as an hired servant,' the father brought forth the fatted calf, and put a ring on his finger, &c. Solomon asked wisdom, and God gave him riches, honour, and great abundance. But much more in the world to come will the fruition be above expectation; for prophecy is but in part; we are not now capable to know what we shall then enjoy; we have but childish thoughts of things to come, as a child comes short of the apprehensions of a man, 1 Cor. 13:9–11.

[2.] This hope cannot be abated with the greatest evil. To a worldly man death is the king of terrors, and to a godly man it is his last end;

though it vanquish his body, it doth not vanquish his soul: Prov. 14:32, 'The wicked is driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous hath hope in his death.' When other men's hopes vanish, his hopes go down with him to the grave, Ps. 16:9; as in a bed of ease they shall sleep until the waking time.

Use. Oh! be not deceived with false promises. We must expect blessing according to the tenor of the covenant; only things promised, and no otherwise than they are promised; temporal things, with a limitation, as good for us, and with the exception of the cross; spiritual blessings, their essence, rather than degree of grace. And take heed of false hope that is, groundless and fruitless. Groundless; the warrant of true hope is the word of God: 'I hope in thy word,' Ps. 130:5. Hope that is without a warrant will be without effect. When men please themselves, they shall do well enough, contrary to the word of God, Deut. 29:19. And it is fruitless; it doth not fill the heart with gladness, and quicken to holiness, and stir up to walk with God. And take heed of false experiences; that is, building upon temporal blessings, and bare deliverances out of trouble. Men are not so much preserved as reserved to further trouble: many are spared but for a time, it is but a reprieve.

I proceed to the 117th verse, 'Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.' Here observe—(1.) A repetition of his request for sustaining grace. (2.) A renewing of the promise of obedience conceived before, ver. 115.

1. A repetition of his request for sustaining grace, 'Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.' Where observe the request, hold thou me up: and the fruit and effect promised to himself, I shall be safe.

First, The blessing asked, 'Hold thou me up;' a metaphor taken from those that faint, or those that slide and are ready to fall. Secondly,



The fruit of it, 'I shall be safe.' Before he had said, 'Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live;' now he promiseth himself more from the divine assistance, safety. By safety he means either the safety of the outward or inward man. Why not both? I shall be safe from those warpings and apostasy, and all dangers and mischiefs that do attend it. Turning aside from our duty doth not procure our safety, but perseverance in our duty. God's children, when they have failed, have run themselves into much temporal inconveniences, as Josiah ran upon his own death by his own folly, 2 Chron. 33:22.

2. The resolution of his obedience, that is renewed and promised upon obtaining of this mercy. And there take notice—(1.) Of the accuracy of that obedience promised, I will have respect unto thy statutes. (2.) The constancy of it, continually; not for a moment only, a few days, in a pang, or when the mercy is fresh and warm upon the heart, but constantly, without intermission, without defection.

First, Observe from the repeating of the same request:—

Doct. 1. That sustaining grace must be sought with all earnestness and importunity. 'Uphold me' before, and now again, 'Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.'

Reason 1. They that have a due sense of things upon their hearts will do so; that is to say, that have a sense of their own weakness, the evil of sin, and the comfort of perseverance in obedience.

1. That have a sense of their own weakness, as David was touched with a sense of his own necessity; therefore he repeats this prayer, 'Hold thou me up;' and if David need to be held up, what need have we! If pillars are not able to stand of themselves, what shall reeds do? If giants are overthrown and vanquished, children much more: Prov.

28:14, 'Happy is the man that feareth always.' How so? With a fear of caution, not a fear of distrust; with a fear of reverence, not with a fear of bondage; otherwise it were a torture, not a blessedness. That man that is sensible of his own frailty is more blessed than other men. Why? Because he will ever have recourse to God to set his power a-work for the good of his soul: Rom. 11:20, 'Be not high-minded, but fear.' Though weakness be a misery, yet a sense of it is a degree towards blessedness, because it makes way for the great Christian grace, which is trust and dependence.

2. They have a sense of the evil that is in the least sin. This is the difference between a tender conscience and a hard heart—one is afraid to offend God in the least matter, the other makes nothing of sin, and so runneth into mischief, Prov. 28:14. Well, then, a man that hath a tender heart is loath to fall into the least sin, he is ever drawing to God to be kept from all sin. When we are earnest in this matter, it is a sign we are sensible what an evil sin is. Men that side with their own lusts and interests may wonder at the frequent requests of the Psalmist here—establishment and preservation from sin. But those that have a tender conscience are like the eye, soon offended, and make it their business to keep it from offence; they are thus solicitous and earnest with God to be upheld.

3. They are sensible of the good of perseverance in obedience. There are two things here:—

[1.] Obedience is good; the more we experiment it, the more we would desire to keep it up in an even tenor of close walking with God, without interruption, without intermission. God appeals to experience: Micah 2:7, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' And when men wander they have this experience, 'Am I a barren wilderness?' Micah 6:3, 'O my people! what have I

done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.' The more we find liberty, sweetness, and comfort in the ways of God, the more we should desire to continue in them.

[2.] As obedience is good, so perseverance in obedience is good, for it strengthens grace, especially in an hour of temptation, when many make defection. The choicest discovery of good men is in bad times: 'Noah was upright in his generation,' Gen. 6:9; to stand when others decline, to be like fish that keeps its freshness in salt water, to hold fast there where Satan hath his throne, Rev. 2:13, and to be faithful, as is said of Judah, Hosea 11:12, when 'Ephraim compassed me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit.' It is a comfort and honour to persevere with God.

Reason 2. This sustaining grace must be asked, because God will show his sovereignty, that it is not at our beck; it must cost us waiting, striving, and earnest and renewed prayer: 2 Cor. 12:8, 'For this thing I besought the Lord thrice.' God will not answer at the first knock, but at the third, then God came in. So Christ; Mat. 26:44, the third time he came and repeated the same thing; then, if you compare Luke, he received his consolation by an angel. God doth not come at the first knock, therefore we must pray again, 'Uphold me.'

Reason 3. Without continued influences of grace we cannot be safe, therefore they must not be sought once and no more, but daily. As we seek daily bread, so we should seek daily grace. The word σήμερον, this day, hath respect to all the petitions; this day we must have our daily bread, this day lead us not into temptation, this day keep us from evil. While temptations continue, we must continue prayer. Long suits, though often denied, may prevail at length. In short, the continuance of strength and assistance from God is necessary to

preserve both habitual and actual grace, therefore they must be continually asked.

1. To preserve habitual grace, the seed that remains in us. We would wonder to see a herb to thrive and grow in the midst of many weeds; so that grace should be there where there is so much pride, love of pleasure, worldly care and brutish lusts, especially when any of these are set a-work by temptations without. The angels and Adam fell when there was nothing within to work upon them but the mutability of their nature; so when there is so much within to work, and temptations without, it is hard to keep grace in the soul.

2. For the quickening and actual stirrings of the soul to good. We should soon faint and tire in the ways that we have begun were it not for God's sustaining grace; these sparks would quickly go out, if God did not keep them alive. 1 Chron. 29:18, when the people were in a high point of willingness, 'Lord, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people.' When we have gotten any good frame of spirit, we cannot preserve it without this continual influence.

Reason 4. Renewed prayer is a means of persevering, not only for it, but by it. God keeps us alive in the way of grace, as by the word, so by prayer. Praying in the Holy Ghost is one means of establishment, Jude 20. Prayer is a solemn preaching to our selves, or a serious warming of our souls in our duty in the sight of God. Now means of support must be used, not once, but often. There must be constant meals for the increase of bodily strength. If a man be never so strong, yet he cannot always grow in strength by one meal, there must be new refreshment; so this is one means for our preservation, therefore it must be often used.

Use. For reproof of those that ask sustaining grace customarily and carelessly, without any deep sense or renewed importunity. We are too cold and formal when we say, 'Lead us not into temptation.'

1. Consider, none stand but may fall in some degree, and it is our business to take heed we do not. Every hour we are in danger either of getting some distemper, or letting out some corruption. Of getting some distemper, being spotted and defiled in the world, or at least being made dull and indisposed in the service of God. Or else of letting out some corruptions; if God do not keep our heart and all (Ps. 141:3, 'Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips'), how soon should we betray our folly! And therefore it is a happy day, and we have cause to bless God, when we have not by some words or works of ours interrupted our communion with him.

2. Consider how many things concur to lead us aside, corruptions within and temptations without, and, it may be, sometimes the example of others that are of esteem in the church. Corruption within, always fighting against grace—the flesh lusteth against the Spirit; and temptations without, the favours and frowns of the world. If these things have not, they may befall us, and it is too late to seek armour in time of conflict.

3. And then to see men eminent for knowledge and profession turn back from the holy commandment, and glorious stars fall from their orb and station; this overturns the faith of many, 2 Tim. 2:18. So that, all these things considered, we cannot stand a moment without God; and therefore we should be more earnest with him for grace.

Doct. 2. The constant safety of God's people lies in sustaining grace.

1. Negatively; without it we cannot be safe, partly because there are so many trials and temptations between us and home, by reason of

the sleights of the flesh, the cunning of Satan, and oppositions of the world; and partly because the measure of grace received is so small: Phil. 3:13, 'I have not attained;' and the danger of sinning against God is so great: Amos 3:2, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities.' So that we are no longer safe from sin and punishment than God puts under his hand.

2. Positively; by God's sustaining grace we are kept safe, both as the power and faithfulness of God are engaged for our defence.

[1.] The power of God is engaged: 1 Peter 1:5, 'Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.' The apostle first speaks of heaven, that that is kept for us, and then, presently, you are kept for it by the power of God. An earthly inheritance may be sure enough for the heir, but who can secure the heir from death and all other accidents? But here God provides for our comfort. Not only our inheritance is sure, but we are kept. And how doth God keep us? By his power. Oh! what greater safety can there be? He can mitigate the temptation, or else give a supply of strength; he can keep off trials, or support us under them, 1 Cor. 10:13.

[2.] The faithfulness of God is engaged: 1 Cor. 1:9, 'God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son;' and 2 Thes. 3:3, 'The Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and keep you from evil.' Certainly God is able, but how shall we know that he will do it? His truth is laid in pawn for what he hath promised, and therefore we may hold up our heads with confidence; and this should comfort us against all fears and doubtful and uncertain thoughts.

Use. Instruction, to show us how constantly God must be sought to in prayer, and relied upon in the use of means for our preservation, both from sin and danger.

1. Sought to in prayer. Our strength lies not in ourselves, but in God: 2 Cor. 3:5, 'We are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.' It is not only of God, but in God; there is our treasure kept: 2 Tim. 2:1, 'Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;' and Eph. 6:10, 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.' If the stock were in our own hands, besides the danger of embezzling it, we should neglect God; as when the prodigal son had his portion, he went away from his father. Therefore God keeps grace in his own hand, to keep us humble, depending, observing, and to have a constant converse with him, that our eyes may be to him; as Ps. 123:2, 'As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us;' that is, as maid and men servants look for their dole and portion, their allowance given to them, from their master and mistress, so God will still keep us to him. Dependence begets observance, to keep up our allegiance to the crown of heaven.

2. As he must be sought to in prayer, so relied upon in the use of means for our preservation. God keeps us, but not without our care and diligence. A Christian is said to keep himself, 1 Tim. 5:22; and this is pure religion, to keep ourselves unspotted, James 1:27; and 1 John 5:18, 'He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, that the wicked one touch him not;' and Jude 21, 'Keep yourselves in the love of God.' What! doth not this detract from all that was spoken before? No; we act with subordination and dependence upon him. Our keeping is from him, by him, and under him; so we keep ourselves through his blessing upon the use of means, which he hath appointed for us to use.

The third note is taken from the promise of obedience upon the supposition of this help from God, 'Uphold me.' What then? 'And I

will have respect unto thy statutes.' Observe—

Doct. 3. The more experience we have of God's grace in the preserving us from sin and danger, the more we should be encouraged in his ways. Why so?

1. Because of the obligation. It is his mercy which requires thankfulness. Now gratitude and thankfulness is the true principle which should urge us to perform our duty to God. Observe, there are several principles which put men upon God's service, some false and rotten, some more tolerable, some lawful, some excellent. Some false and rotten, as carnal custom. Shall we serve God, say they, as we have done? Zech. 7:3; when men only do as they have done, it is the manner of the place, they learn it of their fathers, and so customarily worship and serve God. Then vainglory, to be seen of men; that is a rotten thing, Mat. 6. Come and see my zeal for the Lord, saith Jehu. This may put us upon great seeming zeal and activity. So for profit, to make a market of religion; as the pharisees got themselves credit to be trusted with widows' estates by their long prayers; these are rotten principles. Then some are more tolerable, not so bad principles as the former; as when we serve God out of hope of temporal mercy, as when they howl upon their beds for corn, wine, and oil, Hosea 7:4; or for fear of temporal judgments, when men hang down their heads like a bulrush for a while, or else for mere fear of eternal death, they shall else be damned: when men's duties are a sin-offering, a sleepy-sop to appease an accusing conscience. But then there are some that are lawful, good, and sound, as when duties are done out of the impulsion of an enlightened conscience, that urgeth them to that which is good; or upon the bare command of God, his authority swaying the conscience; or when they walk in the ways of God out of the consideration of the reward to come, a respect to heaven; this is very good in its place. Again, there are some excellent principles of



grace, and which do most of all discover a gospel spirit, a well-tempered frame of soul to God, and these are love to God because of his benefits and love to us, gratitude, and thankfulness: 1 John 4:19, 'We love him because he first loved us;' and Rom. 12:1, 'I beseech you by the mercies of God;' when we serve him out of love. Again, when we serve him out of delight, out of love to the duty, find such a complacency in the work that we love the work for the work's sake; as David, 'I love thy law because it is pure;' when we love the law for the purity of it; or when the glory of God prevails above all our own interests; or when the promises and covenant of God enabling of us; that is our principle, Heb. 10:16. I observe this, men usually are brought on from one sort of principle to another; from sinful principles they are brought to tolerable and lawful, and from lawful to those that are rare and excellent.

2. This is such a mercy as gives us hope of more mercy in that kind. If God hath held us up, and we have been safe hitherto, then we may say, Thou hast held me up. We may look for more; new temptation will bring new strength, every day's work will bring its own refreshment. God, by giving, binds himself more to give, for he loves to crown his own work. When he hath done good, he will do good again: Zech. 3:2, 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' He hath saved us, and he will save us. And it holds good sometimes in temporal mercies: 2 Cor. 1:10, 'He hath delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver.' But especially it holds good in spiritual mercies: 2 Tim. 4:17, 18, 'He hath delivered me out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom.' One act of mercy gives us more. God, that hath begun, will make an end; he that hath kept me will keep me.

Use. It serves to reprove two sorts of people:—

1. Those that are unthankful after their deliverance. We forget his care of us, and never think how much we owe to him. When the mariners have gotten to the haven and harbour, they forget the tempest; so these forget how God stood by them in the temptation and conflict; they do not abound more in the work of the Lord. These are like those that would have deliverance, that thorns might be taken out of the way, that they might run more readily to that which is evil.

2. It reproveth those that faint and despond in God's ways, after much experiences of his help and presence with them. The Israelites in the wilderness, upon every new difficulty their faith is at a loss, and then back again to Egypt they would go; though they had so often experience of God, they would not believe him because of his wonders, but 'forgot his works and his wonders that he had showed them,' Ps. 78:11. God had given them wonderful mercy in destroying Pharaoh, that it might be meat to their faith, yet they believed not. Good David was ready to say, 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul,' 1 Sam. 27:1, though he had experience upon experience. We should rather encourage ourselves, and go on in our work notwithstanding all difficulties.

The last point, from the accuracy and constancy of his obedience, 'I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.' This phrase is diversely rendered. The Septuagint renders it, I will exercise myself in them, or apply my heart to them. David's regard to God's law is diversely expressed in this psalm.

Doct. 4. God's precepts must be respected and consulted with as the constant measure and direction of our lives.

Not only respect, but continual respect: Gal. 6:16, '.As many as walk according to this rule;' it notes as many as shall walk in rank and

order: there needeth great accurateness and intension, that we may keep within the bounds of commanded duty. So walk circumspectly. Some men are so crafty through their self-deceiving hearts, through their lusts and interests, so doubtful, that there needs a great exactness, and so apt to be turned out of the way, that we need a great deal of care to look to the fountain and principle of our actions, to look to the matter, manner, end, and weigh all circumstances that we may serve God exactly.

## SERMON CXXIX

### **Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood.—VER. 118**

IN the former verse, the man of God had begged establishment in the ways of God; and now, as a help to what he had prayed for, he observes God's judgments on those that err from them. It is a special means to preserve us from sin to observe how mischievous it hath been to those that close with it. So the prophet here, 'I will have respect to thy statutes.' Why? 'Thou hast trodden down them that err from thy statutes.' By this means we learn to be wise at other men's costs, and are whipped upon others' backs: Zeph. 3:6, 7, 'I have cut off the nations: their towers are made desolate, their cities are destroyed; there is none inhabitant: I said, Surely thou wilt fear me,' &c. God is very much disappointed if we be not bettered and improved by his judgments. Exemplo qui peccat, bis peccat. He that would plunge himself into a quagmire where others have miscarried before, sins doubly, because he neither fears threatenings, nor would take warning by their example. God looks to be the more revered

for every warning he gives us in his providence, because then what was before matter of faith is made matter of sense, and needs only a little application. Thus it will be with me if I should straggle from God, and go contrary to his direction: Isa. 26:9, 'When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.' We need not doubt any more whether God will punish the disobedient, when we see his threatenings made good; only we should reflect upon our hearts: And will not God visit my transgression if I should go on breaking his laws? And what should hinder making such application? Are not all sinners alike to God? Christ tells us, 'Ye shall all likewise perish except ye repent,' Luke 13:5. They contented themselves to censure those on whom the tower of Siloam fell. The desert of sin is the same, and God's justice as exact as ever; therefore, if others are punished, why not we? We are strangely stupid if we do not walk more exactly with God. This use David maketh of it. Whether it were a judgment past, or a judgment expected in faith, this deterred him from doing as they did: 'Thou hast trodden down them that err from thy statutes.' In the words observe—

1. An account of God's judgments upon wicked men, 'Thou hast trodden down them that err from thy statutes.'
2. The reason given of that dispensation, 'For their deceit is falsehood.'

First, In the first place observe—

1. The notion by which the judgment is expressed, thou hast trodden down.
2. The persons described upon whom this judgment hath lighted, or shall light, them that err from thy statutes.

3. The note of universality, all, of what estate or condition soever they be.

From the first of these observe—

Doct. Those that proudly err from God's statutes, God can, hath, and will soon pull them down with ignominy and contempt.

This point will be made good if we consider—

1. The persons described.
2. The notion by which judgment is expressed.
3. Something concerning the certainty of this judgment.

1. The persons described, 'Them that err from thy statutes.' Some err out of weakness, and some out of pride and obstinacy. (1.) To err out of weakness, to wander in by-paths of our own, is not safe: Ps. 125:2, 'As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity.' Men that do not sin out of malice, but are discouraged by the rod of the wicked resting upon the lot of the righteous, ver. 3; therefore think to shift for themselves by their own compliances, counsels, and crooked courses, God will deal with them as with his open enemies. (2.) Proudly to exalt ourselves against God, and trample his interest under foot, will bring sure judgment: Ps. 119:21, 'Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.' Of such the text speaks, those that oppose themselves against God, and bear themselves high in sinful courses, upon account of their prosperity.

2. The notion by which the judgment is expressed, 'Thou hast trodden down.' The Septuagint ἐξουδένωσας, ad nihil deduxisti, thou hast brought to nothing; Acquila, confixisti, thou hast stricken

through; Symmachus, ἀπήλεγξας, reprobasti, thou hast disproved; the vulgar, sprevisi, thou hast contemned; Apollinarius, ἀθέριξας, parvi pependisti, thou hast little esteemed: all to the same purpose. The phrase of treading under foot, used by us, implies—(1.) A full punishment; (2.) A disgraceful one.

[1.] A full punishment. God will pull them down from their altitudes, even to the dust, though never so high and proudly exalting themselves against God. A full conquest of enemies is thus often expressed in scripture: Isa. 10:6, the Assyrian is said 'to take the prey, and to tread them down like mire in the streets;' so Micah 7:10, the same expression, when an adversary is laid even with the ground, that he may be crushed and trampled upon, as Jehu trode Jezebel under foot, 2 Kings 9:32; and Isa. 26:6, 'The feet of the poor shall tread it down, even the steps of the needy.' So the utter and final overthrow of Satan is expressed, Rom. 16:20, 'He shall tread Satan under his feet.'

[2.] It implies a disgraceful punishment: Ps. 110:1, 'Until I make thine enemies thy footstool;' an expression to show the ignominy and contempt God will put upon them. Christ keeps his sheep in his hands, John 10:28, his lambs in his bosom, Isa. 40:11, and his enemies under his feet, Josh. 10:24. When he vanquished the Canaanitish kings, 'Come near,' saith he to his captains; 'put your feet upon the necks of these kings.' Thus Sapore the king of Persia trampled upon Valentinian the emperor, and Tamberlane made Bajazet his footstool. The meaning is, God will not only bring them under, but reduce them to an abject and contemptible condition. So Chrysostom on the text expoundeth this phrase, that God will make them ἐπονειδίστους, καὶ καταγελάστους, ignominious and contemptible. They shall not go off honourably, but with scorn and confusion of face, miserably broken.

3. The certainty of this judgment, that he can, hath, and will do so.

[1.] He can do so, though they be fortified with never so many advantages, for what is too hard for God who made all things? It is easier, we know, to destroy than to build up things. Things long a-building may be destroyed in a moment; and therefore, God, that made them, can destroy them: Isa. 27:4, 'Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together.' Briers and thorns are matter to feed the fire, not to quench it. We want faith in the power of God, and therefore we are dismayed when we see wicked men great and high.

[2.] He hath done so, notwithstanding their greatness and proud attempts. That is the Psalmist's expression here; God hath already trodden down many such persons, and hath decreed to tread down all. Of that sort the prophet speaks as a thing already done, either in way of faith, or in part of sense, as begun to be executed: Amos 2:9, 'I destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath.' Potent and mighty enemies, if they stand in the way of his people's mercies, God can pluck them up, root and branch. When Pharaoh advanced himself against the people of God, God trod him down, and flung him into the bottom of the sea. So the Psalmist tells us, Ps. 135:10, 'He smote great nations, and slew mighty kings for their sakes, all the kingdoms of Canaan, and gave their land for an heritage unto Israel his people.' God will show what respect he hath to his people; therefore, when he ariseth to avenge their quarrel, nothing shall be able to stand before him.

[3.] He will do so, tread them down all.

(1.) Because of his invariable justice: 'God is but one,' Gal. 3:20; that is, one always consonant unto himself, what he hath done he will do;

his justice is the same that ever it was, and his power the same; and therefore in all his dispensations he is one; that is, ever like himself, is as ready to take vengeance on the insolences of men now as before, and keepeth a proportion in his proceedings: he is of one mind, and who can turn him?

(2.) Because of the suitability between judgment and sin. They trample all that is holy and sacred under their feet, therefore God treadeth them under foot; they despise God, therefore are despised, 1 Sam. 2:30; they trample upon the grace of God in Christ, therefore are said, Heb. 10:29, 'to tread the blood of the covenant under foot;' they trample upon the law of God: Amos 2:4, 'I will not turn away the punishment thereof, because they have despised my law;' they trample upon all godly admonitions and reproofs: Mat. 7:6, 'Cast not your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you;' and they trample the servants of God under foot, and make his saints bow down for them to go over, Isa. 51:23; and therefore are they themselves trodden under foot. They despised God, and he therefore despiseth them, and poureth contempt upon them; and the more they esteem themselves, of the less reckoning are they with God.

(3.) For the undeceiving the world, who usually look to sensible things. While their ways are prosperous, we make another manner of judgment upon them than we do when they are under contempt and disgrace: Mal. 3:15, 'We call the proud happy; yea they that work wickedness are set up, and they that tempt God are even delivered.' We dote too much upon outward things, insomuch, that things wicked, if prosperous, seem good and holy. Our affections bribe our judgments, and those things that we would otherwise loathe have a fair gloss and varnish put upon them. It is a mighty temptation, even to good men, and they begin to have other thoughts of things when to



appearance they are befriended by God's providence and succeed beyond expectation; therefore God will tread them down.

(4.) To undeceive sinners themselves, that are hardened by their own prosperity and success, and make God's providence and forbearing punishment to be an approbation of their actions against his law. So Ps. 50:21, 'These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest I was altogether such an one as thyself, but I will reprove thee.' God may for a long time endure very horrible provocations without any act or mark of vengeance, till sinners flatter themselves that the things they do are pleasing' to God; but they shall find they have erred when they read their sins in their punishment: Mal. 2:9, 'Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.' The great God aims at the repentance of men, both in his forbearance and his punishment. In his forbearance: Rom. 2:4, 'Not knowing that the forbearance of God leadeth to repentance.' He is pleased to suffer them that offend him grievously to taste the goodness of his providence, and have their turn in this world's felicity, to see if that will better them; if not, then he poureth contempt and shame upon them, that by his frowns he may further their conviction. When prosperity is a temptation, God will change the dispensation, and instead of general favour and respect, they meet with shame and disestimation and disgrace. This is the punishment of those that are partial in his law. It is true this is not to be taken singly without the foregoing provocation. It was the lot of Christ and his prophets and apostles to be disrespected in a wicked world, and such a trial may befall his faithful messengers. Yet when this is the fruit of foregoing unfaithfulness, and men that had nothing to commend them to the world but their height and grandeur, that only had a testimony in men's carnal affections because of their greatness, and not a testimony in men's consciences

because of their purity and holiness and good fruits, as good men have been in the consciences of those that hate them, it is to them a judgment. But, however, when those that in the main are faithful are by a righteous providence exposed to ignominy and contempt, they ought the more to search their ways, and to see whether they have been throughout with God in the conscience of their duty to him, and whether some neglect and partiality of theirs hath not brought this judgment upon them.

(5.) To give a check to the insolency of men who abuse their power, and think they may do what they please when they have no hindrance and rub in the way: Micah 2:1, 'They do evil because it is in the power of their hands.' Restraints of conscience prevail not with many, but only restraints of providence. It is no thanks to them if they are not worse than they are; it is not because they want will, but because they want power. Therefore God cuts them short, and treads them down like mire.

Use 1. A warning to them that are in prosperity, that they do not carry it proudly against God, his ways and people. God hath unhorsed many that have held their heads very high; therefore let none presume to do evil because they are high and exalted. There is a foolish and mad confidence which wicked men have in their prosperity, as if they were above the reach of providence, and therefore abuse their greatness to contempt and oppression. When men are up they know nothing moderate. Former judgments upon the proud and disobedient, that contemn God, his people and ways, should a little check them. God, that hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, Luke 1:51, can do it again, and will, when men will not take warning. As Nazianzen, when his heart was like to be corrupted and grow wanton with ease and prosperity, I thought, saith he, of reading the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and of the doleful

condition of the church in former times. This means he took to reduce himself to a holy sobriety. This is the thing God aimed at in the ceremonial law. In the thank-offerings, leavened bread was required, which was allowed in no other sacrifice; thereby showing we should not so surfeit and run riot with our mercies as to forget the bitterness of former afflictions, together with the causes of them.

Use 2. Not to be dismayed at the prosperity of the wicked, so as to be troubled either about your own persons, or about the cause of God, or to cry up a confederacy with them that err from God's statutes when uppermost. Wicked men are here supposed to be in power, height, and pride of spirit; but God treadeth them down: and to be full of craft and subtlety; but their deceit is falsehood; that is, for all their might and subtlety, they are not able to resist God. David was shaken with this trial, when evil men were great flourished in wealth and authority, Ps. 73:17; but how doth he settle his heart? 'I went into the sanctuary, and there I understood their end.' When we look to the end of things, that will settle us; but when we see God's work by halves, we miscarry: we make another judgment when we see God's work brought to perfection than we did when we only saw the beginning of it. Therefore let us not be altogether dismayed; a little faith will help us against the temptations from sense. When the Lord shall have tried and humbled his people, then the cup is put into the hand of the wicked, and God will throw them down from the seat of their arrogancy, and trample upon them like dust. What should hinder? Cannot God do it, or will he not? Cannot he do it? Yes; very easily. Poor earthen vessels that oppose him, they do but dash themselves against a rock, they do but break themselves in pieces; all attempts are nothing; God will laugh them to scorn. Or else will he not do it? Doth not he hate sin as much as before, or love his people as much as ever? What God punisheth in one he punisheth in all, if repentance prevent not; he oweth them a shame, therefore will pour

contempt and disgrace upon those that dishonour him, Ps. 53:5. It might soon be known what will become of them, if you would but awaken faith; you may look upon it as a thing accomplished already: he shall tread down all iniquity under his feet, Mal. 4:3.

Use 3. Observe the judgments upon those that err from God's statutes, that we may fear before the Lord, and believe in him, and learn to obey his statutes. David trembled to see Uzzah smitten, 2 Sam. 6:7, 8; so should we when God revenges the quarrel of any commandment. Examples of judgments are lively instances, and are apt to strike deep upon the heart. Therefore, when we read or hear or see any of these, we should look upon it as a warning piece let off from heaven to warn us not to sin after the similitude of their transgression. God comes to speak to us in the language of sense; when we cannot understand by faith, he makes good his threatenings. The unbelieving Israelites were destroyed, Jude 5; Aaron's sons for offering strange fire were consumed, Lev. 10.; Uzzah for touching the ark; Lot's wife for looking back turned into a pillar of salt; therefore it is said, 'Remember Lot's wife,' Luke 17:32. So in every age there are remarkable judgments, how God treads down those that err from his statutes; which should be observed, not to censure others, but for our own caution.

But now, because men are apt to misapply providence by a malicious interpretation, and to make perverse judgments of the sins of others, I shall give you some rules how you may avoid censure on the one hand, yet not hinder profit on the other.

1. It is certain God's judgments upon others must be observed: Jer. 7:12, 'Go unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people Israel;' Amos 6:2, 'Pass ye to Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye

to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms?' It is stupidity not to take notice of God's hand. Providence is a comment upon the word of God, written many times in blood, and those that will not observe it shall feel it. 'Remember Lot's wife.' One observeth upon those words, *Lege historiam, ne fias historia*—observe the instances of God's wrath upon others, lest thou be made an instance thyself. Sometimes God meets with this sinner, sometimes that; any that will go on in a way of sin and disobedience against God.

2. This observation must be to a good end; not to censure others, for that is malice: to speak even to the grief of those whom God hath wounded, this is condemned, as enemies did of the people of God in their affliction, Jer. 50:7. Neither must we do it to justify ourselves; that is pride and self-conceit, condemned Luke 13:5, 'Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish;' but for instruction, that we may fear for ourselves: Zeph. 3:7, 'Surely now thou shalt fear me.' And that we may be cautioned against the like sins, that we may see what an evil and bitter thing it is to forsake the Lord, Jer. 2:19; and that we may admire the Lord's mercy to us, that we are not set out as marks of his vengeance, that we are not in their condition, Amos 6:2; that we may give to the Lord the glory of his mercy, justice, and truth. Take one place for all: Rom. 11:22, there the apostle doth sum up all these three, that we might not boast ourselves over others, that we may admire the justice of God, and mercy to us-ward, and may learn to fear him, and walk cautiously and humbly with him, lest we contract the like judgment upon ourselves.

3. In making the observation, there must be care that we do not make providence speak a language which it owneth not, the language of our fancies, and pry into God's counsels without warrant.

[1.] When you come to observe judgment, there must be a due reasoning from the provocation to the judgment, but not e contra, not judge of the wickedness of the person by the affliction of the person. The barbarians showed little reason, and less charity, in misconstruing the passage of the viper fastening upon St Paul's hand, Acts 28:4. The foregoing provocation must be evident before we interpret the judgment. The dispensations of God's providence are common, and fall alike to good and bad, Eccles. 9:2. God by a sudden stroke may take off the godly as well as the wicked. Good Eli broke his neck, 1 Sam. 4:18, and Josiah died in the army in the same manner that Ahab did, by an arrow in battle after he disguised himself, 2 Chron. 35:23. Therefore do not reason from the stroke of God. Shimei misinterpreted David's afflictions: 2 Sam. 16:7, 8, 'Come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial; the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son.' Job's friends thought him a hypocrite because God smote him with boils and sores. The best of God's children may suffer greatly from his hand; but the judgment must not make you conclude a sin, but the foregoing sin must make you interpret it to be a judgment.

[2.] When the sin is written upon the judgment, and there are some remarkable circumstances wherein the sin and the judgment meet; as Judges 1:7, Adonibezek, as he served his vanquished enemies, so was he served himself, his thumbs and toes cut off. God's retaliation is very notable. Many judgments have a signature upon them, as many herbs in nature have a signature to show for what use they serve: Obad. 15, 'As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee; thy reward shall return upon thine own head.' When God payeth men home in their own coin—Gen. 9:6, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed—it is not only a law, what ought to be

done in justice, but a rule of providence, what shall be done. Pharaoh was the author of the execution in drowning the Israelites' children, so Pharaoh and all his host, his nobility and men of war, were drowned in the sea. Ahab's blood was licked up with dogs in the place where they licked up the blood of Naboth. Jezebel was more guilty than he; Ahab permitted it, but Jezebel contrived it; Ahab humbled himself, therefore his body was buried, but Jezebel was entombed in the bellies of dogs. Haman was hanged on the gallows set up for Mordecai. Henry III. of France was killed in the same chamber where the massacre was contrived. Charles IX. flowed with blood in his bed. Thus God will requite men in the same kind. His own people meet with this. Jacob supplanted his elder brother, and therefore the elder is brought to him instead of the younger. Asa put the prophet in the stocks, and he was diseased in his feet. Joseph's brethren were not flexible to his request; afterwards, when they were in extremity, Joseph proves inexorable to them: Gen. 42:21, 'We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.' How comes this into their minds? This was many years after the fact was committed, some twenty years as they computed. So God deals with his children in like manner as they dealt with others, that their consciences may work the more kindly. The same is observed concerning David and Absalom, 2 Sam. 12:10–12. He took the wife of Uriah to be his wife, and Absalom took his wives before his eyes. St Paul consented to the stoning of Stephen, and assisted in the execution, 'They laid down their garments at his feet;' therefore, afterwards, Paul himself for preaching the gospel is stoned and left for dead, Acts 14:19, 20. Barnabas was not stoned, that assisted Paul; both were alike offensive to the men of Iconium in preaching the gospel. Paul was sensible of this as a great part of his guilt, Acts 22:20, and his conscience works upon that. Many other instances might be given, but this is enough.

[3.] When judgments fall upon them in the very act of their provocation. Thus many are taken away by a violent death in the very heat of their drunkenness. Zimri and Cozbi lost their lives in the very instant when they were unloading their lusts, and many times we see punishment treads upon the heels of sin.

[4.] When they are authors of their own destruction. Not only in such a sensible manner as Saul, Achitophel, and Judas, that murdered themselves; but thus, when men are given up to their headlong counsels, to break themselves: Prov. 5:22, 'His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.' Wicked men are often whipped with their own rods; and Ps. 9:15, 16, 'In the net which they hid, is their own foot taken. The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgajon, Selah.' When by their own errors, mistakes, and furious passions they undo themselves.

[5.] When evil men are brought down, wonderfully, suddenly, contrary to all apparent likelihood and the course of second causes: Ps. 64:7, 'God shall shoot at them with an arrow, suddenly shall they be wounded; so they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves.' And Ps. 58:7, unto the 11th verse, there is this consolation given to the church, that enemies shall be destroyed before the pots feel the thorns. When they are contriving and boiling somewhat in their minds, before the pots feel the thorns, God takes them away suddenly in an instant, and then men shall say, Verily there is a rewarder of evil.

[6.] When God's judgments are executed by unlikely means and instruments. Sisera, a great captain, destroyed by Jael, Judges 4:21; Adrian the pope strangled by a gnat; Arius voiding his bowels in a draught after his perjury; Cora, Dathan, and Abiram, when the earth



clave to receive them that had made a rent in the congregation; and Herod was eaten up with the lice.

[7.] When such accidents bring a great deal of glory to God, and peace and tranquillity to his people; as hanging Haman with his sons upon his own gallows, Esther 7:9, and 8:17.

[8.] When God supplies the defects of man's justice, and their iniquity finds them out, when they think all is forgotten, and shall be no more heard of: Ps. 9:12, 'When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them; he forgetteth not the cry of the humble.' There are many instances how God finds out men that seem to escape well enough from man's hands, when they could not be found out by man. Zeph. 3:5, the prophet tells us, 'Every morning he will bring his judgments to light.' There is some sinner or other which God notably punisheth, that men may own his providence.

[9.] When the word κατὰ τὸ ῥητὸν, in the express letter, is made good upon men: Hosea 7:12, 'I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard.' The word doth fully take effect, and what they would not believe they are made to feel. By these rules we may observe God's judgments with profit. To quicken you to do so, consider—

(1.) It would be a mighty cure to atheism. There are a sort of men 'settled on their lees, that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil,' Zeph. 1:12; that think God is so shut up within the curtain of the heavens, that he takes no notice of what is done below. These vain conceits would soon vanish if men would but turn students in. God's providence; they would soon cry out, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth: they would say, There is a ruler of the affairs of the world, and a righteous judge that takes care of all things here below.

Usually men think amiss of God, as if good and evil were of no respect with him, but all things were governed by chance; as Job's wife said, 'Dost thou yet retain thy integrity? Curse God and die.' Mal. 2:12, 'Ye have wearied the Lord with your words, yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?' We do not see his justice, and so have atheistical and evil conceits of God. When we fancy evil men are in esteem, and the good neglected and despised, it is a temptation to men to think there is no providence—no God. So when the nocent are prosperous, and the good vexed with all manner of displeasure; as Claudian the poet much doubted whether there were any such thing as providence, that had a care of sublunary things; but at length, when he saw Ruffinus was only lifted up that his fall might be the greater, then he no more calls in question God's providence, or taxes him of indifferency to good and evil.

(2.) It will be a notable curb and awe upon us to keep us from sin; for all these things befall them for our learning. It is our stupid incogitancy when God puts these examples before our eyes, and we are not affected with them, and so are of little use to us: Josh. 9:3, 'When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua did to Jericho and to Ai,' they were wiser than we; they did not expect the coming of Joshua, but sent messengers to meet him and strike up a covenant with him. Or as that captain that came to Elijah, 2 Kings 1:13, when two captains were destroyed with their fifties, he comes and desires the prophet to spare his life, and that those he brought with him might be dear and precious in his eyes. As he did, so should we. God hath smitten this and that for sin; we should the more humble ourselves, and desire terms of grace; but our blindness and stupidity is such that we are not moved with God's judgments on others to look to the state of our souls: Prov. 22:3, 'The wise man

foreseeth the evil and hideth himself, but the fool goeth on and is punished.'

Secondly, I come now to the reason rendered, 'For their deceit is falsehood.' The Septuagint hath ὅτι ἄδικον τὸ ἐνθύμημα αὐτῶν—thou hast despised all those that err from thy statutes, for their thought is unjust. But to open the words. These two notions, deceit and falsehood, sometimes are taken for the vanity of outward things, the disappointment of trust; for by an ill-built trust a man deceives himself, and his hopes prove false; and sometimes they are put for craft, guile, and hypocrisy. Now, according to these different acceptions of the word, diverse senses are given. (1.) Some think these words relate to the disappointment of their trust. Thus their confidences wherein they trust will deceive them at last, and be found falsehood. Certain it is that carnal men have many imaginations and carnal confidences wherein they flatter themselves, and hope to avoid their appointed judgments, which prove in the conclusion but lying vanities. If this were the sense, that at length it shall appear how deceitful their trust is, then it concerns us to see to our trust, to see what in probability these confidences might be whereby they deceive their own souls. Is it their greatness and present height? This deceiveth them when they are brought down wonderfully, Isa. 14:12–16. Or is it meant of their devices and witty counsels wherein they trust? But their subtle devices fail, and they are often taken in the snares they laid for others: Isa. 29:14, 'The wisdom of the wise men shall perish, and the understanding of the prudent shall be hidden.' All their craft will do them no good; all their cunning and policy, by which they hope to fortify and defend themselves and prevent their ruin, shall come to nought. Or they do not get that by their deceit which they hope for; though they have many methods and stratagems to circumvent the people of God, yet they shall prove but vain. (2.) Most simply it seemeth to be taken for

hypocrisy and guile of spirit, manifested either in shows of piety or any guileful course, whereby they would undermine others; for this reason God will bring them down.

Doct. All fraudulency and hypocrisy is hateful to God, therefore he will sooner or later discover and destroy those that practise it.

Fraudulency is twofold:—

1. Either falsehood in ordinary commerce, lying or treacherous imposing on the simplicity of upright and honest men. Most men's wisdom and policy lies in their falsehood and deceitfulness; but this shall be manifested, and whilst they think to deceive others, they shall be deceived themselves, Job 5:13, and be taken in their own snares; and whilst they seek to ruin and undermine others, they are ruined and undermined themselves. Or—

2. There is another sort of fraudulency, pretences of piety, whereby such men deceive the world. Now this deceit is threefold—either the deceit of the heretic and erroneous person, or the formalist and supertitious person, or the deceit of those that pretend to be truly religious. All these cheats put upon the world shall not long hold.

[1.] The cheat of erroneous persons and heretical seducers, who, under a fair mask and plausible appearance, carry on such designs as prove troublesome and noxious to the church of God. Though for a while they carry great sway under colour of a godly life, yet at length God will tread them to dust and nothing, and then all will be counted but deceit. The deceit of heretical seducers is often spoken of in scripture: Rev. 2:9, 'I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan;' and 1 Tim. 3:5, 9, 'But they shall proceed no farther; for their folly shall be manifest unto all men.' When, under a form of godliness, they carry

on a horrible design unto the great disturbance of the church, of the kingdom and commonwealth, the day shall declare it, 1 Cor. 3:13; God will bring them down.

[2.] There is the deceit of superstitious persons and formalists, who seem to be devout, and have great zeal for outward things, not commanded by God; such 'make a fair show in the flesh,' Gal. 6:12, by observing outward and carnal rites, as circumcision, difference of meats, legal purifications; all their religion is but a vain show, to beguile a loose conscience. This same sort of men are again described to be those that 'speak lies in hypocrisy,' 1 Tim. 4:7. These also do in time discover the folly of their way, manifested by some notable judgment; for these things take not hold of men's consciences, but only of their affections; and when public countenance is gone, they are of no more esteem.

[3.] There is the deceit of those that only pretend to be truly religious, and are not so; and because false and counterfeit, they are hateful and abominable to God. Now these God will not only punish in the other world: Mat. 24:51, 'He shall appoint him his portion with the hypocrites;' hell seems to be their freehold and patrimony; but here, sooner or later, God will pluck off these vizards, and bring disappointment and ruin upon these deceivers: Prov. 26:26, the hypocrite shall be discovered before the congregation. Things that are counterfeit and false do not long hold out. God will discover them, either by some trying judgment, as he that builds upon the sand, when the winds blow and beat upon the house, down it falls. Earthen vessels, when they come to be scoured, the varnish and paint wears off. Or by some scandalous fall, for 'that which is lame will soon be turned out of the way,' Heb. 12:13. This deceitfulness—

(1.) Is contrary to God, who is a God of truth, Ps. 31:5; the author of truth: Eph. 4:24, 'Created after God in righteousness and true holiness;' and a lover of truth: Ps. 51:3, 'Thou desirest truth in the inward parts.' So that it is a great affront to God when men deal falsely: Jer. 5:3, 'O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? 'Is not that the thing thou lookest after in all the works of men? This is all in all with God.

(2.) It is contrary to justice, charity, and common ingenuity; it destroys the commerce between man and man: Eph. 4:25, 'Put away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour; for ye are members one of another.' It is unnatural and monstrous by lying and deceit to circumvent one another; it is as for one part of the body to destroy another. It is a sin not only unseemly for a Christian, but it tends to the overthrow of all human society, fidelity and mutual trust being the ground of all commerce. Now God will pour out his judgments upon them.

Use. Let this teach us to carry it sincerely both to God and men, for craft will not always succeed. The more real worth in any, the more openly and fairly they carry it. But for motives.

1. You will never else have true solid comfort, until you are real, without dissembling before God and men: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with guile and fleshly wisdom, we have had our conversation in the world.' Truth breeds joy and comfort of heart when a man is sincere and acts according to his conscience.

2. You will never hold out without it; your mask will fall off: James 1:8, 'The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways;' wavering, inconstant, up and down, off and on with God. A hypocrite is compared to a rush that grows in the mire, Job 8:12; pluck it up, it

soon withers: they are like reeds shaken with every wind. And you can have no approbation and acceptation with God; God likes those that are sincere: 'Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.' Who are those who have pardon of sin sealed up to their souls? Oh! blessed is that man that can say his sins are forgiven him. Who is that man? 'In whose spirit there is no guile;' that is, without dissimulation, fraudulency, and guile: this man enjoys acceptance with God, pardon of sin, justification before God. And the contrary will certainly bring down a heavy judgment.

## SERMON CXXX

### **Thou putteth away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies.—VER. 119**

IN these words we have—(1.) God's dispensation; (2.) The effect it had upon David's heart.

In the first branch we have—

1. The character by which they are described, all the wicked of the earth.
2. The esteem God hath of them, they are dross.
3. A suitable providence dealt out to them, intimated, thou putteth them away like dross.

First, That the wicked are men of the earth. There are common reasons why we are all men of the earth. Our original is earth, made of the dust of the ground, Gen. 2:7. They are but a little earth or red

clay fashioned into the form of a man, a handful of enlivened dust. Our abode and service is here: John 17:4, 'I have glorified thee upon earth;' and at our end and dissolution we are turned into earth again: Eccles. 12:7, 'Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was;' Ps. 146:4, 'His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth.' Princes as well as others must look to be dissolved into dust again. But in an especial respect are wicked men said to be of the earth, and that in contradistinction to the people of God, Rev. 13:10. God's witnesses 'tormented the dwellers upon earth;' that is, those that are out of the true church, in Antichrist's kingdom. So Rev. 13:8, 'And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb.' As, on the contrary, they that dwell in the church, are said to be in heaven: Rev. 13:6, 'And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven;' so Rev. 18:20, 'Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles.' But why are they thus characterised? Because here they flourish: Jer. 17:13, 'Their names shall be written in earth;' grow great, and of good reckoning and account here. Judas bad the bag; they 'prosper in the world.' Ps. 73:12, 'Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world.' Here they are respected: 1 John 4:5, 'They are of the world, and speak of the world, and the world heareth them.' Here their hearts and minds are, Mat. 6:19, 20. It is their natural frame to be worldly; they only savour the things of the world; preferment, honour, greatness, it is their unum magnum; here is their pleasure, and here is their portion, their hopes and their happiness. A child of God looketh for another inheritance, immortal and undefiled.

Use 1. To wean us from present things, which the wicked enjoy more than the righteous, and which certainly are but poor things in comparison of our happiness: 'Set your affections on things above, not on things in the earth,' Col. 3:2. Affect them not as your



happiness and last end: Ps. 17:14, 'Their portion is in this life.' Affect them not in competition with heavenly things, but in subordination, Mat. 6:33; affect them not inordinately, but so as to part with them when God will: Job 1:21, 'Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' Affect them not so as to use unlawful means to get them: Prov. 28:8, 'He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.' Affect them not so as to put yourselves upon the temptation of getting or keeping them by unjust means: 1 Tim. 6:9, 'But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition;' Prov. 28:20, 'He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.' Affect them not so as to be backward to good works: 'But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?' 1 John 3:17; 1 Sam. 25:11, 'Shall I take my bread, and my water, and my flesh, which I have provided for my shearers, and give it to men I know not?' Affect them not so as to neglect heavenly things; affect them not so as to lay out your whole time and care about them: Prov. 23:4, 'Cease from thine own understanding; labour not to be rich;' Isa. 55:2, 'Why do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?' But only affect them as you may honour God: Prov. 3:9, 'Honour the Lord with thy substance.' You may provide for your families in the fair lawful way of God's providence, 1 Tim. 5:8; also you may be helpful to others, Eph. 4:28; for if you so do, you are not the wicked of the earth, but those that use this world, but hope to enjoy better things.

Use 2. Let us be contented though we be kept low and mean in the world. God's people are not the children of this world; better things

are reserved for them in the world to come: and therefore, if we have food and raiment, and that but of the coarsest, let us be content: 1 Tim. 6:8, 'Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.' Jesus Christ gave thanks for five barley loaves and two fishes, Mark 6:41. The wicked are characterised to be of the earth; God's children are from above as to their original, and thither they tend as to their scope and end; and if we have anything by the way, we have no cause to complain: 1 Peter 2:11, 'I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims.' What would a man care for in a journey but a bait or a little refreshing? If we seek after more, it is inordinate affection, and must be mortified, not satisfied: Eph. 3:5, 'Mortify your members which are upon the earth.' Evil inclinations bend us to the earth, and earthly things, those splendid nothings, riches, pleasures, honours, these hinder us from nobler things; yea, they increase our difficulties about the things that are necessary for us by the way: Heb. 13:5, 'Let your conversations be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;' implying that whilst we indulge carnal desires, it is hard to trust God with daily supports, for daily protection and daily maintenance; but always distract ourselves with fruitless cares and thoughts about the things of this life. And also we may say, 'The Lord is my helper; I do not fear what man can do unto me.' Therefore let us not desire more than God alloweth: a little with God's blessing is enough to supply our necessities as to wants, and to give us protection against dangers; as the apostle subjoineth God's undertaking, and the saints' confidence thereupon by way of a cure; if we believe God's promises, and have the spirit of his saints, this is enough to us.

Use 3. Let us not envy the prosperity of the wicked.

1. They are the wicked of the earth; here they flourish; as nettles will more easily grow than choicer plants, the soil bringeth them forth of its own accord; so do wicked men thrive here: but you need not envy them; not only our hopes are much better than their possessions, but our present condition is much better, Ps. 17:14. Their possessions are not to be compared with our hopes. What is a more plentiful table to the everlasting fruition of God? the pomp of the world to the seeing God face to face? vainglory to everlasting glory? honour here to the glory that shall be upon us at Christ's appearing? their momentary pleasures, which pass away suddenly as a dream, to the everlasting pleasure you shall enjoy in the sight of God? Nay, for the present you have communion with God and the sense of his favour, how poor and afflicted soever your outward condition be: Ps. 4:6, 7, 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us: thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time when their corn and wine increased.' Carnal men rejoice in sensual earthly good things, not in the favour of God. And mark, this joy is proposed with a supposition of increase; and at the time of this increase, when the carnalist doth enjoy the greatest affluence of worldly blessings, take them at their best, when they have the most lively sense of these things, yet a Christian hath more cause of rejoicing: 'Thou hast put gladness in my heart;' here is matter and ground of rejoicing. They drink of the cistern, you of the fountain, Jer. 12:13; they rejoice not in God, but his gifts; and not the best gifts, but the common sort, riches, pleasures, and honours; and these not as the effects of God's bounty, but as happening to them in the ordinary course of second causes: 'Who will show us any good?' But you rejoice in God, in his best gifts, his love and grace. And then here is the author of this joy: 'Thou hast put gladness.' This joy is allowed by God, and wrought by him: Rom. 14:17, 'The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' It is stirred up by his Spirit; their joy is neither

God's allowance nor God's work. And then here is the subject and seat of this joy; not tickle the senses, but delight the heart: 'Thou hast put gladness in my heart.' And then here is the measure; it is more joy, it is more pure and sublime, of a stronger efficacy, which not only overcometh the sense of present infelicities, but the fear of death, hell, and judgment to come: Heb. 6:18, 'That we might have stronger consolation.' But wicked men dance about the brink of hell, have their secret gripes; and will you envy them, as if your condition were not much better? When God hath given you the feast, will you be troubled that they have the scraps and fragments of his bounty?

2. In regard of the uncertainty of their condition: Ps. 37:1, 2, 'Fret not thyself because of the evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity; for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.' Though they seem to be in a very prosperous condition for the present, as grass while it is standing is very green, yet they are soon cut down by the scythe of providence, then presently fadeth, and is carried away from the place where it grew. You think providence doth not deal righteously, because the unworthy are exalted and the worthy depressed. Do but tarry a while, and you will have no cause to complain, or to grow weary of godliness, or to cry up a confederacy with evil men. They are never nearer their own ruin than when they come to the height of their exaltation, as the sun declineth presently when he cometh to the highest point of the zenith. Who would envy those that climb up a ladder for execution? or are carried to the top of a rock, that they may be thrown down from thence to be broken in pieces? Ps. 73:18, 'Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction.'

Secondly, That the wicked of the earth are as dross. They are so in these respects:—

1. As to external show, they seem to be a part of the substance or metal, but indeed they are but the filth of the metal, which is wont to be consumed with fire, that the metal may be purged. This is fitly applied to the degenerate members of the visible church, that have only a show of the purity of religion, but are corrupt in faith and manners, ungodly and unrighteous. There are disciples in show, and disciples indeed, John 8:31; some that live, and some only that have a name to live, but indeed are dead, Rev. 3:4. There is a Jew outwardly and inwardly, of the letter and of the spirit, Rom. 2:28, 29. There are branches in Christ, by an external visible union, that bring forth no fruit, John 15:2. Some are Christians in name, by external visible communion, others by real implantation into Christ. It concerneth us to see whether we be dross or metal, living members of Christ's mystical body, or only equivocally called Christians, because of some loose profession of Christ's name.

2. Dross is intermingled with purer metal, and maketh one mass with it. The wicked and the godly live together in the visible church; they are never totally severed till the great day of separation or general judgment, when the sheep and the goats are put apart, some on Christ's right hand and some on his left. Here in the world, as in the finest metal, there is some dross, and in the same field there is chaff and corn, Mat. 13:29. We should not leave the flour for the chaff, but leave the chaff that we may be pure grain.

3. In God's esteem they are refuse, drossy, worthless things: Ezek. 22:19, 'Thus saith the Lord, Because ye are become dross,' poor, unprofitable creatures. The church and people of God, because of their excellency, are compared to gold and silver; so Rev. 1:20, 'The seven golden candlesticks.' As gold is the most precious metal, so is the church much esteemed by God, called God's jewels, Mal. 3:17; as a diamond among a heap of pebbles; God's jewels, 'of whom the

world is not worthy,' Heb. 11:38; his 'peculiar people,' Titus 2:14. God maketh no such reckoning of wicked men. Dross is cast away as good for nothing; and all the wicked of the earth are but as dross to so much good metal. But all his saints are much set by, as the filings of silver and gold are precious. What a difference is there between the judgment of God and the judgment of the world! The men of the world esteem the saints to be, 1 Cor. 4:13, 'the off-scouring and filth of all things,' as the sweeping of the city, to be cast forth to the dunghill. Whereas themselves are so indeed in God's account; but 'reprobate silver,' Jer. 6:30, or rather dross, which is the refuse of gold and silver. Therefore their contempt is not to be regarded, how great soever they be; though potentates, high in honour and place, yet if ungodly and wicked, God reckons them to be vile persons, Dan. 11:21, dross, worthless souls. Men are not valued by God for their secular interests, but moral qualifications. The potentates of the earth are not valued as his princely, but holy ones: 'The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour,' Prov. 12:26. God puts the highest price upon them, they are coin and medals who bear his own image.

4. They are consumed in trials, as dross consumeth in the fining and trying of metals. Solid metal endureth, but the dross is consumed; which holdeth true of wicked men in two respects:—(1.) Their seeming goodness is lost, and the difference is seen between them and those that are sincere. Sound and searching judgments discover hypocrites, as the lightness of a building is seen in a storm: Mat. 7:27, 'When the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, the house fell, and great was the fall of it.' so God, in the metaphor of the text, is often said to melt and try his people, Jer. 9:7, to discover the dross from pure gold. Hirelings will soon prove changelings, when God trieth them to purpose. (2.) Their imaginary felicity vanished into smoke, they perish, the meanest as well as the greatest. Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross;

they are consumed in the fire of God's wrath, and destroyed: Ezek. 22:20, 'As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you.' But of this by and by.

Use. Let us see what we are, real members of Christ's mystical body, yea or no. The wicked of the earth are as dross, and the godly are the finest sort of metals. To move you to consider what you are:—

1. Ordinarily the visible church is so mixed, that the generality thereof is unsound: Zech. 13:8, 'Two parts thereof shall be cut off and die; and I will bring the third part through the fire, and refine them as silver is refined, and try them as gold is tried.' There is but one part in three sound, and it were well the proportion were sound every where; and therefore we had need to consider who shall be saved and found faithful: Luke 13:23, 24, 'And one said unto him, Lord, are there few that shall be saved? and he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many shall seek to enter, and shall not be able.' We had need be the more earnest, because the most miscarry.

2. The trials will be searching; we must pass through the fire, and then what will become of the dross? Rev. 3:10, 'An hour of temptation shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon earth.' And, alas! are we able to brook the fiery trial? 1 Peter 4:10. Few professors will be able to abide it, when we are to part with the sweetest of our earthly comforts, yea, and it may be life itself, which maketh us capable to enjoy them. It is no strange thing that it should happen to us, 1 Peter 4:12; it is as useful as violent storms at sea or tempestuous weather in winter; when God is upon reckoning with his people, such things may be expected.

3. The best of us will be found but dross if God would deal with us in extremity; so much of corruption cleaveth to us, and so many hidden lusts do we cherish and indulge, that would soon become a root of apostasy, if God did not hold a hand of grace over us. But God will not be extreme: Isa. 48:10, 'Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction;' that is, not so thoroughly. Silver is not refined till all the dross be consumed and wrought out of it; and when should we see good day if God should so refine us?

4. They are not reckoned to dross, but metal, that walk answerable to their profession and obligations to God, as becometh his peculiar people to do; they are not satisfied 'with common mercies. A man may have the world at will, and yet be a castaway: they must have something peculiar and distinguishing: Ps. 119:132, 'Look upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do to them that love thy name;' things that can never be given in anger. They do not rest in common grace: Heb. 6:9, 'But we hope better things of you, and things that do accompany salvation;' those good moods in hypocrites and temporaries. Nor content themselves with a common conversation: 1 Cor. 3:3, 'Are ye not carnal, and walk as men?' 1 Peter 4:4, 'Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them into the same excess of riot;' Mat. 5:46, 'If you love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?' You should do something rare and singular, not in an ordinary loose rate.

Thirdly, That it is God's business in heaven to put away the wicked as dross, to sever them from the purer metal.

1. God hath many ways and means to do it. (1.) Partly by his judgments he doth it more and more: Mat. 3:12, 'His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat



into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' As the chaff from corn, so dross from metal: Isa. 4:4, 'When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughter of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof, by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning;' that is, by the judgment executed upon the evil among them: Ezek. 20:38, 'And I will purge out from among them the rebels, and them that transgress against me.' This God doth by destroying, wasting judgments. (2.) Partly by the censures of the church: 1 Cor. 5:9, 'Put away from among yourselves that wicked person.' And partly by the stroke of the civil magistrate, and their punishments: Prov. 25:4, 5, 'Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.' Thus doth God do it now, but he will fully and finally do it at the last judgment, when there shall be a perfect separation of them, and all the wicked shall be cast away as refuse: Mat. 25:32, 33, 'Before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on his left hand;' there is a congregation and then a segregation, never to meet more, nor be mingled more. Now God doth it in part, but then more fully.

2. The reasons. (1.) God doth so, lest the silver itself should be turned into dross. We are apt to corrupt one another, natural corruption within meeting with examples without: Isa. 6:5, 'Woe is me, I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips;' as a man that hath the matter of a disease prepared, coming into infectious company, is soon infected. God's choicest people have much dross in them, therefore the Lord needeth to purge out their dross. The purest church is apt to contract pollution and to degenerate, and the choice plants of the covenant-

stock to run wild, were it not for these dispensations. (2.) That impunity may not harden the wicked and encourage others. God suffereth it as long as he judgeth it expedient: Eccles. 8:11, 'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil;' Ps. 9:16, 'The Lord is known by the judgments he executeth; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.' Men sin more freely and securely when a judgment doth not presently overtake them, when sinners go on without any mark of God's vengeance; but God will in every age clear his providence, by bringing of judgments upon wicked men. (3.) The nearer they are to God, the more hateful their provocations are, and more severely punished: Amos 3:2, 'You have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.' For their sins the valley of vision is brought to barrenness. They sin against the clearest light, the dearest love, the highest engagements to the contrary; and therefore, when they are mingled among his people as dross with the silver, God putteth them away.

Use 1. To inform us that God in his judicial proceedings will distinguish; he will divide the dross from the other metal, that he may destroy the one, and preserve the other. David prayeth, Ps. 26:9, 'Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men;' that God would not lay him common with the wicked. God hath his harvest, for cutting down, for cutting and binding together those that sinned. Now David prayeth that he, that had severed himself in his course of life, might not be gathered with them in their punishment. God will distinguish; his judgments are for the destruction of the worsor sort, and the amendment of the better; when he severeth the dross, he hath a care of the silver. Though never so terrible to the wicked, still he will be comfortable to his own: 2 Peter 2:9, 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve

the unjust to the day of judgment to be punished.' His own jewel, that lieth hidden among them: when all is shaken round about them, God can hide them in the secret of his presence, and preserve them as he did Lot and Noah. His own are wonderfully preserved in common judgments; several scriptures speak to this: Eccles. 8:12, 13, 'Surely it shall be well with them that fear God, but it shall not be well with the wicked;' and Josh. 3:10, 'Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites;' Isa. 3:10, 11, 'Say unto the righteous, It shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him.' God will make a difference between good and bad.

Use 2. That a few wicked men may bring a great deal of hurt and mischief, as Achan upon Israel; two dry sticks may set a green one on fire, as the whole metal is melted that the dross may be severed.

Use 3. All judgments on the visible church are to sever the dross from the gold. God suffereth them a while to be mingled, and then come trying judgments to separate the one from the other; which is a comfort to us; the church is the purer for these judgments: Isa. 1:25, 'And I will turn my hand upon thee, and I will surely purge away thy dross, and take away thy tin.' So Mal. 3:3, 'And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.' He will send such judgments as will destroy the incorrigible wicked ones, and purify the rest. It is a comfort against persecutions. We murmur under them, know not how they shall be turned away; God, who is the purger of his church, will find out some way. And it is a comfort under his judgments; they

are not to destroy, but to purge. God intendeth only our purging, how hot soever the furnace be; therefore let God alone with his work.

Use 4. To teach us to wait upon God in the way of his judgments. He is putting away the wicked of the earth like dross; it is not only a work that he hath done, or will hereafter do, but he is always doing of it. We should observe how God hath already done it, and so by faith we should look upon him as still about it. First, he beginneth with his people; he is purging away their wickedness: Isa. 27:9, 'By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged.' 'But many shall cleave to them by flatteries, and some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them and to purge, and make them white,' Dan. 11:35. Now, when God hath employed wicked men to fan and purge his people, then their turn cometh next: Jer. 25:29, 'For lo I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by my name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished; for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth;' 1 Peter 4:17, 'If punishment begin at the house of God, where shall the wicked and ungodly appear?' Prov. 11:31, 'Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth, much more the wicked and the sinner.' When the Lord hath performed his work upon Mount Zion and Jerusalem, then he will reckon with his enemies. He beginneth with his church, and maketh an end with their enemies: his enemies drink the dregs of the cup, and their end must needs be unspeakably terrible.

Use 5. Let us see we be not put away like dross, when God's judgments are abroad in the earth: 1 Cor. 11:32, 'We are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.' We shall put that out of question if we do two things:—(1.) If we be faithful to God, and cleave to God's people, truth, and interest, how great soever our trials be: Ps. 44:17, 'All this is come upon us, yet we have not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in the covenant.' To

consume in the melting is the property of dross; but the pure metal is the more united, and cleaveth together the more closely. (2.) If you are refined by all these trials: Isa. 27:9, 'By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged.' A Christian loseth nothing by his afflictions but sin, which is better parted with than kept.

We come now to the second branch of the text, and that is the effect it had upon David's heart, 'Therefore I love thy testimonies.' This use he made of all God's judgments.

Doct. A gracious heart, that observeth the providence of God, and the course of his judicial dispensations, will find more cause to love the word of God than ever before.

1. Because thereby he hath sensible experience of the truth of it. God's providence is a comment upon his word; the effect is answerable to the prediction, and the word that God hath said is fulfilled to a tittle. Now, the more confirmation the word receiveth, the more is affection increased. The apostle telleth us that 'the word spoken by angels was steadfast,' Heb. 2:2, because every 'transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' The punishment of the transgressors of the law was a proof of God's authorising their doctrine; the same law made formerly is valid. We see the word doth not threaten in vain, and they that slight it smart for it. Now I see the word of God is to be valued, for God will make it good, even to a tittle.

2. Because if we love not the word, we may see great danger likely to ensue: even those terrible punishments by which he purgeth out the dross should make us fall in love with God's law. If we would not perish with the wicked of the earth, we should not sin with the wicked of the earth. If we partake of their sins, we must partake of their plagues: Ps. 2:12, 'Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish

from the way, if his wrath be kindled but a little: blessed are they that trust in him.' When we see the danger of being enemies to God, or unsound with him, we have need to learn this wisdom of showing all affection and reverence and respect to Christ in his ways, and submit to him heartily; there is no safety in any other course. If a spark of his wrath light upon us, how soon will it consume us! The stupid world regardeth not this, to love his ways the more God giveth out proofs of his anger against those that despise them. Many are cut off in the midway sooner than they did or could expect, and yet they do not grow one jot the wiser. It is dangerous to stand out against God, his cause, work, or people.

3. It doth endear the mercy of God to us; because he hath dealt otherwise with us, who in strict justice have deserved the same. God's judgments on the wicked commend his mercies to his children, Rom. 9:23. The vessels of wrath fitted to destruction serve to show the greater love of God to the vessels of mercy; the torments of hell inflicted on the wicked do the more set forth his love to the saints, to whom he hath appointed the joys of heaven. So the severity of God in his present judgments doth imply the love of God to his chosen people, who can take comfort in the promises when the threatenings are accomplished upon others; this might have been our condition too, but that grace hath made the difference. Well, then, as it doth endear the mercy of God to us, so it calleth upon us more highly to love and prize him and his word, because of this distinction.

4. It is not only a means to set off the love of God to us, but even his judgments upon others may be a necessary act of love to us. They are purged out as dross, that they may not infect us by their example, or molest us by their persecutions or oppressions. Now the more we are befriended in this kind, the more we are bound to serve God cheerfully: Luke 1:74, 75, 'That being delivered from the hands of our

enemies, we may serve God in righteousness and holiness all the days of our lives.' The world is one of those enemies, or the wicked of the earth; therefore we should serve him faithfully.

5. By this means we see the world is governed by God, and we may the more safely commit ourselves to his protection upon the encouragement of his promises. If the affairs of the world were governed by blind chance, and men might do what they listed without check and control, we might think that we had cleansed our hearts in vain, and that a man doth make himself a prey by the simplicity of his innocence. But when God punisheth the wicked in our sight, certainly this should teach us to be more holy in all our ways: Ps. 58:11, 'A man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.' They that knew not what to think of providence shall see there is a God in the heavens that doth wisely administer all things below; and so we are encouraged to love him and serve him more heartily. Say, as the Psalmist, 'It is good for me to draw nigh to God,' Ps. 73:28.

Use. Well, then, let our love to God, and liking and approbation of his law, be accompanied with the hatred of sin, the more we observe his judgments in putting away the wicked like dross, that we may be more holy, and seek after communion with God as our only blessedness. To this end:—

1. Let us bless God for giving a sure rule to walk by, and such promises of protection in the midst of the darkness and uncertainty of the present world. When others perish, you are safe: Isa. 8:20, 'To the law and to the testimony,' &c. Thou shalt walk in this way safely, and shalt not stumble; yea, please God, and you need not fear.

2. Let us walk exactly by this rule, since our temporal and eternal safety and happiness is concerned thereby. For the world to come it

is clear, as well as in this life: Prov. 3:1, 2, 'My son, forget not my law, but let thine heart keep my commandments; for length of days, and long life, and peace shall they add unto thee;' and Gal. 6:16, 'As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them.'

3. The more God doth own his law by his judgments, the more let our love be increased. This is to wash our feet in the blood of the wicked: Ps. 58:10, 'The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.'

## SERMON CXXXI

### **My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments.—VER. 120**

IN this psalm you find the man of God under divers passions, sometimes of joy, sometimes of sorrow, sometimes of hope and courage, and sometimes of fear. As there is a time for all things in this world, there are several conditions and duties that we run through, and we have affections planted in us that suit with every condition. Religion doth not nullify, but sanctify our affections. Some have vainly thought affections to be an after-growth of noisome weeds in our nature corrupted; whereas they are wholesome herbs, implanted in us by God at our first creation, of great use to grace when rightly stirred and ordered: *Anima nunquam melius agit, &c.* The passion expressed in the text is fear; for two or three verses his meditations had been taken up in the observation of God's judgments upon evil-doers: 'Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes; for their deceit is falsehood' (ver. 118). They were once high, but God hath brought them down with ignominy and contempt; they had borne themselves out in their sinful courses on



account of their prosperity, but at length they are utterly ruined and broken. And why? 'For their deceit is falsehood;' that is, they were unmasked, and all their pretences of piety and justice found to be fraud and imposture. In ver. 119 he still insisteth upon the same argument: 'Thou putteth away all the wicked of the earth like dross; therefore I love thy testimonies.' They seemed to cleave to the church and people of God as dross to gold or silver. That God, who is the purger and refiner of his church, failed not to put a difference, and to consume the dross and refine his silver. The use that David made of these judgments was twofold:—(1.) To love God's ways so much the more, and to cleave to them with greater firmness, 'Therefore I love thy testimonies. (2.) To fear before the Lord, and tremble at the Lord's judgments, as in the text. There are two affections wherein we should always seek to profit—the love of God and the fear of God. Of this last in the text, 'My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments.' In which words we have—

1. The degree of his fear, my flesh trembleth.
2. The object of his fear, for fear of thee.
3. The ground and reason of his fear, I am afraid of thy judgments.

1. The degree of his fear, 'My flesh trembleth.' The word *samar* St Hierome rendereth, *horrivilavil caro mea*—my flesh is in horror and affrightment. Symmachus before him, *ὀρθοτριχεῖ ἀπὸ τοῦ φόβου ἡ σὰρξ μου*—my flesh maketh my hair stand on end, as the prickles of a hedgehog, which is an emblem of horror. The poet Persius expresseth such an affrightment thus, *Excussit membris tremor albus aristas*—my fear made my hair stand up like a field of corn, from the contraction of the skin. So it happeneth in cases of fear. You have the like expression, Job 4:14, 15, 'Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake; the hair of my flesh

stood up.' And elsewhere the same word is so used. The Septuagint reads it imperatively, καθήλωσον ἐκ τοῦ φόβου τὰς σαρκὰς μου, ἀπὸ γὰρ τῶν κριμάτων σου ἐφοβήθην—pierce through my flesh with fear, as with nails. Surely it noteth some deep sense and high degree of fear; as the prophet Habakkuk expresseth upon like occasion, Hab. 3:15, 'When I heard this, my belly trembled, my lips quivered, rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in my flesh;' his bowels did beat and shake for fear, and his lips quivered for fear, that he could not speak. The judgments of God ought to beget a deep sense and trembling, not a slight affection in us. The prophet saith, Amos 3:8, 'The lion roareth; who will not fear?' We have need to stir up our hearts again and again. When the Lord roareth and cometh forth to judgment, we have need be ashamed of our stupidity when we are not affected.

2. The object of his fear, 'For fear of thee.' It was not the fear of man that put him into such an agony and consternation. We are always dissuaded from the fear of man, but we are exhorted to the fear of God: Mat. 10:28, 'And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him that is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.' The one is a snare—Prov. 29:25, 'The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe'—but the other is a duty. The great preservation of the soul from spiritual dangers is the fear of God. We are *tuti si cauti, securi si attoniti*, saith Tertullian—the fear of God maketh us circumspect, and so bringeth safety to us; yea, the one is the cure of the other, Isa. 8:12, 13. As one nail driveth out another, or as Moses' rod did eat up the rods of the magicians, so doth the fear of God against all contrary fears and terrors, whereby the heart may be turned from God. Man can only kill the body, but God can cast both soul and body into hell-fire; so that we may set God against man, soul and body against the body only, and hell-fire against temporal punishment. As that holy

man said, *Da veniam, imperator, tu carcerem comminaris, Deus autem comminatur Gehennam*—thou threatenest bonds, and imprisonment, he threateneth everlasting damnation; therefore it is God is to be feared: Ps. 76:7, 'Thou, even thou, are to be feared; and who can stand in thy sight when thou art angry?' Not man, in comparison of God. Man against man may stand, and wicked men in the time of his patience may stand; but when God judgeth, who can stand? Now of God there is a double fear—filial, which draweth us to him; and servile, which driveth us from him: Exod. 20:20, 'And Moses said unto the people, Fear not, for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your face, that ye sin not.' Fear not with a slavish fear, but an awful fear, composed of reverence and love.

3. The ground of his fear, 'I am afraid of thy judgments.' The great severity which God did exercise in punishing the evil-doers, and purging out the dross. When God doth smite the wicked and call them to an account for sin, he warneth his own people to stand in awe. As here, 'Thou putttest away the wicked like dross. When the threatening is made good, and terrible judgments are abroad, every one needeth to look to himself; not only to love God's testimonies, but to stand in awe of his judgments. We need all affections to keep us within our duty, both fear and love.

Doct. That when God is angry, and his judgments are abroad in the world, it becometh his own people to observe them, and have a deep awe and sense thereof.

Here I shall show you—

1. How far the people of God do and ought to take notice of his judgments.

2. This fear that is wrought thereby, whether it be an infirmity or a duty.

3. The reasons why it becometh them to have a deep awe and sense of these things.

For the first:—

1. His ancient judgments in former times ought to be laid to heart by us, especially when like sins abound. The scripture referreth to the days of Lot and Noah, and biddeth us remember Lot's wife, Luke 17:26–32. God biddeth his people, 'But go ye now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people Israel,' Jer. 7:12. And the apostle tells us that all the punishments that befell the stubborn Israelites are for our caution and warning: 1 Cor. 10:1–10, 'And all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come;' so he concludeth in ver. 11. And the apostle tells us that Sodom and Gomorrah were 'an example to those that after should live ungodly,' 2 Peter 2:6. A people might easily read their own doom and destiny if they would blow off the dust from these ancient providences, and mark the prints of God's justice and truth in them, and how the word of God was verified upon them, for these are but copies and patterns. The desert of sin is still the same, and the exactness of divine justice remaineth still the same. These providences are pledges of the same wrath, of the like for substance to come upon us also, if we walk contrary to God. Others have smarted, why not we? God is impartially and immutably just: Gal. 3:20, 'He is but one;' always consonant unto himself, like unto himself; his power is the same, so is his justice; and therefore we should take warning: Exemplo qui peccat, bis peccat. He that will plunge himself in a bog or quagmire,

where others have miscarried before him, is doubly guilty of folly, because he neither feareth nor will take warning by their example. This is one great benefit we have by the historical part of the word, that it doth not only preserve the memory of the saints, that we may imitate their graces and enjoy their blessings, but also records the sins and punishments of the wicked, that we may know God hath owned the historical part of the word, and fear for ourselves: Heb. 2:1, 2, 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward;' Rom. 1:18, 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.' So the historical parts are also to justify the prophetic. It is not only a register and chronicle of what is past, but a calendar and prognostication of what is to come. God might have blotted out the memory of sinners, that it should be no more thought or heard of, but he would secure it upon record for our learning; as some malefactors, their bodies are not buried, but quarters set upon places of greatest resort: *Ut qui vivi noluerunt prodesse, morte eorum respublica utatur;* or as Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt, to season after ages. So that our flesh may tremble at the old judgments, that Adam for one sin was turned out of paradise, the old world swept away with a flood, Dathan and Abiram swallowed up of the earth, Achitophel and Judas brought to the halter, Herod eaten up with worms for his pride; and all these have their use.

2. Judgments that light upon other countries ought to be made use of by us, because usually they go in a circuit; the cup of trembling goeth round, Jer. 25:32; and because by this means we may learn to be wise, and have all our schooling at other men's costs. As God

expresseth it, Zeph. 3:6, 7, 'I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate: I made their streets waste, that none passed by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, none inhabitant. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, however I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings.' God would have us take warning at a distance, and, while he is yet a great way off, to send for conditions of peace; otherwise it is a new provocation, and the judgment is hastened, Jer. 3:7–10. A fire in one house alarmeth all the street: and they make provision for their safety.

3. When the judgments of God break in among us, and are executed before our eyes, that must be the more considered: Isa. 26:9, 'When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.' God looketh to be more revered and obeyed for this, because then what was before matter of faith is made matter of sense; and we need not doubt any more whether God will punish the disobedient when his threatening is made good. Smoke is a sign of fire, much more when the fire is breaking out; and we see what we only heard before, and we feel what we would not believe before.

4. Though we should be well at ease in our own persons, yet the judgments upon others should be considered by us. Nehemiah, chap. 1, preferred at court, yet hath a sad resentment of the state of Jerusalem. So Daniel, chap. 9:5, a great man in Babylon, yet layeth to heart the judgments upon the people of God.

5. Though the judgment pursue but a few, yet all should fear. When Ananias and Sapphira fell down dead, it is said, Acts 5:5, 'That great fear fell upon all that heard these things.' God, in one or a few, giveth an instance of his severity that others may tremble; as it is said of David, when the breach was made upon Uzzah, 1 Chron. 13:12, 'And

David was afraid of God that day, saying, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?' The sin was Uzzah's, the breach only upon him, but the stroke was God's, and that maketh David tremble. Yea, the pagan mariners, when divine vengeance had pursued Jonah, chap. 1:16, 'Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord, and made vows.' The danger was for Jonah's sake; when he was thrown overboard, there was a calm; but the men feared greatly.

6. Though it should light upon enemies to us and God, yet their fall is not to be insulted over, but God's hand observed with great reverence: 'Thou putteth away the wicked of the earth like dross;' then 'my flesh trembleth,' saith David. So in Ps. 76:6, 7, 'At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and the horse are cast into a deep sleep. Thou, even thou, art to be feared; and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?' We ought to express a sense of our Father's displeasure, as a child quaketh when he heareth his father is angry with or doth correct a servant. Naturalists say a lion will tremble to see a dog beaten before him: Ps. 52:6, 'The righteous also shall see and fear.' The godly will be wise observers of God's work and dispensations of justice, and the spiritual advantage they may gain thereby: Prov. 21:12, 'The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked, and that God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.' Holy men do exceedingly profit by these judgments.

7. Much more should we tremble at God's judgments upon his own people, when he cometh to visit their iniquities with rods and their transgressions with scourges. If this be done in the green tree, what in the dry? 'If judgment begin at the house of God, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?' 1 Peter 4:18. Many times they are broken with a great breach and heavy corrections: Jer. 25:17, 'Then I

took the cup at the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to drink.' His own people sip of the bitter cup that others drank the dregs of. The world shall know that he is a God hating sin, and therefore will punish them for it, lest he should seem to approve their sin. Though God doth not condemn his people to hell for their sin, yet by his sharp corrections of them in this life the world shall know how much he hateth sin; especially when they have made the name of God to be evil spoken of. God will vindicate himself. Now these should make us tremble; they are ordered for this purpose.

Secondly, I shall inquire what this fear is, an infirmity or a duty. To many, to fear judgments seemeth slavish, and thereupon build a false conceit, that God only is to be feared for his mercies and not for his judgments. Indeed 'God is feared for his goodness,' Hosea 3:5, but not only. Judgments are the object of fear; and the fear conversant about them may be so far from being a sin that it is a grace. Briefly, then, it is not such a fear as driveth us from God, Gen. 3:5, but bringeth us to him, keepeth us with him: 'I will put my fear into their hearts, and they shall never depart from me,' Jer. 32:40. They are afraid both to sin and to suffer for sin. Afraid to sin, and so it is the fear of caution and circumspection. Certainly it can be no fault to be afraid of that which deserveth punishment or judgment; and afraid to suffer for sin in this world, where all things come alike to all; and in the world to come, where God will stir up all his wrath. But to fear punishment, is not this servile? No, it is not. First, if it keep its proportion; and doth not exceed its limits, driving us into a despairing anguish, such as the devil's is, James 2:19. Secondly, if it have its spiritual use and end, which is the main and principal thing, which is to make us cleave the closer to God: Jer. 32:40, 'But I will put my fear into their hearts, and they shall not depart from me.' Or, thirdly, if it be subordinate, which is to make us cautelous and watchful against sin, or such things as may occasion these



judgments, fleeing from wrath to come, Mat. 3:7, and to use the means for our preservation with the more diligence, Heb. 11:7.

Thirdly, The reasons.

1. Because a tender heart is easily affected with all God's dispensations; one of the great and first privileges of grace is a heart of flesh, Ezek. 36:26. Wicked men have a heart of stone, a stout, obstinate, stupid spirit; but when God's hand is upon their persons they have no sense: Jer. 9:3, 'Thou hast smitten them, but they have not grieved.' But God's children have a heart of flesh, that trembleth at his word, and at judgments at a distance: they are soon affected with a providence. This tenderness, as it is wrought in them by grace at the first, so it is increased by their acquaintance with God and experiences of his love. Familiarity with men breedeth contempt; familiarity with God not so. None are moved with reverence to the Lord more than they that know him best, and are most familiar with him. None rejoice more than they when they find God is pleased and giveth out demonstrations of grace to the world. None fear more than they when God is angry: Ps. 90:11, 'Who knoweth the power of thine anger? According to thy fear, so is thy wrath.' The world think not of God's anger till they feel the terrible effects of it; but God's children, that have a deep awe of God, and observe him in all his motions, have the greatest apprehensions of his displeasure.

2. It is the property of God's children, when they look to anything without them, still to draw home the providence, and consider their own case, and to edify themselves by that they see in others, whether it be good or evil. *Electorum corda semper ad se sollicite videant*, saith Gregory. When Uzzah was stricken, 'How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?' saith David, 1 Chron. 13:12. Will not God be as severe to me, if I behave myself unreverently? He observed how

failing about holy things did much incense God's wrath: Gal. 6:13, 'Ye which are spiritual, restore such a one with meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted,' They that rigidly and uncharitably censure others, are usually greatest strangers to their own hearts; but a man that draweth all things home, knoweth that if God should let loose temptations upon him, he may be as bad as others. A man that usually reflects upon himself will be afraid, and will not reflect on the judgments executed on others, but tremble. Nunquid ego tali? &c., was a good question in a heathen. If God should visit my transgressions, I have broken his laws, and deserve as great a punishment. A spirit of application is a great advantage. Our Lord telleth others, Luke 13:5, ye shall likewise perish, without repentance. David was afraid lest he should be cast away with the dross, because they love not God's testimonies; therefore he would not only love his testimonies, but also fear his judgments. Carnal men forget themselves when they are so bitter against others.

3. The usefulness of this fear showeth it is their duty. It is very necessary—

[1.] To stir up watchfulness and care for our own safety, that we may not fall into like offences, or do anything that is displeasing to God, lest we fall into his vengeance. We are hidden to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, Phil. 2:12. We have to do with a just and holy God, who is tender of his laws. Now, this fear should be more active and lively when we see his judgments executed, for then God is ready at hand with a whip to awaken us, and to show us he will not be dallied with, and that danger attendeth us, when we begin to straggle out of our duty. He that breaketh through a hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Fear is the great restraint of sin, as the fear of man keepeth the beasts from hurting him, Gen. 9:2; it is their bridle:

'The fear of you shall be upon the beasts of the field.' So fear of God helps to keep from offending him, or breaking his laws.

[2.] To humble us, when we see that sin shall not escape unpunished. Alas! if God should enter into judgment with us, who could stand? Ps. 143:2. *Non dicit cum hostibus tuis, sed cum servo tuo.* He doth not say, If thou shouldest enter into judgment with thine enemy, but with thy servant. God is a just judge, and therefore, when we see judgments executed upon others, we may be afraid of his righteousness. Every humble heart is conscious to himself of grievous offences; and if God, when he cometh to purge out dross, should be severe with us, what miserable wretched creatures should we be! This striketh a holy fear into our hearts, and so helps us to humble ourselves in his presence.

[3.] To make us thankful for our mercies and gracious escape. It is fear that maketh us taste the sweetness of the promise of free pardon, when we see from what miseries we are delivered by the mercy of God. When the Israelites had seen the Egyptians drowned in the water, they saw they had cause to triumph in the God of their salvation, Exod. 15:1, 2. The consideration of our defects is in part represented to us in the bitter experience of others; there we may see what dangers we are liable unto, were it not for his preventing grace, that we are not condemned with the world, and left to perish in our sins.

[4.] To quicken and sharpen our prayers. God knoweth how to take vengeance on all iniquity, even in his dearest servants: Joel 2:17, 'Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach.' Sparing is an act of God's mercy, withdrawing and moderating deserved judgments. Now the more our fear is increased, the more

earnest and importunate will we be to keep off or get the judgment removed.

Use. Reproof of the greatest part of the world, that pass by God's judgments, and take no notice of them, so as to fear and return to him; not his judgments upon others. When the arrows of God fly round about us, we should fear for ourselves, and when wrath is making inquisition for sinners, be the more earnest to be found in Christ. But a senseless stupidity possesseth most men; they mind none of these things. The Gibeonites were more wise and cautious, Josh. 9:3, 4. When they saw the cities of Jericho and Ai destroyed, and their inhabitants cut off by the sword, they did not expect the coming of Joshua, but sent messengers to him, and by a wile struck up a covenant with him, before he came any further. Or as that captain, when two before him with their fifties were destroyed by fire, he fell upon his knees before the prophet, 2 Kings 1:13, 14, saying, 'O man of God, let my life and the life of these fifty thy servants be precious in thy sight. Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties, with their fifties; therefore let my life be precious in thy sight.' But oh! our blindness and stupidness! though others fall under the judgment of God, we are as immovable as rocks, and do not fall down before the Lord to deprecate his anger. Certainly if we had a due sense of our condition, we are as worthy as they; it is by the mercy of God that yet we stand. Therefore we should fear with a holy fear, that we may bridle the flesh, humble ourselves before the Lord, be thankful for our safety, and be earnest in prayer: this we should do when we see any others in afflictions. Again, when judgments are on ourselves, when God cometh nearer to us, and beginneth to touch us with his hand, we should relent presently. To be sinning and suffering is the condition of the damned in hell. The Holy Ghost sets a brand upon Ahaz: 2 Chron. 28:22, 'That in the time of his distress he did yet

trespass more and more against the Lord; this is that king Ahaz.' If we keep our pride, luxury, vanity, wantonness still, our avarice, coldness in religion, Sabbath profanation, if we be not brought by all our afflictions to fear God the more, such a brand will he put upon us, yea, our judgments will be increased, and the furnace heated seven times hotter; as when the child is stubborn and obstinate, the father redoubleth his strokes. Therefore we are to beg his Spirit with his rod, that we may be the better by all his corrections: Numb. 12:14, 'If her father had spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days?' So if our heavenly Father be displeased and casts contempt upon us, &c.

Use 2. It reproveth those that triumph over the fallen, and declaim and inveigh against their sins, but do not consider their own. We should rather tremble and learn to fear from every judgment executed, though upon the worst of men, and say, Well, God is a righteous God, and whosoever provoketh him to wrath shall not escape unpunished. But this ἐπιχαιρεκακία, this insulting over and upbraiding others with their evil and afflicted condition, is a sin which God cannot endure, and will certainly punish: Prov. 17:5, 'And he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.' If God hath stricken them, and the hand of justice found them out, we should be tender to them: Prov. 24:17, 18, 'Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth; lest the Lord see it and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.' Some read it, Et convertat iram suam in te—he turn his wrath upon thee. Thine enemy is not he that thou hatest, for a Christian should hate nobody, but he that hateth thee. If we rejoice in their evil, certainly it is a sign we hate them, however we please ourselves with the thoughts of forgiving them. As not when he falleth, so not when he stumbleth, not at lesser evils that befall them. Many will say they do not wish their destruction, but a little evil they could be glad

of; which showeth how rare true piety is. God will give him like advantage against thee; as the leprosy of Naaman doth cleave to Gehazi. David, when he heard of the death of Saul, rent his clothes and wept and fasted, 2 Sam. 1:11, 12. Therefore, to feed our eyes with the misery and torment of others, is no holy affection. Job disclaimed it: Job 31:29, 'If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him, neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul.' Revenge is sweet to carnal nature, but such a disposition as that cannot or should not find room in a gracious heart. To evidence his integrity, Job produceth this vindication. Though they that hate us be our worst enemies, and should have spirits steeped in bitterness and wormwood against us, yet ought we not to rejoice at the misery of an enemy. Yea, to mourn at their fall becometh us more, if we would act as Christians; and to fear because of it is an act of piety. Therefore this old leaven of malice and revenge must be purged out, this being inwardly delighted, when we hear of the fall of those that hate us. When thine enemy falleth, consider, Either I myself am like him, or worse, or better than he. If better, who made thee to differ? If worse, thou hast cause to wonder thou art spared, and to fear before the Lord. Let us therefore observe the judgments of God executed according to his word. Lactantius telleth us, Quod non metuitur, contemnitur, quod contemnitur utique non colitur. If the wrath of God be not feared, it is contemned; and if God be contemned, he cannot be worshipped.

## **SERMON CXXXII**

## **I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors.—VER. 121**

HERE is—

1. David's plea.
2. His prayer.

First, His plea, 'I have done judgment and justice.' *Defensio est, non arrogancia*, saith Ambrose; he doth not speak this boasting or trusting in his own righteousness, but by way of apology and just defence: it is no pleading of merit, as if God were his debtor; but an asserting of his innocency against slanderers. There is *justitia personæ*, the righteousness of the person; and *justitia causæ*, the righteousness of the cause wherein any one is engaged. We may propound the justice of our cause to God as the judge of the earth, and appeal to him how innocently we suffer, when we are not able to plead the righteousness of our persons as to a strict and legal qualification: Ps. 143:2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.' Well, then, David pleadeth the equity and justice of his cause, and his right behaviour therein. They cannot condemn him of any unrighteousness and injustice, and yet endeavour to oppress him; therefore he pleads, Lord, thou knowest where the right lieth, so far as concerneth their slanders, I appeal to thee for my integrity and sincerity; thou knowest that I have given up myself to do just and right things; though they are thus forward to mischief, I have done them no wrong; 'hear me, O God of my righteousness,' Ps. 4:1. They that look to be protected by God must look that they have a good cause, and handle that cause well, otherwise we make him the patron of sin.

When we suffer as evil-doers, it is the devil's cross, not Christ's, that we take up.

But let us see how David expresseth his innocency, 'I have done judgment and justice.' These two words are often joined together in scripture. When God is spoken of, it is said of him, Ps. 33:5, 'He loveth righteousness and judgment;' and in the 2 Sam. 8:15, it is said that 'David executed judgment and justice over all Israel.' Muis distinguisheth them thus, *Judicium adversus sceleratos, justitia erga bonos*—judgment in punishing the wicked, justice in rewarding the good. Besides that David speaketh not here as a king, but as a poor oppressed man, the words will hardly admit of that notion. Some think they are only put to increase the sense: I have done judgment justly, exactly. I suppose the one referreth to the law or rule itself, according to which every one is to do right—that is, judgment, a clear knowledge of what ought to be done; the other referreth to the action that followeth thereupon. So that judgment is a doing of what we know, and acting according to received light: Ezek. 18:5, 'Do that which is lawful and right;' it is in the margin, *Do judgment and justice*. Now when this is attributed to public persons, judgment signifieth due order in trying and finding out the state of a cause; and justice the giving out sentence on that trial and judgment, or causing justice to be executed for righting the wronged and punishing the wrong-doer. When to private men, the one implies the direction of conscience, the other the rectitude of our actions. By judgment we discern between right and wrong, and by justice doing things justly according to the rule. Thus it is said, Ps. 106:3, 'Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doth righteousness at all times.' There is another notion of these two words, which I had almost forgotten:—(1.) Judgment seemeth to be opposite to rigour and extremity, and seemeth to import equitable carriage, mixed with mercy and moderation in exacting our own from others. Certainly, so judgment



is sometimes taken, Jer. 10:24, 'O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.' (2.) Justice is just and faithful, dealing in and about those things which we owe to others, or are employed about, or are intrusted with by others.

Doct. It is a comely property in God's children, and very comfortable to them, to do judgment and justice.

1. It is an excellent property—

[1.] Because by it we are made like God. Righteousness is part of God's image, and herein we do most resemble his perfection: Ps. 145:5, 'The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.' There is a perfect holiness in his nature, and a condecency in all his actions. Therefore it is God-like in us when our natures are sanctified, and all our actions are righteous and holy. It is said, Eph. 4:24, 'That the new man is created after God in righteousness and true holiness,' according to the pattern of God, much like to him: they that are most so, are most like him. Natural conscience doth homage to the image of God: Mark 6:20, 'And Herod feared John, knowing he was a just man.'

[2.] It is acceptable and pleasing to God. The just man is an object of God's complacency: Prov. 15:9, 'The Lord loveth him that followeth after righteousness.' God loveth all his creatures with a general love, but with a special love those that bear his image. He doth not love men because they are rich and mighty, fair and beautiful, valiant and strong, but as holy and just. It is said, Prov. 21:3, 'To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.' God hath required both, and we should make conscience of both; but yet the one is better than the other, though the one be a duty of the first table, the other of the second, because moral and substantial duties

are better than ceremonial, internal before external, and duties evident by natural light before things of positive institution. It appeareth in this, that God doth accept of moral duties without ceremonial observances, 'For in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him,' Acts 10:35. But ceremonial observances without moral duties are of no account in God's sight: he still rejecteth their offerings when they neglect justice; not thousands of rams and rivers of oil, but to show mercy, and to do justly, Micah 6:7, 8, this is good. Again, he dispenseth with the ceremonials and the externals of religion when they come in competition with moral duties, even of the second table; as David's eating the shew-bread when he was hungry, Mat. 12:5. Well, then, how right and punctual soever we be in other things, unless we show mercy and do justice, we are not accepted with God, though zealous for and against ceremonies of the stricter party in religion. It is true we cannot say they are better than faith and love, and the fear of God, and hope in his grace, for these are the substantial duties of the first table. And compare substantials with substantial, *de ordine modus*, first-table duties are more weighty. But compare internals of the second with externals of the first, moral duties of the second with the ceremonies of the first, natural and evident with the merely positive and instituted; these latter are more weighty. Give to God what is God's, and to men what is men's.

[3.] Because it fitteth for communion with God. When you are just and righteous, you may call for and look for such blessings as you stand in need of; for the righteous have an easy access to him, and are sure of audience: Ps. 17:15, 'But as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.' I cannot behold the face of Saul, he will not see my face; but this comforts me, that I can behold thy face. Lord, thou wilt look upon me, and be gracious to me, and hear my prayers. Otherwise God will not hear the unjust, as he saith he would not

accept of their peace-offerings, till 'judgment ran down as a river, and righteousness as a mighty stream, Amos 5:23, 24, and rejects the Jewish fasts, Isa. 58., because they did not loose the oppressed, &c. On the other side, he hath assured the protection of his providence to him that is just: Isa. 33:15, 16, 'He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly, he that despiseth the gain of oppression, and shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high, his place of defence shall be the munition of rocks; bread shall be given him, and his water shall be sure.' God will minister to him sure comforts and sure supplies. They that walk in a continual course of righteousness and just dealing of all sorts shall be as safe as if in a fort impregnable, not to be taken by any force, and sufficiently furnished with store of provisions to hold out any siege; a high craggy place is such. Bread and water are tokens of God's full and final deliverance: Isa. 51:1, 'Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness.' None must look to be thus qualified but the righteous.

[4.] It is so suitable to the new nature as fruits to such a tree. What is works meet for repentance? Acts 26:20, 'That they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance;' and 'bring forth fruits meet for repentance,' Mat. 3:8. They are the kindly products of faith in Christ and repentance towards God. It is as unsuitable to those that are gracious to be unjust, as that the egg of a crow should drop from a hen, or venomous berries should grow upon a choice vine. That grace that is put into our hearts, which maketh us submissive and dutiful to God, doth also make us kind and harmless to men. These things are required of us as the fruits of true faith and repentance: Isa. 1:16, 17, 'Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless,

plead for the widow.' This is particularly insisted upon as the proper fruit of their change. So Dan. 4:27, 'Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor.' Repentance is a breaking off the former course of sin. The king, an open oppressor, Daniel preacheth righteousness and mercy to him. They that continue their former unjust courses never yet truly repented: Zech. 8:16, 17, 'These are the things that ye shall do, Speak ye every man truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates, and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord.' He would have their repentance thus expressed.

[5.] Because it is so lovely and venerable in the eyes of the world. A Christian, if he had no other engagement upon him, yet, for the honour of God and the credit of religion, he should do those things that are lovely and comely in themselves, and so esteemed by the world, for he is to glorify God, 1 Peter 2:12, and adorn religion, Titus 2:10, to represent his profession with advantage to the consciences of men. God is dishonoured by nothing so much as injustice, which is so odious and hateful to men; and wicked men are hardened, the hopeful discouraged, atheism prevaieth: Neh. 5:9, 'Also I said, It is not good that ye do; ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?' On the contrary, when we give every one their due, we bring honour to God and credit to religion; you can the better hold up the profession of it against contradiction, hold up head before God and man. Now justice is so lovely, partly as it is a stricture of the image of God, as before, in which respect it is said, Prov. 12:26, 'The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.' Men are convinced that he is a more perfect man, fitter to be trusted, as being one that will deal faithfully. And

partly because the welfare of human society is promoted by such things: Titus 3:8, 'These things are good and profitable for men.'

[6.] And indeed that is my last reason; it conduceth so much to the good of human society. A Christian is a member of a double community—of the church and of the world; the one in order to eternal life, the other in order to the present life; as a man, and as a Christian. Without justice what would the world be but a den of thieves? Remove justitiam, &c., saith St Augustine. The world cannot subsist without justice: 'The king's throne is established by righteousness,' Prov. 16:10. The nation gets honour and reputation by it abroad: Prov. 14:34, 'Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.' Never did the people of the Jews, nor any other nation whose history is come to our ears, flourish so much as when they were careful and exact in maintaining righteousness. And as to persons, all commerce between man and man is kept up by justice. And if this be a truth, that God, and not the devil, doth govern the world, and distribute rewards and the blessings of this life, surely then justice, which is a compliance with God's will, is the way to be exalted, and to live well in the world, and not lying, cozening, and dissembling.

2. It is very comfortable to us to be just. The comfort of righteousness is often spoken of in scripture: Prov. 29:6, 'In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare; but the righteous doth sing and rejoice;' whatever befalleth him, good or evil, much or little, in life or death. Good or evil; if good, he hath comfort in his portion, because what he hath he hath by the fair leave and allowance of God's providence: Prov. 13:25, 'The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul;' he hath enough, because he hath what God seeth fit for him; he hath enough to supply his wants, enough to satisfy his desires; sometimes it is much, sometimes it is little. It is much sometimes, for they are

under the blessing of the promise: Deut. 16:20, 'That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.' Justice shalt thou follow; if you will take care for that, God will take care to bless you. If it be little, that little is better than more gotten by fraud and injustice: Prov. 16:8, 'Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right;' Prov. 15:16, 17, 'Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure, and trouble therewith;' though it be but a dinner of herbs: Ps. 37:16, 'A little that a righteous man hath is better than the treasures of many wicked.' The comfort, if they will stand to the scriptures, lieth not in abundance, but in God's blessing. There is more satisfaction in their small provisions than in the greatest plenty. Suppose their condition be evil, whatsoever evil a just man suffers, he shall get some good by it, living or dying, and so still hath ground of comfort: if scorned or neglected, he hath the comfort of his innocent dealing to bear him out. As Samuel, when he and his house was laid aside, 1 Sam. 12:2, 3, he appeals to them, 'Whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or from whose hands have I received a bribe to blind mine eyes therewith, and I will restore it?' If you are opposed and maligned, you may plead against your enemies as Moses did, Num. 16:15, 'Respect not their offerings; I have not taken an ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.' You may plead thus when you are sure you have not wronged them. If you are oppressed, as David in the text, you may appeal to the God of your righteousness. In life, in death, they have the comfort of their righteousness; in life, Deut. 16:20, as before. In death; Prov. 14:32, 'The righteous man hath hope in his death;' Isa. 38:3, 'Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, that I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.' When he is going the way of all the earth, this will be a comfort to him, that he hath done no wrong, hut served God faithfully, and

lived with men without guile and deceit. Oh, for comforts for a dying hour! Now this comfort ariseth partly from a good conscience, and partly from the many promises of God that are made to righteousness.

[1.] From peace of conscience. We are told, Prov. 15:15, 'That a good conscience is a continual feast.' Ahasuerus made a magnificent feast, that lasted a hundred and eighty days; but this is a continual feast, a dish we are never weary of. Now, who have this feast? The crooked, the subtle, the deceitful? No; but those that walk with a simple and plain-hearted honesty: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.' They have comfort in all conditions: Acts 24:16, 'Herein do I exercise myself always, to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.' Others are like trees of the forest, every wind shaketh them; but they are the garden of God: Cant. 4:16, 'Awake, O north wind; blow, O south wind, upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.' Out of what corner soever the wind bloweth, it bloweth good to them.

[2.] Partly from the many promises of God, both as to the world to come and this present life. For the world to come, the question is put, Ps. 15:1, and it were well we would often put it to our hearts, 'Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?' It is answered, 'He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth with his heart, that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour;' a man that maketh conscience of all his words and actions. So the apostle telleth us, in the new heavens and new earth there dwelleth righteousness, 2 Peter 3:13. Then, for this world there are many promises: take a taste; this bringeth profit, and is only profitable: Prov. 10:2, 'Treasures of wickedness profit nothing,

but righteousness delivereth from death.' Men think to do anything with wealth, and that naked honesty may be a-cold; they have food and physic, friends and honour; alas! how soon can God blow upon an estate and make it useless to us—make a man vomit up again his ill-gotten morsels! Job 20:15, 'He hath, swallowed down riches, and shall vomit them up again: God shall cast them out of his belly.' As a man that hath eaten too much, though God permit him to get, he doth not permit him to hold what he hath gotten unjustly. There is a flaw in the title will one time or other cast them out of possession. Well, then, riches profit not. But what is profitable? 1 Tim. 4:8, 'Godliness is profitable to all things.' And this part of godliness, righteousness, that will prolong life, and bring a blessing upon the soul of the righteous: Prov. 10:3, 'The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish; but he casteth away the substance of the wicked.' Another promise; it bringeth preservation in times of difficulty and danger; he that hath carried it righteously, they know not how to lay hold upon him, and work him any mischief: Prov. 11:3, 'The integrity of the upright shall guide him, but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.' So again, Prov. 13:6, 'Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way, but wickedness overthroweth the sinner.' It is God keepeth us, but the qualification of the person kept is to be observed, it is he that is just and honest. We think it is the way to danger, because the eye of the flesh is more perspicuous than the eye of the spirit or mind; and we are more apt to see what is, and who is against us, than what and who is for us: Ps. 25:21, 'Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait on thee.' That which, in the judgment of the flesh, is the means of our ruin, is indeed the means of our preservation. So Isa. 33:15, 'He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly,' &c. Again, for recovery out of trouble: Prov. 24:15, 16, 'Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting-place; for the just man falleth seven times, and riseth up



again; but the wicked shall fall into mischief.' They may be 'persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.' There are strange changes of providence; we are up and down, but shall rise again; with the wicked it is not so. Again, for stability: Prov. 10:4, 5, 'As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more; but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.' Wicked men, being great in power, rend and tear all things, and bring down all things before them; but they have no foundation: the one is fleeting as the wind, the other is settled as the earth. So Prov. 12:3, 'A man shall not be established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous shall not be moved.' Wicked men get up, seem high for the time, but they have no root, therefore soon wither: they have no root, as that ambassador, when he saw the treasure of St Mark, said, This hath no root. All their policies, secret friendships, shall never be able to keep them up. Ahab was told that God would root out him and all his family; he thought to avoid this threatening; gets many wives and concubines, by whom he hath seventy children, hoping that one of them would remain to succeed him; he committed their tutelage and education to the choicest of his nobility, men of Samaria, a strong town; but you see all this came to nought, 2 Kings 10. So Prov. 10:30, 'The righteous shall never be moved, but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.' Every man that is in good estate would fain make it as firm and lasting as he can; these settle polities, contract friendships, use all means to make their acquisitions firm and secure, but pass by the main care, which is to settle things upon a righteous foundation, and therefore they shall not flourish. So for posterity: Prov. 11:21, 'The seed of the righteous shall be delivered.' so Prov. 12:7, 'The wicked are overthrown and are not, but the house of the righteous shall stand; Prov. 20:7, 'The just man walketh in his integrity; his children are blessed after him.' All our care is for posterity, man multiplied, continued; in short, all manner of blessings: Prov. 21:21, 'He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness,

and honour.' He findeth life: Prov. 11:19, 'As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death;' Prov. 12:28, 'In the way of righteousness is life, and in the pathway thereof there is no death.' Righteousness; he shall have righteous dealing from others. Honour; he shall have a good name in the world, and be preferred when God thinks fit.

Use. To press us to do judgment and justice—

1. As to our private dealing with others; carry yourselves faithfully, and make conscience of justice and equity.

[1.] Propound to do nothing but what is agreeable to righteousness and honesty: Prov. 12:5, 'The thoughts of the righteous are right, but the counsels of the wicked are deceit.' Our evil purpose spoils all. A good man erreth sometimes through ignorance, incogitancy, or violence of temptation, overtaken or overborne; but he doth not propose to do evil, that is the property of the wicked.

[2.] Be always exercising righteousness, as God giveth opportunity and occasion: 1 John 3:7, 'He that doth righteousness is righteous;' Ps. 106:3, 'Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doth righteousness at all times.' Justice must be observed in lesser things as well as in great, for where heaven and hell are concerned nothing is little, Luke 16:10. He that is faithful in that which is least, in minimo, ὁ πιστὸς ἐν ἐλαχίστῳ—he that is faithful in a little thing will not be unfaithful in anything. Many will be righteous in some thing, but in some others dispense with themselves.

[3.] Do not depart from your rule and resolution of just dealing upon any temptation whatsoever. Men resolve to be just, but when the temptation cometh, their resolution is shaken. Oh! remember the greatest gain will not countervail your loss: Mat. 16:26, 'What is a

man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' It will prove a poor bargain in the end; and there is no profit in what is gained unjustly; it is a certain loss, and so it will prove in the issue: Hab. 2:9, 10, 'Woe unto him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil: thou hast consulted shame to thy house, and hast sinned against thine own soul.' You think to avoid all emergent evils; there needs no more to pull down the power and greatness of the oppressor than his studying to make it great; nothing destroyeth it so much.

[4.] Take special heed to thyself that thou be not unrighteous when opportunity is offered, when put in places of power and trust. Many are innocent because they have no opportunity to be otherwise. It is said, John 12:6, 'He was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.' When corrupt affections and suitable temptations and objects meet, then it is dangerous to the soul.

[5.] Take heed of covetousness: 1 Tim. 6:10, 'The love of money is the root of all evil.' It will make a breach on thy duty when it is indulged; therefore take away the lusts, and temptations will have less power over thee.

For motives—

(1.) Righteousness is a christian's breastplate: Eph. 6:14, 'And having on the breastplate of righteousness,' to defend the heart and vital parts. It keepeth the heart whole; if the breast be covered with a firm resolution to shun whatsoever is evil and unjust, temptations will not pierce us. Unless you arm yourself with this resolution, you will lose comfort, and lose grace.

(2.) Consider how soon God breaketh in with a judgment when once men transgress righteousness: 1 Thes. 4:6, 'Let no man go beyond his brother, nor defraud his brother; for God is the avenger of all such.' God, that is the patron of human society, will not suffer unrighteousness and injustice to go unpunished.

2. In your public engagements, see that you have a good cause and a good conscience, and in due time God will plead your cause. (1.) See that you have a good cause; you must not intitle God to your petty quarrels and revenges: 1 Peter 2:19, 20, 'For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience towards God endure grief, suffering wrongfully; for what glory is it if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God;' 1 Peter 3:16, 17, 'Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ: for it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing.' That epistle was penned in a suffering time. When you are exposed to hardships, be sure you are in God's way. (2.) As the cause is good, so must your carriage be. Do not step out of God's way for the greatest good. So many, if they may drive on their designs, they care not what they do, as if a good end would warrant them. Christ need not get up on the devil's shoulders. God is now bound to avenge this, for 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.' In this evil day the righteous shall be saved. God saved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and delivered just Lot, 2 Peter 2.

Secondly, We have David's prayer, 'Leave me not to mine oppressors.' He beggeth help against the oppression of the enemy. I might observe—

1. That it is no new thing to see innocent men troubled, oppressed, persecuted. He that could say, I have done judgment and justice, yet had his oppressors. As long as Satan wants not instruments, the people of God shall not want troubles; and the two seeds will never be reconciled. Therefore we should not censure the oppressed, and those that are fallen under the displeasure of men; and the oppressed themselves should not wonder at it—wicked men do but after their kind.

2. That to be left of God under the oppression of wicked men is a grievous calamity, and earnestly to be deprecated.

[1.] When are we said outwardly and visibly to be left by God under the oppression of wicked men?

(1.) When he taketh off the restraints of his providence, and the hedge of his protection is broken down, and lets loose the enemy upon us, and we are left in the power of their hands: Dan. 1:2, 'The Lord gave the king of Judah into his hands.'

(2.) When he doth not comfort us in such a condition, particularly when God's assistance is not vouchsafed. Sometimes he doth so: 2 Cor. 1:4, 'Who comforts us in all our tribulations.' At other times all is dark: Ps. 74:9, 'We see not our signs; there is no more any prophet, neither is there among us any that knoweth how long.'

(3.) When he doth not direct us, and show us our duty: Ps. 143:10, 'Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God, thy Spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness.' It was a time when his enemies prevailed over him. Now, if God hide counsel from us, we grope at noonday.

(4.) When he doth not support us. Sometimes this, Ps. 138:3, 'In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul; and Ps. 94:18, 'When I said my foot slippeth, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up;' Ps. 73:23, 'Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me up by my right hand.' David prayeth, Put me not into their power, do not let loose 'the reins; thou hast hindered them hitherto. It is thy mercy that all this while I have not been given up as a prey to their teeth; they want not malice and a will to take vengeance to the uttermost.

[2.] It is a grievous calamity.

(1.) It is a hard thing to be left to the will and lusts of men. David was in a strait; he chose rather to fall into the Lord's hands than into the hands of men: 2 Sam. 24:14, 'I am in a great strait; let me now fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great, and not into the hand of man.' Men are revengeful, proud, insolent: wicked men will soon exceed their commission: Zech. 1:15, 'And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease; for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction;' Deut. 32:27, 'Were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this.' God speaketh after the manner of men.

(2.) It is a great mark of our Father's displeasure when he withdraweth, hideth counsel from us, leaveth us without support and comfort: Mat. 9:15, 'And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.'

[3.] It is earnestly to be deprecated, not only as a grievous calamity, but as hoping for relief: 'I will not leave you ὀρφανοὺς,' John 14:18, 'comfortless;' and Mat. 28:20, 'Lo, I am with you to the end of the world.'

Use. Go, then, and represent your condition to God with humiliation, owning his anger, but with faith waiting for his help. Tell him what a prey you have been to Satan; desire him, if he withdraw his presence one way, he will manifest it in another, in comforting, counselling his own people; tell him your weakness, the enemies' malice, and implore his aid and assistance.

## SERMON CXXXIII

### **Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me.—VER. 122**

IN this verse we may observe a petition—(1.) Metaphorically expressed; (2.) Literally explained.

In the former branch we have—(1.) The notion by which the help he expecteth from God is expressed: it is that of a surety, be surety for thy servant. (2.) The end and fruit of that help, or the terms on which he expecteth it, for good.

In the literal explanation we have—(1.) The matter of the petition, let them not oppress me. (2.) An argument insinuated from the quality and disposition of his enemies, the proud.

First, From the metaphorical notion, 'Be surety for thy servant,' we may observe this doctrine—

Doct. In deep distress we have leave and encouragement to desire God to interpose for his people's relief.

1. I shall open the notion of a surety.
2. Show why we have leave and encouragement to desire God to interpose.

First, For the notion of a surety. Symmachus, ἀναδέξαι με εἰς ἀγαθὸν, receive me into thy protection for good. Septuagint, ἐκδέξαι τε δοῦλόν σου, suscipe servum tuum. It is a phrase taken from men when they are sureties for a debtor, to take him out of the hands of a cruel creditor who is ready to cast him into prison. And thus the prophet speaketh to God when he was in extreme danger, and could think of no help but God's.

1. It implieth the danger imminent; when a sergeant hath attached a man, and he is ready to go to prison, and there is no means for him to escape, unless somebody be his surety to answer all the challenges and demands of the law. In this sense Hezekiah used it: Isa. 38:14, 'I am oppressed; undertake for me.' He spake it when he was summoned to the grave, to pay the debt we all owe to nature: I am like a poor debtor called to pay my debt speedily; therefore, Lord, be my pledge, deliver me out of this danger. So doth David here, when the proud were cruelly set upon his destruction. We are driven to God alone, and beat to the throne of grace by our miseries; yea, God lets the affairs of his people run on to loss and ruin, till we be in the condition of a debtor going to prison; he reserveth himself for such occasions till brought nigh to utter ruin, and all other inferior reliefs fail. And we must be content it should be so; for there is no use of a surety till we are attached. Imminent danger giveth notice that the Lord is coming.



2. That this distress and misery cometh as a debt respecting God's laws and the higher court, where all things are decreed and sentenced before they are executed in the world, so it is a debt that must be paid, and distress is God's arrest. God is compared to a creditor, Luke 7:41; therefore the miseries of God's people are expressed by chains, stocks, prisons, fetters, words that relate to a judicial proceeding. To chains: Lam. 3:7, 'He hath made my chain heavy.' To stocks: Job 13:27, 'Thou puttest my feet into the stocks.' To a prison: Ps. 92:7, 'Bring my soul out of prison.' To fetters: Job 36:8, 'And if they be bound in fetters, and holden in cords of afflictions.' To a debt that must be paid, so is sin considered with respect to its punishment, Mat. 6:12; Luke 11:4, 'Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.' God puts the bond in suit, the instruments are but as sergeants and officers to demand of us satisfaction for breach of covenant with God. They think not so, neither doth their evil heart mean so; but so it is in God's purpose. When you are in trouble God hath committed you to prison, and there is no coming out without submission and humiliation, urging the satisfaction of Christ. You are sent thither by God's authority, and there is no getting out without his leave.

3. That the party is insolvent and undone unless some course be taken to satisfy the creditor; he cannot help himself by his own wisdom and strength out of the danger. The debtor in the Gospel had nought to pay, Mat. 18:25. Why else should we look after a surety: Job 17:3, 'Put me in a surety with thee: who is he that will strike hands with me?' Man is not able to stand alone under the weight of his afflictions; it is a burden too heavy for us to bear. We have no might, 2 Chron. 20:12. God's people are often brought into such a case. When the principal is not solvendo, the surety answereth. We are weak, but he is strong; we are not able to subsist. They exceed us in carnal advantages; if force be to be resisted by force, they will

easily overcome us, unless another that is stronger than we undertake for us.

4. That the surety taketh upon him the debt of the principal person, and is to be responsible for it. God hath taken our obligation upon himself, to pay our debts, to oppose himself against all our wrongs. He will take our cause as his own: Ps. 9:4, 'For thou hast maintained my right and my cause;' and in his own time and manner will show it to the world, and justify us against our enemies. Oh! how should our hearts rejoice in this, that he will be the party responsible, make our cause his own, and be liable to the suit as a debtor is to the creditor! 'He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye,' Zech. 2:8; 'He that despiseth you, despiseth me;' 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' Acts 9:4; and Isa. 63:8, 'And he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie; so he was their saviour.'

5. God is a sufficient surety. Here we may consider two things—the satisfaction of Christ, and the power of God's providence; in respect of both which he is a pledge and surety every way sufficient for our comfort, safety, and deliverance.

[1.] I would not leave out Christ's satisfaction, though it lie not so full in this text; for as God hath a hand in all our sufferings, and all our affairs are determined in a higher court, this satisfaction is necessary to answer the controversy and quarrel of God's justice against us. Thus Christ the second person is ἐμφορικῶς, our surety: Heb. 7:22, 'Christ is the surety of a better testament.' There is a double sort of surety—by way of caution and satisfaction, as sureties in case of debt and sureties for good behaviour; the one for what is past, the other for what is to come. The example of the one we have in Paul for Onesimus, Philem. 18, 'If he hath wronged or owed thee ought, put it upon my account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, and I

will repay it.' An example of the other we have in Judah for Benjamin: Gen. 43:9, 'I will be surety for him; at mine hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever.' In both these respects Christ is a surety; he is our surety as a surety undertaketh for another to pay his debt; and he is our surety as he hath undertaken that his redeemed ones shall keep God's laws, be carried safe to heaven. Of his suretyship by way of caution we speak now. Though Theodoret understand that in the text, Undertake for me that I shall keep thy laws; but it is more proper to consider the speech as it referreth to the payment of our debt by virtue of this suretyship. Solomon hath assured us, Prov. 11:15, that he that is surety for another shall smart for it, or be broken and bruised. The same word is used concerning Christ, Isa. 53:10. He was our surety, and was bruised and broken, suffered what we should have suffered. We have a right to appear to God's justice, but our surety having made a full satisfaction for us, God will not exact the debt twice—of the surety and the principal. When the ram was taken Isaac was let go: Job 33:24, 'Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom.' Well, then, as our punishment is a due debt to God's justice, the Lord Christ undertaketh or is become a surety for us; not only our advocate to plead our cause, but our surety to pay our debt; from a judge become a party, and bound to pay what we owe: Isa. 53:4, 'Surely he hath borne our griefs.'

[2.] The power of God's providence. If God undertake for us, his bail is sufficient; none of our enemies can resist his almighty power, surely he is able to deal with our enemies: Isa. 23:4, 'Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle?' They are matter to feed the fire, not to quench it. He rescueth us just as going to prison. If he put himself a pledge between us and our enemies, he will defeat all their oppositions and machinations against us, and stand between us

and danger, as an able bail or surety doth between the creditor and poor debtor. Well, then, suretyship, as it noteth our necessity, so God's engagement, and his ability and faithfulness to do what he undertaketh. We must set God against the enemies: Isa. 51:13, 'And forgettest the Lord thy maker, who hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth; and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy; and where is the fury of the oppressor?' Dan. 3:17, 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace.' We have the Almighty to be our saviour and protector, why are you afraid of a man? God against man is great odds, if we had faith to see it: man is mortal, God is immortal; man is a poor weak creature, but God is almighty; what is he not able to do for us? Surely he will not leave his friends in the lurch; his power is such that he is able to keep us safe and sound.

Secondly, The reasons why we have leave and encouragement to desire God to interpose.

1. From God's covenant, where in the general there is a mutual engaging to be each other's. In our several capacities we engage to stand by God and own his cause, and God is engaged to stand by us. We make over ourselves, bodies, souls, interests, all to God. God, *quantus quantus est*, as great as he is, is all ours; therefore, if he be ours, we may pray him to appear for us, and own us in our distress and trouble. Our friend is a friend in distress. A gracious heart, by virtue of this mutual and interchangeable indenture, appears for God, and taketh his cause, though never so hated, as its own: 'The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me,' Ps. 6:9. We are his witnesses, Isa. 43:10. Surely it is too high a word for the creature; but God taketh our cause as his, is surety for us; by virtue of the general tenor of the covenant he is our God, *jure venit* in

auxilium nostrum, his covenant engageth him to undertake for us. More particularly God undertaketh to defend and maintain his people; as to be a rewarder, so to be a defender: Gen. 15:1, 'I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.' And Ps. 84:11, 'For the Lord is a sun and a shield.' This defence is sometimes expressed, with respect to the violence of assaults in the world, by the notion of a shield. So, with respect to the process of the law, by the notion of a surety; Isa. 52:3, we have the term of a redeemer. So that we have leave to pray him to fulfil his covenant engagement.

2. God's affection is such that he will refuse no office that may be for his people's comfort. We are often dissuaded from suretyship, especially for strangers, by the wise man, with great vehemency and instance: Prov. 6:1, 2, 'My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, thou art snared with the words of thy mouth;' Prov. 11:15, 'He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it;' Prov. 17:18, 'A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend;' Prov. 20:16, 'Take his garment that is surety for a stranger;' Prov. 22:26, 27, 'Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts: if thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take the bed from under thee?' and in other places. Our pity is stirred towards a man that is like to be undone and ruined; therefore there is such dissuading from suretyship. And hath not God a greater pity over the afflictions of his people? He pities the afflictions of them that suffer most justly, yea, far below their desert: Judges 10:16, 'His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel;' 2 Kings 14:26, 'For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter; for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel.' How much more will he pity them that are unjustly oppressed of men! Acts 7:34, 'I have seen the afflictions of my people which is in Egypt, and have heard their groanings, and am come down to deliver them.' His bowels worketh;

God loveth his people better than they love themselves. fide-jube, Domine, pro servo.

3. Our relation to him: I am thy servant, and I know thou art a good master; and he is our sovereign Lord, and therefore hath undertaken to provide for us: the master was to be the servant's patronus. God hath found us work, and he will find us defence. This the argument of the text, 'Be surety for thy servant.' We are employed in his work, engaged in his cause. If a rich man set a poor man at work, as to dig such a ditch, if he be afterwards troubled for it, the rich man is concerned to bear him out: Ps. 116:16, 'O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid.' Whilst we are engaged about our master's business, and in his work, he is engaged to protect us, and bear us out in it.

4. Our very running to him, and committing ourselves into his hands, is an engaging God: Ps. 86:2, 'Preserve my soul, for I am holy, O thou my God; save thy servant that trusteth in thee;' Ps. 10:14, 'The poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.' Employ God, and find him work; he will not fail to do what he is intrusted with: Ps. 57:1, 'Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me, for my soul trusteth in thee; yea, in the shadow of thy wing will I make my refuge, until these calamities be over-past.' God taketh it well that we should make bold with him in this kind, and tell him how we trust him, and expect relief from him. Nothing is so dishonourable to God, nor vexatious to us, as the disappointment of trust. An ingenuous man will not fail his friend that doth trust and rely upon him, much less will a faithful God fail those that look to him, and depend upon him for help.

Use. Advice to us what we should do in our deep distresses and troubles; when able to do nothing for ourselves, God will be surety,

that is, make our cause his own.

1. As your matters depend in a higher court, and with respect to your own guilt and sin, which hath cast you into these troubles, acknowledge your debt, but look upon Christ as your surety, who gave himself a ransom for us. The controversy between God and us must be taken up by submission on our parts, for God is an enemy that cannot be overcome, but must be reconciled. The way is not to persist in the contest, and stand it out, but beg terms of peace for Christ's sake: 2 Chron. 6:38, 39, 'If they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul, then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling-place, their prayers and supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee;' Job 5:8, 'I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause.'

2. As your danger lieth with men, acknowledge your impotency, but consider who is your surety, and will take your part against the instruments that have had a hand in your trouble.

[1.] God, who hath such a pity over his suffering servants, is ready ever to do them good: Ps. 35. 'Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me.' He is in such full relation, and so fast bound to them, that they may not be weary and impatient and swallowed up of despair, he will interpose. God seeth our sufferings, heareth our groans, suffereth together with us, and is afflicted in all our afflictions. Believe it assuredly that he will take the matter into his own hand, and be the party responsible: Ps. 140:12, 'I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.' Woe be to them that would not have God for their party, joined in the cause of the afflicted. God hath given assurance of his protection not by words only, but by deeds:

Prov. 22:23, 'The Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.' He hath passed his word, and he will do it: Prov. 28:11, 'For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.' It is his title, Isa. 51:22, 'Thus saith thy Lord, the Lord and thy God, that pleadeth the cause of his people;' not by a verbal or local, but a real and active plea: Ezek. 38:22, 'And I will plead against him with pestilence, and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and the people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire and brimstone.' And Isa. 50:8, 'He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together; who is mine adversary? let him come near to me;' that is, let him join issue with me, commence his suit in law. We should be confident upon God's undertaking: Jer. 50:34, 'Their redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is his name; he shall thoroughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land.' It is a great ease in affliction to commit our cause unto God, and put our affairs into his hand.

[2.] God, who hath such power; we need not fear any opposite if God be our surety: Ps. 27:1, 'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?,' Ps. 46:1, 2, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;' a resolution to adhere to God and his truth whatever cometh. If they be mighty, God is mightier; if they be crafty, God is wiser. It is a great crime to fear men so as not to trust in God; it is a great sin to fear men so as not to fear God. When we comply with them in things displeasing to God, this is to set men above God.

Secondly, We come to the limitation, end, or fruit of this suretyship, 'For good.' There are three expositions of this clause, as noting the end, the cause, the event. (1.) Undertake for me, ut sim bonus et



justus; so Rabbi Arama on the place, Be surety for me that I may be good. Theodoret expounds it, Undertake that I shall make good my resolution of keeping thy law. He that enjoineth, undertaketh. Though we have precepts and promises, without God's undertaking we shall never be able to perform our duty. (2.) 'In good,' so some read it. God would not take his part in an evil cause. To commend a wrong cause to God's protection is to provoke him to hasten our punishment, to make us serve under our oppressors. But when we have a good cause and a good conscience, he will own us. We cannot expect he should maintain us and bear us out in the devil's service, wherein we have entangled ourselves by our own sin. (3.) 'For good;' so it is often rendered: Ps. 86:17, 'Show me a token for good;' Jer. 14:11, 'Pray not for this people for good.' So Neh. 13:31, 'Remember me, O my God, for good.' So here, 'Be surety for thy servant for good.'

Doct. We should only desire the interposing of God's providence so as may be for good to us.

I shall first give you the reasons, and then give you some rules concerning this good here mentioned.

Reason 1. Because then we pray according to God's undertaking: Ps. 34:10, 'But they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing;' they may want food, want raiment, want many things, but they shall want no good thing: Ps. 84:11, 'No good thing will he withhold.' He may keep us low and bare, withhold many temporal mercies from us, feed us from hand to mouth, and short commons may be sweet and wholesome, and deny to give us larger revenues and incomes. If they were good for us, we should have them. God withholds these things so as our need and good doth require: Jer. 24:5, 'Whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.' Their captivity was for good.

Reason 2. Because then we pray according to the new nature; old nature would have ease, the new nature would have grace; the flesh would be pleased, but the spirit would be profited; and God hears not the voice of the flesh, but the spirit in prayer: Rom. 8:27, 'He that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God.'

Let me give you some rules.

1. This good is not always the good of the flesh, not always the good of prosperity. Sometimes the good of prosperity may be good: Prov. 24:25, 'But to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them.' A good blessing shall come upon them that plead God's cause against the wicked. There is the blessing of prosperity-good and adversity-good. All good is more or less, so as it cometh near or less near the chiefest good; therefore that is good that tendeth to make us spiritually better, more like to God, and capable of communion with him. Lam. 3:27, 'It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.' That is good which conduceth to our everlasting good.

2. God knoweth what is better for us than we do ourselves. We ask a knife wherewith to cut ourselves. It would be the greatest misery if God should always carve out our condition according to our own fancy; we would soon pray ourselves into a snare if our will were the rule of our prayers, and ask that which would be cruelty in God to grant. I will give you an instance in Lot, Gen. 19:17, 18, 'Make haste, escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed: I cannot, saith he, escape to the mountain, behold now this city is near, it is but a little one, and my soul shall live.' Lot presenteth his own fancy to God's counsel and choice for him: this little place was in the plain; he was persuaded the shower of brimstone would overtake him before he

got thither. Often it is thus with us; though God should command and we obey, we lift up our will above his, and doat upon our own fancies, and will prescribe to God, think it is better to live by sense than by faith. This mountain was the weaker border of the plain. Now this was weakness in Lot surely. God, that had taken him out of Sodom by the hand of his angels, stricken the Sodomites with blindness, which was an instance of God's great power and goodness to him. Now compare the 17th and 18th verses with the 30th verse, 'And Lot went out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, he and his two daughters with him, for he feared to dwell in Zoar; and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters.' Mark here, when God biddeth him go to the mountain, then he goeth to Zoar; when God gave him leave to tarry in Zoar, then he goes and dwells in the mountain: he was afraid in Zoar, when he saw the horrible desolation of all the country about it. Now see the ill success of his own choice, and how badly we provide for ourselves: a little time will show us our sin and folly: his abode in the mountain drew him to incest. Another instance: Hosea 13:11, 'I gave them a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath.' God may let things succeed with us to our hurt: 'If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us;' 1 John 5:14. God is a God of wisdom, he knoweth certainly what will be good for us. He is a God of bowels, and loveth us dearly, and will certainly cast all things for the best; therefore God is to be judge both for time and kind of our deliverance, otherwise we may meet with wrath in every condition, whether we want or have our will; but if we refer it to him, we shall never want what is best for us. The shepherd must choose our pastures, whether lean or fat, bare or full grounds. The child is not to be governed by his fancy, but the father's discretion; nor the sick man by his own fancy, but the physician's skill: our will is not the chief reason of all things.

3. That which is not good may be good, and though for the present we see it not, yet we shall see it; though not good in its nature, it may be good in its fruit: Rom. 8:28, 'We know that all things shall work together for good to them that love God;' a little faith and a little patience will discover it. As poisonous ingredients in a medicine, take them singly, and they are destructive; but as tempered with other things by the hands of a skilful physician, so they are wholesome and useful: Heb. 12:11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous.' The rod is a sour thing for the present, but wait a little, this bitter root may yield sweet fruit: God can so overrule it in his providence. So Ps. 119:71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.' Ask a man under the cross, Is it good to feel the lashes of God's correcting hand? No; but when he hath been exercised, and found lust mortified, the world crucified, and gotten evidences of God's favour, then it is good that I have been afflicted.

4. This good is not to be determined by feeling, but by faith: Ps. 63:1, 'Yet God is good to Israel, and to such as are of a clean heart.' God is good to his people, however he seem to deal hardly with them: sense judgeth it ill, but faith saith it is good; it seeth a great deal of love in pain and smart. There is such a difference between faith and sense as there was between Elisha and his servant, 2 Kings 6:15, 16; the servant saw the host of the enemies, but he did not see the fiery chariots and horsemen that were for his help; Elisha saw both. So believers see not only the bitterness that is in God's chastenings, but the sweet fruits in the issue. Faith can look at the pride and power of wicked men as a vain thing, when they are in the height of their power and greatness: Job 5:3, 'I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation;' that is, prophetically, Dot passionately; foretelling evil, not wishing it. When they were taking root, as themselves and other worldly men thought, I judged him

unhappy, foretold his end and destruction. There is much of the spirit of prophecy in faith. When others applaud, make little gods of them, he looketh through all their beauty, riches and honour: Ps. 92:7, 'When the wicked spring as the grass, and all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever.' Grass will wither and dry up of its own accord, especially when there is a worm at the root. Their very prosperity, as it ferments their lusts, and hardeneth their hearts, is a means to draw on their destruction: Ps. 39:5, 'Man in his best estate is vanity.' Then, when they seem to have all things under their feet, who could harm them? so that none dare open the mouth, move the wing, or peep; yet God can easily blast and whip them with an unseen scourge.

#### 5. Good is of several sorts, temporal, spiritual, eternal.

[1.] Temporal good. Cross accidents conduce to that: Gen. 1:20, 'Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good; to bring to pass as it is this day, and to save much people alive.' The Egyptians and themselves had wanted a preserver if Joseph had not been sold and sent into Egypt. If a man were to go to sea in a voyage upon which his heart was much set, but the ship is gone before he cometh, but after he heareth that all that were in the ship are drowned, then he would say, This disappointment was for good. As Crassus' rival in the Parthian war was intercepted and cut off by the craft of the barbarians, had no reason to stomach his being refused. Many of us have cause to say, *Periissem nisi periissem*—we had suffered more if we had suffered less. In the story of Joseph there is a notable scheme and draught of providence. He is cast into a pit, thence drawn forth and sold to the Ishmaelites, by them sold into Egypt, and sold again. What doth God mean to do with poor Joseph? He is tempted to adultery; refusing the temptation, he is falsely accused, kept for a long time in ward and duress. All this is against him; who would have

thought that in the issue this should be turned to his good? that the prison had been the way to preferment, and that by the pit he should come to the palace of the king of Egypt, and exchange his parti-coloured coat for a royal robe? Thus in temporal things we get by our losses, and God chooseth better for us than we could have chosen for ourselves. Let God alone to his undertaking, and he will manage our affairs better than we looked for.

[2.] Good spiritual: Heb. 12:10, 'For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' What do we call profit? The good things of this world, and the great mammon which so many worship? No; some better thing, some spiritual and divine benefit, a participation of God's holiness. Then we profit when we grow in grace and are more god-like, when we are more concerned as a soul than a body. It is a good exchange to part with outward comforts for inward holiness. If God take away our peace, and give us peace of conscience, we have no cause to complain. If our outward wants be recompensed with the abundance of inward grace, 1 Cor. 4:10, and we have less of the world that we may have the more of God, and be kept poor that we may be rich in faith, James 2:5, 6; if we have a healthy soul in a sickly body, as Gains had, 3 John 2; if an aching head maketh way for a better heart,—doth not God deal graciously and lovingly with us?

[3.] Our eternal good. Heaven will make amends for all that we endure here. This mainly is intended in Rom. 8:28, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' And then in the 29th and 30th verses, he presently bringeth in the golden chain, 'Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, he justified; and those whom he justified, them he also glorified.' So 2 Cor. 4:17, 'This light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh

for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;' it shall either hasten or secure our glorious estate. A man may lose ground by a temptation, his external good may be weakened, his soul suffereth loss; but this warneth him of his weakness, and quickeneth him to stand upon his watch, and to look up more to Christ for strength against it. Or he may be cut off, and perish in the affliction; but then his glorious estate cometh in possession.

6. That may be good for the glory of God which doth not conduce to our personal benefit; and the glory of God is our great interest, John 11:27, 28, 'Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour, Father, glorify thy name. Then there came a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.' There was the innocent inclination of his human nature, 'Father, save me from this hour;' and the overruling sense of his duty, or the obligation of his office, 'But for this cause came I to this hour.' We are often tossed and tumbled between inclinations of nature and conscience of duty; but in a gracious heart it prevaieth above the desire of our own comfort and satisfaction: the soul is cast for any course that God shall see fittest for his glory. Nature would be rid of trouble, but grace submitteth all interests to God's honour; that should be dearer to us than anything else; were it not selfishness and want of zeal, that would be our greatest interest.

## SERMON CXXXIV

**Be surety for thy servant for good: let not  
the proud oppress me.—VER. 122**

USE. It informeth us what reason there is to pray and wait with submission to the will of God. God will answer us according to our trouble, not always according to our will. He is wiser than we, for he knoweth that our own will would undo us. If things were in our own hands, we would never see an ill day, and in this mixed estate that would not be good for us. But all weathers are necessary to make the earth fruitful, rain as well as sunshine. We must not mistake the use and efficacy of prayer. We are not as sovereigns to govern the world at our pleasure, but as supplicants humbly to submit our desires to the supreme Being. Not to command as dictators, and obtrude any model upon God, but to solicit as servants: 'Do good in thy good pleasure to Zion,' Ps. 51:18. If we would have things done at our pleasure, we should be the judges, and God only would have the place of the executioner. Our wills would be the supreme and chief reason of all things. But this God cannot endure; therefore beg him to do good, but according to his own good pleasure.

1. Let us submit to God for the mercy itself, in what kind we shall have it, whether temporal, spiritual, or eternal. If God see ease good for us, we shall have it; if deliverance good for us, we shall have it, Ps. 128:2; or give us strength in our souls, or hasten our glory. We should be as a die in the hand of providence, to be cast high or low, as God pleaseth: 1 Sam. 3:18, 'It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.'

2. Let us submit for the time. Though Jesus loved Lazarus, yet he abode still two days in the same place when he heard he was sick, John 11:6. It is not for want of love if he doth not help us presently, nor want of power. Christ may dearly love us, yet delay to help us, even in extremity, till a fit time come, wherein his glory may shine forth, and the mercy be more conspicuous. He doth not slight us, though he doth delay us; he will choose that time which maketh most



for his own glory. Submit to God's dispensations, and in due time you shall see a reason of them.

3. Let us submit for the way and means. We know not what God is a-doing: John 13:6, 7, 'Then cometh he to Simon Peter, and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not, but thou shalt know hereafter.' No wonder we are much in the dark, if we consider, first, that the worker of these works is 'Wonderful in counsel and excellent in working,' Isa. 28:29; infinitely beyond politicians, whose projects and purposes are often hidden from us; therefore much more his. Secondly, That the ways of his working are very strange and imperceptible, for he maketh things out of nothing: Rom. 4:17, 'And calleth those things that be not as though they were;' one contrary out of another, as light out of darkness, 2 Cor. 4:6, meat out of the eater, enemies caught in their own snare. Thirdly, That his end in working is not to satisfy our sense and curiosity: Isa. 48:7, 'They are created now, and not from the beginning, even before the day when thou heardest them not, lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them;' Isa. 42:16, 'I will bring the blind by a way they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known.' He chooseth such a way as may leave enemies to harden their hearts; Micah 4:12, 'But they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel; for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor.'

Secondly, I now come to the literal explanation; and there we have—

1. The evil deprecated, oppress me.
2. The persons likely to inflict it, the proud.

First, The evil deprecated, 'Let not the proud oppress me.' The Septuagint,  $\mu\eta\ \sigma\upsilon\kappa\omicron\phi\alpha\nu\tau\eta\sigma\acute{\alpha}\tau\omega\sigma\acute{\alpha}\nu\ \mu\epsilon\ \acute{\upsilon}\pi\epsilon\rho\acute{\eta}\phi\alpha\nu\omicron\iota$ , let them not

calumniate me. The Septuagint takes this word for oppression or violent injustice, and therein are followed by St Luke 3:14, 19:8.

Doct. Oppression is a very grievous evil, and often deprecated by the people of God.

1. I shall show you what oppression is. It is an abuse of power to unjust and uncharitable actions. That it is an abuse of power appeareth by the object of it, who are those that are usually oppressed; that is, either the poor and needy: Deut. 24:14, 'Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of the strangers within thy gates.' The fatherless and the widow are mentioned: Jer. 7:6, 'Ye shall not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.' The stranger: Zech. 7:10, 'And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor;' and Exod. 22:21–23, 'Thou shalt neither vex a stranger nor oppress him, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child; if thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all to me, I will surely hear their cry.'

2. The subject or agent by whom it is practised—(1.) 'The proud;' the mighty, rich, great man; at least comparatively, in regard to the wronged party: Eccles. 4:1, 'And on the side of their oppressors there was power, but the oppressed had no comforter;' Job 35:9, 'By reason of the multitude of oppressors they make the oppressed cry, and by reason of the arm of the mighty.' (2.) The base and mean, when they get power into their hands, to oppress the rich, noble, and honourable: Isa. 3:5, 'And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour; the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable.' It is commonly more insolent and cruel and

contemptuous and despiteful: Prov. 28:3, 'A poor man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain that leaveth no food.' When men do unjust and uncharitable actions, as when men bear it proudly or insolently towards them, throwing them out of their riches, denying them the liberty of their service because it is in the power of their hands, or taking advantage of their low condition to run over them, or making an advantage of their necessity and want of skill: Hosea 12:7, 'He is a merchant, the balance of deceit is in his hand; he loveth to oppress;' or prejudice their testimony to the truth by our credit and esteem in the church rendering them so weak or wicked, factious or foolish, as not to be regarded.

3. This is a grievous evil; it is so in itself, and may be specially aggravated as to cases.

[1.] It is grievous in itself, as it is so odious to God, as being a perversion of the end of his providence. Those that excel in any quality are appointed for the protection and support of the weak and indigent. God gave them their wealth and parts and power and credit and greatness, to the end they might comfort, counsel, defend, and do good to those that want these things. Now when they make no other use of their power than lions and bears do, to mischief others by it, they do evil because it is in the power of their hands, Micah 2:1. Power, if men have not a great tenderness of conscience and fear of God, is an unwieldy wilful thing, degenerates into oppression: Isa. 10:14, 15, 'There was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself as if it were no wood.' Therefore he went on to oppress and tyrannise in the world, because none durst to oppose him. Power needs much balance to temper and allay it.

[2.] It is so offensive to his people, and burthensome to them: Eccles. 7:7, 'Oppression maketh a wise man mad;' it shaketh and discomposeth those of the best temper, makes them pray and weep, and cry before the; Lord: Eccles. 4:1, 'So I returned and considered all the oppressions under the sun, and beheld the tears of such as are oppressed.' When you lay such heavy loads upon them that they are not able to bear it, but cry to God to right them.

[3.] The evil itself, oppression. It is not only theft, but murder. These expressions we have: Isa. 3:13, 14, 'Ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye, that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor?' that is, cause them by your hard usage to pine away? So Micah 3:1–3, 'And I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel, is it not for you to know judgment, who hate the good, and love the evil, who pluck off their skin and their flesh from off their bones? who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them, and they break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the cauldron?' It is in God's account human butchery and murder, beyond simple slaughter, as they make them die a lingering death.

[4.] It is especially aggravated if they be God's servants oppressed for religion: Ps. 12:5, 'For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy; now will I arise, saith the Lord, I will set them in safety, from him that puffeth at him.' The proud persecutor doth little think of the godly, that any power he hath can do anything to help him; therefore mocketh at all his hopes: therefore, when God hath exercised the godly for a while, he will arise, &c. I say the sin is aggravated by the innocency, the holiness, the usefulness of the party oppressed, when fitted to glorify God, and do service to the public, and disabled to the prejudice of both.

[5.] It is the highest impiety to fetch power and advantage from any ordinance of God to commit it: John 19:10, 11, 'Then said Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.' Courts of justice, that should be sanctuaries and places of refuge to oppressed innocency, they make slaughterhouses and shops of cruelty. When pretexts of laws and justice are used to colour the oppression and persecution of innocent useful persons, this makes it more odious in the sight of God.

Use 1. Oh, pity the oppressed! Job 6:14, 'To him that is afflicted, pity should be showed from his friend; but he forsaketh the fear of the Almighty.' The men of Keilah thought of delivering up David, because they feared not God, 1 Sam. 23:11, 12. But men have no fear of God, but too much fear of men. When God is angry, God will suffer none to help: Ps. 88:18, 'Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness;' Job 12:5, 'He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease.' Sensuality will make us forget the afflictions of others: Amos 6:4-6, 'They lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their conches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and calves out of the midst of the stall; that chaunt to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments, but they are not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph.' Scruples of conscience through difference in religion: John 4:9, 'How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest water of me?' Therefore we should pity others; we have God's example: 2 Cor. 7:6, 'God that comforteth those that are cast down.'

Use 2. Keep from oppression; let us be far from this sin. Samuel professeth his innocency: 1 Sam. 12:3, 4, 'Behold here I am, witness against me before the Lord and his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received a bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? And they said, Thou hast not defrauded nor oppressed us.'

Motives.

1. God will right the wrongs of the oppressed: Prov. 22:22, 23, 'Rob not the poor, because he is poor, neither oppress the afflicted in the gate; for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them;' Prov. 23:11, 'For their redeemer is mighty, he shall plead their cause with thee.' It belongeth to him as supreme judge and mighty potentate: Eccles. 5:8, 'If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter, for he that is higher than the highest regardeth, and there be higher than they.' Who can break the power of the greatest? The poor and indigent have none to own them, to resent the things done unto them, but God, who is the supreme Lord, will not fail to own them.

2. Consider the injustice of such dealing, as being contrary to that rule of reason, *Quod tibi non vis fieri, alteri ne feceris*. Every man should do as he would have others do to him. Put yourself in their case. Take this rule quite away, and there is nothing so false, bad, cruel, that you would not be drawn to think or say or do against your brother. Ucharitableness, and want of sympathy with us in our troubles, much more insulting over us in our miseries, we look on it with detestation; and shall we oppress and afflict others when we

have power so to do? Those that profess themselves Christians should be far from this sin.

Means.

1. The fear of God should bear rule in our hearts: Job 31:23, 'For destruction from God was a terror to me; and by reason of his highness I could not endure;' Lev. 25:17, 'Ye shall not, therefore, oppress one another, but thou shalt fear thy God; for I am the Lord your God.' We should be afraid to do them injury, as if a strong party, able to repay injuries, were ready to be avenged upon us for it.

2. Take heed of envy, covetousness, pride, revenge; these are illcounsellors. Ahab envies Naboth's vineyard, and covets it, and that put him upon oppressing him. So Hosea 12:7, 'He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand; he loveth to oppress.' so take heed of pride: Ps. 10:2, 'The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor.' So when persons are of a revengeful temper, it will put them upon oppression and persecution for every fancied or supposed affront offered to them: the enemy and avenger go together, Ps. 8:2.

3. Think of changes, that pride may not be without a curb, nor affliction without a comfort. It is the proud oppress, who are drunk with their wealth and outward prosperity. The Lord's people are not troubled by humble souls, that are sensible of their mutableness and frailty, but by those who little think of these things, and how hard it fareth with them that fear God.

Secondly, Here are the persons to inflict it, 'The proud.'

Doct. The proud are they that especially persecute the godly. Who are the proud?

1. Generally those that obstinately stand it out against God and the methods of his grace: Neh. 9:16, 'But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not unto thy commandments;' and ver. 29, 'Yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not to thy commandments;' Jer. 13:17, 'My soul shall weep in secret for your pride.'

2. More especially those that are too well conceited of themselves, seen by their affecting to meddle with things too high for them: Ps. 131:1, 'Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty, neither do I exercise myself in great matters, nor in things too high for me.' Murmur under crosses, quarrel with providences, finding fault with all God's sayings and doings, trust in themselves that they are righteous, Luke 18:14; scoff at others for their godliness: Ps. 119:51, the proud 'had me greatly in derision;' Ps. 10:2, 'The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor,' ready to brawl on all occasions; Prov. 23:10, 'Only by pride cometh contention;' would have all to stoop to them, are stiff in their opinions, boasters, lessening the gifts of others, impatient of admonition.

3. The particular pride here mentioned, when men are high-minded, and trust in uncertain riches, drunk with their prosperity. So oppressing in their honour and greatness, as if they would trample all others under foot, and crush them at pleasure. These are merciless and pitiless, disdain the poor, whatsoever presence of God they have with them; we are filled with the scorning of them that are at ease.

## **SERMON CXXXV**



## **Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness.—VER. 123**

IN the former verse, David spake as one under oppression, here he setteth forth his longing and waiting for deliverance. In the words we have—

1. The act of faith, together with the object of it; his eyes were to the salvation of God.
2. The defect and weakness of his faith, and God's delay, implied in the occasion of it, 'Mine eyes fail.'
3. The ground and support of his soul in this exercise, 'The word of thy righteousness.'

By salvation is meant temporal deliverance: his eyes were to his salvation; that is, he did with faith and patience wait for it. But in waiting, his eyes failed; that noteth some deficiency and weakness, but his support during all this was the word of God's righteousness, that word wherein God promised salvation and deliverance to them that are oppressed. And he calleth it the word of his righteousness; because he is one that kept it justly and faithfully; as if he had said, Surely God is righteous, and is no more liberal in promises than faithful in performing, therefore, though mine eyes even fail, yet I will keep looking and longing still for his salvation.

I begin with the ground of his faith, and the support of his soul, which is the word of promise.

Doct. That God's word, wherein he hath promised deliverance to his suffering servants, is a word of righteousness.

There are three things in the promise—Veritas, fidelitas, justitia, fidelity, faithfulness, and righteousness.

1. Veritas, sincerity or truth in making the promise, according to which God doth really intend and mean to bestow what he promiseth; 'For God is not as man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?' To lie is to speak a falsehood with an intention to deceive; this cannot be imagined of God. What need hath he to court a worm, or to mock and flatter us into a vain hope? What interest can accrue to him thereby? Yea, the purity of his nature will not permit it: Titus 1:2, 'According to the hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.' He will as soon cease to be God as cease to be true, for his truth is his nature, he is truth itself. Man, that is mutable, and hath an interest to promote by dissembling, may put on a false appearance, and speak what he never meaneth; but God cannot do so, for he is truth itself, essentially so in the abstract, can admit of no mixture, though creatures may. Light itself admitteth not of any darkness, but as it is in subjects, so it doth. But God is truth, and in him is no falsehood at all. Now, of all lies, a promissory lie is the worst; it is greater than an assertory lie. An assertory lie is when we speak of a thing past or present otherwise than it is. A promissory lie is when we promise a thing for time to come, which we never intend to perform. And this is the worse, because it doth not only pervert the end of speech, but defeateth another of that right which we seem to give him, in the thing promised; which is a further degree of injustice. Therefore we must take heed how, either directly or interpretatively, we ascribe such a lie to God. The apostle telleth us, 1 John 5:10, 'He that believeth not, maketh God a liar;' which is the highest dishonour you can cast upon him, which in manners and civility we would not offer to our equal, and which even a mean man

would scorn to put up with at our hands. God hath made many promises, as that he will be with thee in six troubles, and in seven he will not forsake thee, Job. 5:19; that he will dispose of all things for the best to them that love him. Rom. 8:28; that no good thing shall be wanting to them that fear him, Ps. 34:10. Doth not God mean as he saith? and dare we trust him no more? Your diffidence and drooping discouragements give him the lie, and you carry it so as if these were but words of course, without any intent to make them good.

2. Fidelitas. The next thing in the promise is faithfulness, and that referreth to the keeping of the promise. A man may be real in promising, he did not intend to deceive: but afterwards he changeth his mind: there may be verity in making the promise, but there is not fidelity in keeping the promise. But God is faithful; hath he said, and shall he not do it? All the promises are 'Yea and Amen' in Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. 1:20. God's word is not 'Yea and Nay,' but 'Yea and Amen;' it doth not say Yea to day, and Nay to morrow, but always Yea. So it is Amen, so it shall be; and this in Jesus Christ, on whose merit they are all founded, and who was the great instance of God's truth: for the great promise wherein God stood bound to the church was to send a Saviour to redeem the world; and if God hath made good this promise, surely this is a pledge that he will make good all the rest; for if he spared not his Son, he will not stick at other things.

3. There is justitia, righteousness; for this is righteousness, jus suum cuique tribuere, to give every one his right and his due. Now by promise, another man cometh to have a right in the thing promised; therefore justice requireth that you should give him the right that accrueth to him by virtue of your promise. So God, promittendo se fecit debitorem, maketh himself a debtor by promise. It was his mercy and goodness to make the promise, but his justice bindeth

him to make it good. This is often spoken of in scripture: 1 John 1:9, 'Faithful and just to forgive us our sins;' 2 Tim. 4:8, 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.' By his promise he is become a debtor to us; he cannot go against his own word; his justice will not suffer him to change. It is a debt of grace indeed, but a debt it is which it is justice for God to pay. Thus you see how it is a word of righteousness.

Reason 1. Because God hath in his promises pawned his truth with the creature, and so given us an holdfast upon him. *Chirographa tua injiciebat tibi Domine.* Promises, as in a contract, are more than simple declarations, and bare assertions of what good he will do to us. With man it is one thing to say, This I purpose to do; another, This I promise to do. A promise addeth a new bond and obligation upon a man for fulfilling his word. An intimation or signification of God's will and purpose showeth the event will follow; but a promise doth not only do that, but giveth us a right and claim to the things promised. Scripture prophecies will be fulfilled because of God's veracity; but scripture promises will be fulfilled, not because of his veracity, but his fidelity and justice. And the 'heirs of promise may have strong consolation by God's word and oath'—'two immutable things, wherein it is impossible for God to lie,' Heb. 6:18. There is a greater obligation upon God to make it good.

Reason 2. Because none that ever depended upon God's word were disappointed; not one instance to the contrary: Ps. 18:30, 'The word of the Lord is tried; he is a buckler to all that trust in him.' Search the annals and records of time, and all experience hath found the word of God exactly true. If any build not upon it, it is because they are not acquainted with God, and the course of his proceedings: Ps. 9:10, 'They that know thy name will trust in thee.' There is so little

believing and trusting God upon his word, because they are men of no experience; otherwise they would find God punctual to his promise: 'Not one thing hath failed of all the good things the Lord your God spake concerning you,' Josh. 23:14. He speaketh not only as his own observation, and the result of all his experiences, and that in a time when there was no room for dissembling: 'I go the way of all the earth,' but also 'you know in all your hearts, and all your souls;' and he repeateth it, 'Not one thing hath failed.' Unless you be impudent, you cannot deny it; try him, you have found support and relief hitherto.

Reason 3. Because God standeth much on the credit of his word. Heathens have acknowledged it to be the property of the gods, ἀληθεύειν καὶ εὐεργετεῖν; certainly the true God hath showed himself to the world in nothing so much as doing good and keeping promise: Ps. 138:2, 'Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name,' above all that is famed or spoken or believed of God, this is most conspicuous, as being punctual in keeping covenant and fulfilling promises. God hath ever stood upon that, of being tender of the honour of his truth in the eye of the world: therefore we should build securely upon the word of his righteousness.

Use 1. To bless God that we are upon such sure terms. All people that know there is a God, wait for some good things from him; but they are left to uncertain guesses, it may be they may have them, it may be not: but we have it under hand and seal, and have God's warrant for our hope, and so deal with God upon sure terms. Well may we take up David's song, 'In God I will praise his word, in the Lord I will praise his word,' Ps. 56:10. It is twice repeated in that psalm: that is ground of rejoicing, that God will assure us beforehand what he will do for us. God might have dealt with man by way of dominion and command alone, without any signification of his goodness, and left

us to blind guesses. Promises are the eruptions and overflows of God's love, he cannot stay till accomplishment, but will tell us aforehand what he is about to do for us, that we may know how to look for it.

Use 2. To exhort us to rest contented with God's word, and to take his promises as sure ground of hope. I shall show you how you should count it a word of righteousness; what is your duty; and that first you are to delight in the promise, though the performance be not yet, nor like to be for a good while: Heb. 11:13, *πεισθέντες καὶ ἀσπασάμενοι*, being persuaded of them, they embraced them. Oh! how they hugged the promises at a distance, and said in their hearts, Oh, blessed promise! this will in time yield a Messiah: John 8:56, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and saw it, and was glad.' You hold the blessing by the root, this will in time yield deliverance, Heb. 6:18; not only yield comfort, but prove comfortable: Ps. 119:111, 'Thy testimonies I have taken for an heritage; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.' For your duty—

2. You are to rest confident of the truth of what God hath promised, and be assured that the performance will in time be: *πεισθέντες*, Heb. 11:13. Faith is not a fallible conjecture, but a sure and certain grace: Rom. 8:28, 'We know that all things shall work together for good to them that love God.' So Ps. 140:12, 'I know that God will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.' There is a firm persuasion; I know I shall find this to be a truth. Men who are conscionable and faithful in keeping their word are believed; yet, being men, they may lie: Rom. 3:4, 'Let God be true, and every man a liar.' Every man is, or may be a liar, because of the mutableness of his nature; from interest he will not lie, but he can lie. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater. Surely God cannot deceive, or be deceived. He never yet was worse than his word.

3. You are to take the naked promise for the ground of your hope, however it seem to be contradicted in the course of God's providence; when it is neither performed, nor likely to be performed, it is his word you go by, whatsoever his dispensations be. Many times there are no apparent evidences of God's doing what he hath said, yea, strong probabilities to the contrary. It is said, Rom. 4:18, 'That Abraham against hope believed in hope,' παρ' ἐλπίδα ἐπ' ἐλπίδι. Abraham had the promise of a son, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed; but there was no appearance of this in nature, or natural hope of a child, both he and Sarah being old: yet he believed. It is an antanaclasis, an elegant figure, having the form of a contradiction he goeth upon God's naked word. Then faith standeth upon its own basis and legs, which is not probabilities, but his word of promise. Everything is strongest upon its own basis, which God and nature have appointed. For as the earth hangeth on nothing in the midst of the air, but there is its place, faith is seated most firmly on the word of God, who is able to perform what he saith.

4. This faith must conquer our fears and cares and troubles: Ps. 112:7, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' He must fix the heart without wavering: Ps. 56:4, 'In God I will praise his word, in God have I put my trust: I will not fear what man can do unto me.' The force of faith is seen in calming our passions and sinful fears, which otherwise would weaken our reverence and respect to God.

5. Above all this, you are to glorify God publicly; not only in the quiet of your hearts, but by your carriage before others: John 3:33, 'Put to his seal that God is true.' It is not said, Believed or professed, but, Put to his seal. We seal the truth of God as his witnesses when we confirm others in the faith and belief of the promises by our

joyfulness in all conditions, patience under crosses, diligence in holiness, hope and comfort in great straits. Num. 20:12, God was angry with Moses and Aaron, because ye 'believe not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel.' We are not only to believe God ourselves, but to sanctify him in the eyes of others; as when the Thessalonians had received the word in much assurance, in much affliction, and much joy in the Holy Ghost, the apostle telleth them they were examples to all that believed in Achaia and Macedonia, 1 Thes. 1:5. The worthiness and generousness of our faith should be a confutation of our base fears, but a confirmation of the gospel. But we are so far from confirming the weak, that we offend the strong; and instead of being a confirmation to the gospel, we are a confutation of it.

Use 3. Reproof to us that we do no more build upon this word of righteousness.

1. Some count these vain words, and the comforts thence deduced fanatical illusions; and hopes and joys, fantastical impressions: Ps. 22:7, 8, 'All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.' Nothing so ridiculous in the world's eye as trust or dependence or unseen comforts. Ungodly wits make the life of faith a sport and matter of laughter.

2. Some, though not so bad as the former, they may have more modesty, yet as little faith, since they are all for the present world, present delights, present temptations. With many, one thing in hand is more than the greatest promises of better things to come, 2 Tim. 4:10; they have no patience. Afflictions are smart for the present: Heb. 12:11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but



grievous.' Yea, they do not deal equally with God and man. If a man promise, they reckon much of that, Qui petat, accipiet, &c. They can tarry upon man's security, but count God's nothing worth. They can trade with a factor beyond seas, and trust all their estates in a man's hand whom they have never seen; and yet the word of the infallible God is of little regard and respect with them.

3. The best build too weakly on the promises, as appeareth by the prevalency of our cares and fears. If we did take God at his word, we would not be so soon mated with every difficulty: Heb. 13:5, 6, 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me.' There would be more resolution in trials, more hardness against troubles. Besides maintenance, there is protection in the promise. If we had faith to believe this, it would effectually quiet our minds in all our necessities and straits and perplexities. Man can do much, bring them low, even to a morsel of bread. We need not much desire the best things of the world, nor fear the worst; need not be covetous, nor fearful. Where faith is in any life and strength, it moderateth our desires and fears. It is an ill part of a believer to hang the head.

Secondly, From that clause, David's eyes were to God's salvation, that God's word being passed his people do and must wait for the accomplishment of it. The lifting up of the eyes implies three things—faith, hope, and patience; all which do make up the duty of waiting for help and relief from God.

1. The lifting up the eyes implies faith and confident persuasion that God is ready and willing to help us: 2 Chron. 20:12, 'But our eyes are unto thee;' Ps. 123:1, 2, 'Unto thee I lift mine eyes, O thou that

dwellst in the heavens.' The very lifting up of the bodily eye towards heaven is an expression of this inward trust: so David in effect saith, From thee, Lord, I expect relief, and the fulfilling of thy promises. So that there is faith in it, that faith which is the evidence of things not seen. How great soever the darkness of our calamities be, though the clouds of present troubles thicken about us, and hide the Lord's care and loving-kindness from us, yet faith must look through all to his power and constancy of truth and love. The eye of faith is a clear, piercing, eagle eye: Heb. 11:27, 'Moses endured, as seeing him that was invisible.' A man is very short-sighted before: 2 Peter 1:9, 'He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off;' can only skill in the things of sense and reason, see a danger near him, as beasts or a bait while it is before him; a brute thinketh of no other; or else goeth by probabilities, as it seeth things by the light of reason in their causes. But faith seeth things afar off in the promises, Heb. 11:13, at a greater distance than the eye of nature can reach to. Take it either for the eye of the body, or the mind, faith will draw comfort not only from what is invisible at present, but not to come for a long time; it is future as well as invisible; its supports lie in the other world, and are yet to come.

2. There is hope in it; for what a man hopeth for he will look for it, if he can see it a-coming: 'the earnest expectation of the creature,' ἀποκαταδοκία τῆς κτίσεως, Rom. 8:19; the stretching forth of the head: Judges 5:28, 'They looked out at the window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long a-coming?' So by spiritual hope there is a lifting up of the eyes, or a looking out for what God hath promised, or an intent observing all together: 'Our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for a Saviour,' Phil. 3:20. Faith keepeth the eye of the mind fixed upon the promise, and is ever looking out for deliverance: Ps. 121:1, 2, 'I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help: my help cometh from

the Lord, which made heaven and earth.' Thence they look and wait for succour; it must come out of heaven to them. They see it, they can spy a cloud a-coming; that which a man careth not for he doth not look for. David saith, 'I will pray and look up,' Ps. 5:3. Hope hath expectation of the thing or object hoped for.

3. There is patience in it, in persevering and keeping on our looking till mercy come, with faith and ardency in expecting God's help. Looking and waiting is to be conjoined, notwithstanding difficulties, till it procure deliverance: Ps. 123:2. 'Our eyes wait on the Lord, who will have mercy on us.' This lifting up of the eyes doth not imply a glance, or once looking to heaven; but that we keep looking till God doth help: Isa. 8:17, 'I will wait on the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.' There is a constant depending, and patient attending upon God, notwithstanding the present tokens of his wrath and displeasure. As a man withdraweth himself from a party, and will not be seen of him, nor spoken to by him, but the resolute suitor tarrieth to meet and speak with him. So Micah 7:7, 'Therefore I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.' Not give over upon every discouragement, as a merchant doth not discontinue trading for every loss at sea. Certainly it is not faith and hope, unless we can endure and bear out. Natural courage will bear out for a while, but not long. A little touch breaketh a bubble, and a slight natural expectation is soon discouraged; but to hope against hope, to pray when God forbids praying, to keep waiting when we have not only difficulties in the world, but seeming disappointments from heaven itself, when the promise and Christ seem to be parting from you, and refuse you; yet then to say, I will not let thee go until thou bless me, as Jacob said to the angel, Gen. 32:25, 26, when God saith, Let me alone.

Use. Let us turn ourselves towards God for help, and have our eyes on him, and keep them there: Ps. 141:8, 'But mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord; in thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute.' Let us not give way to discouragements, though God delay us so long till all our carnal provisions are spent, no meal in the barrel, nor oil in the cruse, and we are brought to the last morsel of bread; though brought to complain for pity to them that will show none, but pour vinegar into our wounds; yea, till our spiritual provisions be spent. Faith, will hold out no longer, hope can do us no service, patience lost and clear gone; we fall a-questioning God's love and care. I say, though we grow weary, let us strive against it, acquaint God with it, renew faith in the word of promise. There is a holy obstinacy in believing.

To get this eye of faith—

1. There is need of the Spirit's enlightening. Nature is short-sighted, 2 Peter 1:9. A man cannot look into the other world till his eyes be opened by the Spirit of God: Eph. 1:17, 18, 'The Father of glory give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.' There needs spiritual eye-salve to get this piercing eye to look through the curtain of the clouds.

2. When your eye is opened, you must keep your eye clear from the suffusions of lust and worldly affections. A mortified heart is only a fit soil for faith to grow in. The world is a blinding thing, 2 Cor. 4:4. While present things bear bulk in our eye, invisible things are little regarded by us. Dust cast into the eyes hindereth the sight, carnal affections send up the fumes and steams of lust to blind us.

3. The eye being clear, you must ever be looking up out of the world of temptations into the world of comforts and supports, from earth to heaven: Heb. 11:27, 'As seeing him that is invisible;' and the nothing things of the world, by omnifying and magnifying God. There are the great objects which darken the glory of the world, and all created things. And there we see more for us than can be against us, 2 Kings 6:15. Pharaoh, a king of mighty power, was contemptible in Moses eyes, because he saw a higher and a more glorious king; so glorious, that all the power and princes of the world are nothing to him.

4. The less sensible evidence there is of the object of faith, the greater and stronger is the faith, if we believe it upon God's word: John 20:29, 'Because thou hast seen, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.' It extenuateth our faith, when the object must be visible to sense, or it worketh not on us. Faith hath more of the nature of faith when it is satisfied with God's word, whatever sense and reason say to the contrary: 1 Peter 1:8, 'Whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now you see him not, you rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. Whatever faith closeth with upon sure grounds, it is spiritually present to the soul, though few sensible helps. The less we see in the world, the more must we believe. To see things to come as present, and to see things that otherwise cannot be seen, cometh near to God's vision of all things. God saw all things before they were, all things that may be, shall be, *visione simplicis intelligentiæ*; Prov. 8:31, 'Rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth.' So doth faith eye all things in the all-sufficiency and promise of God, long before they come to pass, and affects the believer with them, John 8:52.

Thirdly, From the weakness and imbecillity confessed, 'Mine eyes fail.' The doctrine is—

Doct. That sometimes God's people wait so long, that their eyes even fail in waiting; that is, their faith, hope, and patience is almost spent, and they are ready to give over looking.

For the phrase intimateth two things—a trial on God's part, and a weakness on ours. First, a trial by reason of God's dispensations. Two things make our waiting tedious—the sharpness of afflictions, and the length of them, long delays of help and great trouble, in the mean time. First, the depth of the calamity, or the sharpness of the trial may occasion this failing: Ps. 38:10, 'My heart panteth, my strength faileth me, for the light of mine eyes is also gone.' Secondly, the length of troubles, or the protraction of deliverance. As the bodily eye is tired with long looking, so doth the soul begin to be weary, when this expectation is drawn out at length: Ps. 119:82, 'Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?' The delay is tedious.

As to the matter of this failing, there are three things:—

[1.] That the sufferings of God's children may be sometimes long. God ordereth it so, that faith, hope, and patience may have its perfect work, Heb. 6:12. There is an intervening time between the promise and the accomplishment. Intervening difficulties, James 1:3, 4; Rom. 8:24, 'Hope that is seen is not hope;' it is but natural probability, natural courage. Those that have received a great measure of faith have a great measure of trials; their troubles are greater that their graces may be the more exercised, that many stubborn humours may be broken, Jer. 4:3. God useth to suffer his enemies to break up the fallow ground of his people: Ps. 129:2, 'The plowers plough upon my back, they make long their furrows.' We have proud and stiff hearts, therefore the plough of persecution goeth deep, that the seed of the word may thrive the more; till they have done their work, God doth not cut asunder the cords. The Lord of the soil expects a richer crop.

The power of the Spirit is more seen: Col. 1:10, 11, 'Strengthened with, all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.' Not only patience, but long-suffering, which is patience extended under continued troubles. Men may fret; it is not unwilling, extorted by force; but they are cheerful under the cross. The length of sufferings; some can endure a sharp brunt, but tire under a long affliction. Some go drooping and heavily under it; therefore joyfulness. For these and many other reasons doth God permit our sufferings to be long.

[2.] Why faith, hope, and patience are apt to fail.

(1.) Because these graces are weak in the best, and may fail under long and sharp trials: Ps. 125:3, 'For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous put forth their hands to iniquity.' The strongest believer may faint in trouble, therefore God will not try them above their strength; but as he sometimes giveth more grace, so sometimes he abateth the temptations. Grace is not so perfect in any as to be above all weakening by assaults. Who would have thought that a meek Moses could be angry? Ps. 106:33. There are relics of sin unmortified, such as may be awakened in the best. Who would have thought that David should fall into uncleanness, an old experienced man, who had many wives of his own, when Joseph, a young man, a captive, resisted an offered occasion? But especially do these graces fail in their operation when the temptation is more spiritual; for these are mystical graces, to which nature giveth no help, when things dear to us in the flesh and in the Lord are made the matter of the temptation, and set an edge upon it, &c. Sins that disturb the order of the present world are not so rife with the saints as sins that concern our commerce with God.

(2.) Because temptations raise strange clouds and mists in the soul, that though they grant principles, yet they cannot reconcile providences with them. As Jer. 12:1, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, yet let me plead with thee.' It is not to be questioned, much less doubted of, that God is upright and just in his dealings; yet what mean those passages of his providence? Their thoughts are fearfully imbrangled, the minds of the godly are molested: 'Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?' So Hab. 1:13. 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity; wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously? and holdest thy tongue, when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?' God is pure and holy, they know; yet how can he bear with the enemy, in their treachery and violence against the church? So brutified are they, that they know not how to reconcile his dispensations with his nature and attributes; though they have faith enough to justify God, yet atheism enough to question his providence. When the heart is over charged with fears: Ps. 73:1, 'Yet God is good to Israel: my feet were almost gone, my steps well-nigh slipped.' They hold fast the conclusion, 'Yet God is good to Israel;' yet cannot maintain it against all objections.

(3.) Carnal affections are hasty and impetuous, and if God give not a present satisfaction, they question all his love and care of them: Ps. 31:22: 'I said in my heart, I am cut off;' Isa. 49:14, 'Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken, and my God hath forgotten me;' Jonah 2:4, 'And he said, I am cast out of thy sight.' So that, did not God confute his unbelief by some sudden experience, as in the first instance, or the word contain a suitable supply, as in the second, or the principle of grace in some measure withstand ('but I will look towards thy holy temple'), the soul would be swallowed up in the whirlpool of despair. Thus hasty and precipitant are we while we hearken to the voice of the flesh. We are apt to count all our troubles God's total desertion of



us. Such a hasty principle have we within us, that will hurry us to desperate conclusions, as if it were in vain to wait upon God any longer.

(4.) Mutability in man. What a flush of faith and zeal have we at first, as stuffs have a great gloss at first wearing. We lose, as our first love, so our first faith: Gal. 5:7, 'Ye did run well; who did hinder you?' There is a great forwardness at first, which abateth afterwards; and men grow remiss, 'faint in your minds,' Heb. 12:3, from one degree to another.

[3.] That this failing is but an infirmity of the saints; though their hope be weak and ready to faint, it is not quite dead.

(1.) It is an infirmity of the better sort, not like the atheism and malignity of the wicked. Some diseases show a good constitution, and seize on none but such. This distemper is not incident to carnal men: Isa. 38:14, 'Mine eyes fail with looking up.' It argueth a vehemency in our hope; they that do not mind things are never troubled with such a spiritual disease; for this failing cannot be but where there is vehemency of desire and expectation. Those that desire little of the salvation of God's people, feel none of this.

(2.) There is a difference between them and others; though they have their weaknesses, yet their faith doth not quite expire; there is a twig of righteousness still to trust to; they are weary of watching, but they do not give over waiting; and say, as he, 2 Kings 6:33, 'What should I wait for the Lord any longer?' Fainting is one thing, and quite dead is another: they strive against the temptation: though no end of their difficulties appeareth, they attend still, keep looking, though the vigour of the eye be abated by long exercise. There is life in the saints, though not that liveliness they could wish; for they do not fall,

and rise no more, and are quite thrown down with every blast of a temptation.

(3.) They confess their weakness to God, as David doth here, acquainteth God with it, and so shame themselves out of the temptation, and beg new strength. It is an excellent way of curing such distempers to lay them forth before God in prayer, for he helpeth the weak in their conflicts. When we debate dark cases with our own hearts, we entangle ourselves the more.

Use 1. It reproveth our tenderness when we cannot bear a little while: 'What! not watch with me one hour?' Mat. 26:40. David kept waiting till his eyes failed. Some their whole voyage is storms;—Christ indents with us to take up our cross daily, Luke 9:22;—who are their lifetime kept under this discipline; and can we bear no check from providence? We would have all done in an hour or in a year, can bear nothing when God calleth us to bear much and long; cannot endure to abate a little of our wonted contentment, when God will strip us of all.

Use 2. Let us provide for long sufferings. All colours will not hold as long as the cloth lasts. We need a great deal of grace, because we know not how long our great troubles may last. Sometimes sufferings are like to be long. First, When the cross maketh little improvement, carrieth little conviction with it. While the stubbornness of the child continueth, the blows are continued. God will withdraw till they acknowledge their offence, Hosea 5:15. When we eye instruments, and pour our rage upon them; or instruments are minded, and we hope to be delivered some other way, when we repent not. Secondly, When provocations are long: Deut. 28:58, 59, 'If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law, that is written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD

THY GOD; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance; and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance.'

## SERMON CXXXVI

**Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.—VER.**

**124**

IN this verse we have two requests—the one general, the other particular; wherein he would have the Lord exercise his mercy to him. Show thy mercy to me in teaching me thy law. The one respects the privilege part of religion, the other the duty part; the one concerns time past, or the pardon of sin already committed, 'Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy;' the other prevention of sin for the time to come, that I may perform my duty for the future, 'Teach me thy statutes.' Mercy is the ground of his request; teaching God's law the matter of it. He would have this gift bestowed on him freely.

First branch, 'Deal with thy servant,' &c. Where we have—

1. His relation to God, thy servant.
2. The terms upon which he would have God deal with him: Not according to my works, but according to thy mercy.

First, His relation is mentioned either—(1.) As a part of his plea, as if he had said, Lord, thou art merciful to all, for 'thy tender mercy is over all thy works,' Ps. 145:9; much more to thy servants: now I am thy servant. God's servants have a special claim and interest in God; besides his general bounty, they expect his special mercy and favour: Ps. 116:16, 'O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid.' Clear that, that you are some of God's servants once, and then you may the better expect your master's bounty. Or, (2.) To show his need of mercy though God's servant. Such an emphasis it seemeth to have: Ps. 143:2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant;' non dicit cum hostibus tuis. He doth not say, Enter not into judgment with thine enemy, but with thy servant. So here David, that was God's servant, a man of singular holiness, desireth that God would deal with him in mercy. From first to last, the saints have no other plea. Theodoret, on the text, observeth, ὁ τοσαύτης ἀρετῆς ἐργάτης ἐλέους τυχεῖν, &c.—so great a worker of righteousness beggeth to receive mercy, and looketh for all his salvation by mercy. And again, οὐκ ἀπαιτεῖ μίσθον ἀλλὰ φιλανθρωπίαν αἰτεῖ—he doth not challenge a reward, but asketh favour and kindness.

Doct. That God's best servants have no other and no better plea than that God would deal with them in mercy.

1. Because there is and can be no merit on the creature's part towards God, according to the rule of justice. Adam in innocency could impetrare, not mereri; it was his grace to covenant with the creature, when innocency and purity did adorn our nature; how much more since the fall, and the distance between God and us hath been so widened by sin! What merits must be indebitum and utile. It must be indebitum: when our righteousness was perfect, yet still due by virtue of our relation to God as creatures; and paying of debts

deserveth no reward. The lawyers tell us, *Nemo consequitur præmium, quod facit ex officio debitum*. We are bound, and do but our duty; but God is not bound to us. All that the creature hath and is, and can do, it oweth to God, and hath received it from him; and God is in such a degree of excellency above us that he cannot be obliged. Where there is so great a disparity of nature and being, there is no common right to make him obnoxious, to make it justice to any action of ours to reward us. Aristotle denied children could requite their parents, and merit from them, and that the obligation of merit is only between equals; certainly not between God and men. There was nothing which bound him necessarily to reward his creature but his free covenant. Again, that which merits must be utile, profitable to him from whom we challenge reward. If we be never so righteous, the benefit is ours, not God's. He is not beholden to us, useth us not out of indigence, but indulgence; not as if he needed anything, but we need his blessing: Luke 19:10, 'When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants;' and Ps. 16:2, 'Our goodness extendeth not to thee.' God giveth all, receiveth nothing from us. The beam oweth all to the sun, the sun nothing to the beam.

2. Because since the fall there is no claiming but by the covenant of grace and mere mercy. A sinner cannot expect anything but upon terms of mercy. The covenant of works supposed us innocent and holy, and bound us so to continue, Gal. 3:20; so that the law knoweth not how to do good to a sinner. Once a sinner, and for ever miserable; it leaveth no room for repentance. So that now there is no hope for the best, according to the rule of strict justice, but only according to the law of mercy. In the new covenant there are these special differences from the law of works. That there is not only grace, but mercy and grace too. In the first covenant there was grace, but no mercy. Grace doth all things gratis, freely; but mercy pitieth the miserable: therefore, till sin and misery entered there could be no

room for mercy. There was grace in that covenant, for it was of grace that God did enter into covenant with man at all, and of grace that he did accept man's perfect obedience, so as upon performance of it to make him sure of eternal life. But now in the new covenant God doth show mercy and grace too, and grace in the most rich and glorious manner. Mercy and grace too in this way of salvation, in that there is hope for a sinner, a plank cast out after shipwreck; and grace in the richest and most glorious manner; partly for the design and end that was driven at; it was the glory of grace: Eph. 1:6, 'To the praise of the glory of his grace;' and partly the ground of it was founded upon the infinite mercy of God and the infinite merit of Christ. The infinite mercy of God: Mercy is the infinite goodness of God, flowing out freely to the creature, without any moving cause or worth on the creature's part to expect it: Rom. 9:16, 'It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth; but of God that showeth mercy.' And the infinite merit of Christ: Isa. 55:3, 'I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David;' Isa. 42:6, 'And give thee for a covenant to the people;' and Isa. 49:8, 'I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant to the people.' David, that is Christ, the seed of David; all the mercies of the covenant are exhibited in and by him, in whom the covenant is made with us, and made good to us, 2 Cor. 1:20. And he is given for a foundation; that is, the foundation of a new and better covenant. And partly because of the terms wherein it is dispensed, which is not unsinning obedience, but a sincere owning of Christ, unto the ends for which God hath appointed him. So that in effect a thankful acceptance of a free discharge is all that we do for paying the debt, or to make way for our acceptance with God: Rom. 4:16, 'Therefore it is of faith, that it might be of grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed;' and Eph. 2:8, 'Ye are saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God.' By the grace of faith we lay hold upon or apply to ourselves Christ and all his benefits; and that faith God giveth us by his mere grace, not

exhibited by any work of others. The whole work of salvation, from its first step in regeneration to its last step in glorification, doth entirely flow from God's free grace, and not from any worth in us. So that this being the end, grounds, terms of the new covenant from first to last, mercy doth all on which our hope dependeth. We must claim by mercy.

3. As there is no merit in the best saints, so there is much demerit, and as there is nothing to induce God to be good to us, so there is much to hinder him, much that standeth in his way; yet God will do us good: Isa. 57:17, 18, 'I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also and restore comforts to him.' He taketh motives from himself to pity when he might take occasion to punish. There are many sins to be forgiven both before and after conversion. We are not only undeserving, but ill-deserving. It was much that God would take us with all our faults, when he first drew us into acquaintance with himself, and intrust us with a stock of grace; but after he hath done that, we still are faulting and sinning: Rom. 8:1, 'Yet now there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ;' notwithstanding the relics of corruption, and its breaking out.

4. From the temper of the saints, their humility. None have such a sight and sense of sin as they have, because their eyes are anointed with spiritual eyesalve. They have a clearer insight into the law: Jer. 31:19, 'After I was instructed I smote upon my thigh.' They are enlightened by God's Spirit; the least mote is espied in a glass of clear water. None are so acquainted with their own hearts and ways as they who often commune with their own hearts, and use self-reflection. Others, that live carelessly, do not mind their offences; but they that set themselves do more consider their ways; none have a more tender sense of the heinousness of sin. She loved much, wept much, because much was forgiven her, Luke 7. Some are of a more

delicate constitution; the back of a slave is not so sensible of stripes as they that have been more tenderly brought up. The beams of the sun shining into a house, we see the dust and motes in the sunbeams, which we saw not before. They profess as Jacob, I am not worthy of all the mercy and truth thou hast showed me. They groan as St Paul, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'

Use 1. Information. We learn hence that we should not be discouraged, when our hearts are touched with a deep remorse and sense of our failings, and are desirous to break off our sins by repentance; that mercy which is freely vouchsafed in the covenant, which all God's servants have so often experienced, which the best make their only plea and ground of hope, will find out a remedy for us. If you have a heart to give up yourselves to God's service, and so to get an interest in the promises and blessings of the covenant, you may come and sue out this mercy, for God desireth to exalt his grace. God saith, 'Return to the Lord your God, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely,' Hosea 14. It is the delight of grace to do good, notwithstanding unworthiness. The worst of sins do not hinder God's help, are not above his cure. There is hope for such as are convinced, and see no worth in themselves why God should do them any good. God needs not, will not be hired by the creatures to do it.

Use 2. How inexcusable those are that reject the offers of grace. If they have any liking to the blessings of the covenant, they have no ground to quarrel and differ with God about the price: Isa. 55:1, 'Ho every one that thirsteth, let him come to the waters and drink freely, without money and without price.' You have no cloak for your sin if you will not deal with God upon these terms. Nothing keepeth you from him but your own perverse will.



Use 3. What reason there is the best of God's servants should carry it thankfully all their days. From first to last the mercy of God is your only plea and claim. No flesh hath cause to glory in his presence, there being no meritorious cause in the covenant of grace, no moving and inducing cause, no co-ordinate working cause: 'Not for your sakes do I this,' Ezek. 36:32; and in 1 Cor. 7:4, it is said, 'Who maketh thee to differ?' We paid nothing for God's love, nothing for Christ, the Son of his love, nothing for his Spirit, the fruit, of his love, nothing for sanctifying grace and faith, the effects of his Spirit dwelling and working in our hearts, nothing for pardon; we have all freely; nothing for daily bread, protection, maintenance; and shall pay nothing for glory, when we come to receive it: Jude 21, 'Looking for the mercy of God unto eternal life.' It is all without our merit, and against merit. We should regard this especially when we are apt to say in our hearts, This is for our righteousness; as Haman thought none so fit for honour and preferment as himself, Esther 6:6; Haman thought so in his heart. So proud-hearted, self-conceited sinners say in their hearts, God seeth more in them than in others. Alas! you are not only unworthy of Christ, the Spirit, grace, and glory, but the air you breathe in, and the ground you tread upon. What did the Lord see in you to judge you meet for such an estate? Gen. 32:10, 'I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and all thy truth.' Did not you slight grace, neglect Christ, as well as others? and doth not sin break out, and make a forfeiture every day?

Use 4. That we should carry it humbly as well as thankfully. The best of God's children should most admire grace and glorify mercy, set the crown on mercy's head. Consider—

1. What was the first rise of all God's love, what set all a-stirring in God's bosom, John 3:16. There was no cause beyond this. In other things we may rise higher, from his power and wisdom to his love.

But why did he love us? There is no other cause to be given—he loved us because he loved us. It was love first moved the business in the ancient counsel of God's will. God's love is the measure of itself.

2. When he came to apply it, he found us in our blood. It was a great mercy that God would take us into his service with all our faults. We were his creatures, but quite marred, not as he made us. We are not what we were when first his; as we came out of his hands we were pure and holy, but since the fall quite spoiled: Jer. 2:21, 'I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed; how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?' Strangely changed and altered! If a servant run from his master, and is become altogether blind, deformed, and diseased, will his master look after him, or care for him, or take him again? This was our case.

3. What is spoken already is common to others; you yourselves knew what you were, Titus 3:3. Every man is soundly affected, more sensible of his own case, seeth particular reasons why God should refuse him; yet you are as brands plucked out of the burning, who did resist such powerful means, such fair advantages; you dallied with God. You know the case of others by guess, your own by feeling. You lay not only in the common polluted mass, but had your particular offences.

4. When taken in a fault, that God will pity our weakness and infirmities in his service: Mal. 3:17, 'I will spare them as a man spareth his son that serveth him;' that is, he will continue his favour and good-will to them that serve him. So surely they that have a conscience, and are privy to their manifold infirmities and failings, will admire this.

5. Though for the main we give up ourselves to live according to the will of God, yet consider, notwithstanding our sins, what constant

humbling considerations there are to keep us sensible of our defects. (1.) All that you do is not worthy of God. Who can serve so great a majesty as the Lord is, according as he should be served? Josh. 24:19, 'You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy and a jealous God.' Alas! such is the poverty of human condition, that they can never perform service becoming his majesty. Have you a due sense of his purity and holiness? Nay, how jealous he is of the respects of his people! (2.) Not worthy of such a pure law, which requireth such perfect service at our hands: Ps. 19:6–8, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul,' &c. What doth that speculation produce, that a short exposition of the law begetteth a large opinion of our own righteousness? (3.) Not worthy such great hopes: 1 Thes. 2:12, 'That ye walk worthy of God, who hath called you to his kingdom and glory.' Since we have such great wages we should do more work. Is this for heaven? Is this for eternity? (4.) Not such as will answer our obligations. We are indebted to all the persons of the Trinity; God himself for our portion, Christ our Redeemer, the Spirit for our guide and comforter. The Gentiles were greatly obliged to God for fruitful seasons. The Jews, though acquainted only with God's patience and forbearance, the ceremonial law was a testification of guilt, or a bond that showed the creature's debt; this bond was not cancelled. (5.) Not answerable to the new nature in God's children; they would be in a state of perfect conformity and subjection to God. A seed worketh through the clods; so they groan under the relics of corruption and sin, Rom. 7:24, longing for the time when they shall be more like God, when they shall serve him without spot or blemish; therefore are unsatisfied with their present imperfections. These things considered, we should ever keep humble and thankful, praising God's grace: Isa. 63:7, 'I will mention the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed upon us; and the great goodness

towards the house of Israel which he hath bestowed on them, according to his mercies, and the multitude of his loving-kindnesses,'

Use 5. Directeth us how to pray. Cast yourselves at God's feet, pleading his mercy. We have heard the kings of Israel are merciful kings, 1 Kings 20:31. You have heard so of the God of Israel; try what mercy will do for you. Say, as David here, 'Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy.' My prayers have no other foundation of hope but thy mercy; I am nothing, and would be nothing, but what I have from thee; I have no merits, but thou hast mercy; all that I have, and expect to have, floweth and must flow from this fountain. Take heed of challenging duty as a debt. No, Lord; thy mercy is all my plea; as all thy servants before have done: Lord, remember me in thy mercy; if any have other things to plead, let them plead; I am resolved to use no other plea: Ps. 13:5, 'But I have trusted in thy mercy.'

Second branch, teach me thy statutes. This may be considered apart by itself, or with respect to the context.

First, Apart, as an entire prayer in itself. So the doctrine is,—

Doct. It is God must teach us his statutes.

This will appear if we consider—

1. What it is to be taught of God. There is a difference between grammatical knowledge and spiritual illumination, or a literal instruction and a spiritual instruction; a greater difference than there is between teaching a child to spell and read the words, and a man to understand the sense. Literal instruction is when we learn the truths contained in the word by rote, and talk one after another of divine things. But spiritual illumination is when these things are revealed to

us by the Spirit of God; as we read of the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit, 1 Cor. 2:4. Others have a form of knowledge, Rom. 2:20. Some have only the report of Christ, have but a human credulity, or the recommendation of others, that reveal the doctrine of God to them. Others receive a revelation made to their souls; their eyes are opened by the Spirit, Isa. 53:1. Once more, there is a difference between the Spirit's enlightening in a way of gifts and common grace, and his enlightening in a way of special and saving grace. Some that are enlightened by the Spirit fall away, Heb. 6:4. Others are taught of God, so as to come to him by Christ, John 6:45. This latter sort, that are savingly enlightened, have not only their minds opened, but their hearts inclined. So to be taught as to be drawn to faith and practice, this is proper to God, who is the sovereign dispenser of grace.

2. This will appear if we consider the heart of man, which is naturally full of darkness, and oppressed by the prejudices of customs and evil habits: 1 Cor. 2:14, 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of God;' 2 Cor. 4:4, 'The god of this world hath blinded their eyes.' This veil can only be removed by the Spirit of God. After grace received we know but in part, 1 Cor. 13:9, and much of the matter which beclouded the mind still remaineth with us; and when our lusts are awakened by temptations, our old blindness returneth upon us, and we strangely forget ourselves and our duty for the present. Therefore we have need to go to God to be taught: 2 Peter 1:9, 'He that wanteth these things is blind, and cannot see afar off.'

3. If we consider the matter to be taught, it is the mysterious doctrine that came out of the bosom of God. Every art hath its mystery, which strangers cannot judge of: 1 Tim. 3:16, 'All scripture is given by inspiration.' This was a secret which had not been known without a revelation. God hath his mysteries which no man knoweth, but by

the Spirit of God: Mat. 13:11, 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but to them it is not given.' Those that have scriptures, yet have scales on their eyes, 1 Cor. 2:14, they have not saving knowledge. How sharp-sighted soever graceless souls may be in things that concern the present world, yet they are blind in spiritual things, so as to be affected and engaged thereby seriously to turn to God. Yea, how accurately soever they can discourse in the theory, and preach of Christ and his ways, yet they have no transforming light. God's mysteries must be seen in his own light, or they make no impression upon us: Ps. 36:9, 'In thy light we shall see light.' The scriptures containing the sum of the Lord's mind, none can of themselves attain to the meaning of them; it was not the device of man's brain. So none understand by their proper skill and invention. There are such knots as cannot be untied and loosed, but by imploring the help of the Spirit.

Use 1. To press us to be often with God for this teaching, and make it our great request to him. A gracious heart would fain learn the right way to heaven: Ps. 43:3, 'O send out thy light and thy truth.' Direction how to carry ourselves is a great blessing.

2. The blindness of our understandings should make us more earnest with God. We are apt to mistake our way, through the natural weakness of our understandings, especially when lusts and interests interpose: Jer. 10:23, 'Lord, the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' As man understandeth not events, so easily mistaketh present duties.

3. Our present estate. The world is a dark place, 2 Peter 1:19; compared with the light of glory, it is but like a light that shineth out of a room where a candle is, and a room where a candle is not seen, the glimmerings of the antichamber of eternity. Our own reason, the

counsel and example of others, will easily misguide us. So the more we depend upon God, the more he will undertake to teach us, Prov. 5:6. Those that make their own bosoms their oracle, God is disengaged from being their guide: they need him not; but the snares they run into will soon show them how much they need him.

4. How unapt we are to see conclusions in the promises, and to apply general rules to particular cases and times; which most Christians cannot do, ἐν διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν, in their inferences: Rom. 1:21, 'Are vain in their imaginations, have their foolish hearts darkened.'

5. To bind all upon the heart, and to lie under the conscience of our duty, maketh the difficulty the greater; many imprison the truth in unrighteousness. Well, then, beg the constant direction and illumination of God's Holy Spirit; cast yourselves upon him in the sense of your weakness, and see if he will refuse you; say, I am blind and ignorant; Lord, guide me. It is dangerous to be left in any part of our duty to ourselves.

Secondly, If we consider the words with respect to the context. And first the remoter context, where David speaketh like a man under trouble and oppression, ver. 121, 122, 'Let not the proud oppress me,' &c. Lord, show me what to do in this time of my oppression.

Doct. Direction how to carry ourselves in trouble, till the deliverance cometh, is a great mercy, and should be earnestly sought of God.

Reason 1. From the parties oppressing. They that oppress watch for our halting, as Jeremiah complained, Jer. 20:10. They accused the prophet unto the ruler, and so to work his ruin, if they could find him tripping in anything. Now when we are watched we need special direction, that God would teach us to walk warily and safely: Ps. 27:11, 'Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path,

because of mine enemies; or, those which observe me, they watch to get some advantage: therefore that they may have no advantage against us, we should not trust to our own single wisdom.

Reason 2. Because the danger of sin is a greater inconvenience than the danger of trouble. In times of trials and troubles we are in danger of soul-losing and sinning, as well as bodily danger; therefore we have need to beg wisdom of God to carry it well under trouble, because we are so apt to miscarry, unless God guide us continually in our dark condition, and take us by the hand, and help us over our stumbling-blocks. There are many sins incident to our condition.

1. Uncomely passion and unadvised speeches; therefore David prayeth in his trouble, Ps. 141:3, 'Set a watch before my mouth, keep the door of my lips.' In our oppression, we are under a temptation to hurt our own cause by unadvised and passionate speeches. When we have too great a sense of the temptation, something or other breaketh out to God's dishonour.

2. Some indirect course to come out of trouble, Ps. 125:3. Men that make haste out of trouble carve for themselves, break prison before they are brought out. Necessity is an ill counsellor, and will soon tempt us to some evil way for our own ease, some sinful compliance or confederacy. The devil tempted Christ when he was an hungry, Mat. 4:3, hoping to work upon his necessity.

3. Private revenge, or meeting injury with injuries. We are apt to retaliate: 2 Sam. 16:9, 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.' Revenge is soon up. No man is troubled if a shower of rain falleth upon us; but if any cast a bucket or bason of water upon us, we are in a rage presently. We can better bear any trouble from God than injuries



from men: 'Oppression maketh a wise man mad.' A revengeful spirit is contrary to our heavenly calling.

4. Waxing weary of our duty, and quite tired and discouraged in God's service: Heb. 12:3, 'Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners, lest you be weary and faint in your minds.' Weariness and fainting belong properly to the body, and they differ gradually. Weariness is a lesser, and fainting a higher degree of deficiency; as when a man laboureth, hungers, or travelleth, it abateth his strength, and abateth the active powers, or toileth the spirits, the principle of motion. And from the body it is translated to the mind, to a less or higher degree of defection; and it is thus, when troubles are many and long continued, we begin to grow faint, and wax weary of the faith and service of Christ, and sink under the burden. It is the devil's design to make us weary, and tire us out in the service of God.

5. Another evil is despairing and distrustful thoughts of God. David, after all his experiences of God, though he had conducted him up and down: 1 Sam. 27:1, 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' He had a particular promise and assurance of the kingdom, and had seen much of God's care over him; yet, after all this, David doubteth of the word of God: Ps. 31:22, 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes; nevertheless thou heardest me.' As if he should say, God hath no care of me, nor thoughts of me; and at that instant deliverance was coming.

6. Questioning our interest in God by reason of the cross. Our Lord hath taught us to say, 'My God, my God,' in the bitterest agonies when he was upon the cross; but few learn this lesson: Judges 6:23, 'If God be with us, why hath all this evil befallen us?' Sometimes we question the love of God because we have no affliction, and anon

because we have nothing but affliction; as if God were not the God of the valleys as well as of the mountains. Well, then, seeing all these distempers are incident to an afflicted estate, we should the more carefully watch against them.

Reason 3. Because our enemies make a great advantage of our failings, and harden themselves in their prejudices if we carry not a holy good cause in a holy religious way, and will take the least occasion given from a questionable practice to slander the truth: Neh. 5:9, 'Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?' If you should trip in anything, you shall soon hear of it, to the reproach of religion. A holy and wise carriage in afflictions is very honourable to the gospel, otherwise your testimony is rejected and blasted.

Use. Well, then, desire the Lord to guide thee in all thy troubles; yea, if God doth guide you, let this satisfy you before the deliverance cometh about. It is a mercy if you have direction, though you have not deliverance; for a godly man should not so much regard the ease of the flesh as the performance of his duty to God. If you carry your cross regularly with faith and patience, God may have more honour and you more profit by your affliction than your deliverance. Yea, to be instructed in the word, and be taught your duty, is in itself a greater mercy than a deliverance: Ps. 94:12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and teachest him out of thy law.' It is a blessed thing, yea, it is a deliverance itself; for it delivereth you from the spiritual evil of the rod, which is the curse. Suffering doth not come as a curse when instruction goeth along with it; yea, it is the means of our great deliverance from the present evil world, 1 Cor. 11:32, as it is a pledge of our future deliverance in due time; for God is not unmindful of us, and will not leave us without the conduct of his Spirit.

Secondly, To handle the words with respect to the nearer context in ver. 123, 'Mine eyes fail for thy salvation.' This teaching is begged after he had complained of the delay of the promises, and so implicitly he complaineth not of the falsity of the word, or the non-performance of the promise, but of the weakness of his own faith.

Doct. When the Lord suspends the promised deliverance, the godly suspect not the truth of his word, but the darkness of their own unbelieving hearts.

They think this failing is because they are no more enlightened; they are dull in conceiving, and misty and cloudy in their apprehensions, and therefore would have a clearer understanding of the promise and a more quick-sighted faith; or have failed in the performance of the condition required, therefore desire that God would teach them and show them their errors, and cause them to profit in sanctification. Thus should we do in like cases when there is a seeming contradiction between the word and the works of God, betwixt his promises and his providence about us. His voice is sweet, like Jacob's, but his hands rough, like Esau's. Do not suspect the promise, but your understanding; go into the sanctuary, Ps. 73:16, 17. God will help you to reconcile things; otherwise the difficulty will be too hard for you. The saints that have suspected or distrusted God have found themselves in an error, Isa. 49:14, 15 and Ps. 77:8–10. (1.) You must not interpret God's promise by his providence, but his providence by his promise; and the promise is the light side, and providence the dark side of the cloud: Isa. 45:15, 'Thou hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour;' Ps. 77:19, 'Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.' We cannot trace him; a man cannot find out the reason of everything that God doth. (2.) You must distinguish between a part of God's work and the end of it. We cannot understand God's providence till he hath done his

work. In the last act of the comedy all the errors are reconciled. Tarry till then: Zech. 14:7, 'At evening it shall be light.' We view providence by pieces, and we know not what God is a-doing, rending and tearing all in pieces. But view God's work in its whole frame and contexture, and it will appear beautiful. (3.) We must distinguish between what is best for us and what we judge is best for us: Deut. 8:15, 16, 'Who led thee through the great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock; who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not; that he might humble thee, and prove thee, to do thee good at the latter end.' Other diet is more wholesome for our souls than our sick appetite craveth. It is best with us many times when we are weakest: 2 Cor. 12:10, 'When I am weak, then am I strong;' worst, when strongest: 2 Chron. 26:16, 'When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his own destruction.' Many times the buffetings of Satan are better for us than a condition free from temptations; so is poverty and emptiness better than fulness. (4.) We must distinguish between what things are in themselves, and what in their reduction, use, and tendency. All things are for a believer in their use, though they may be against him in their nature, 1 Cor. 3:18–20, and Rom. 8:28. 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' All their crosses, yea, sometimes their sins and snares, God will overrule them for good, and the work of grace sometimes goeth back that it may go forward. Many such cases there are which look like a contradiction, which we shall not know what to make of them, unless we bring it to Christ, an interpreter, one of a thousand. But take heed in these confusions and tossings of thy soul how thou reflectest on God; a little experience will confute thy prejudices.

Thirdly, With respect to the nearest context, the former clause of this verse. After an appeal to the covenant of grace, or a petition for

mercy, he asketh direction to keep the law.

Doct. They that would have mercy by the covenant must be earnest to be taught God's statutes.

Mercy and teaching are David's two great requests throughout this and other psalms.

Reason 1. The moral obligation of the law still lieth on God's servants, that are taken into the covenant of grace. There is an eternal obligation upon the creature to love and serve the creator, which cannot be dissolved. We are not redeemed from the service of the law by Christ, but the curse of the law: Luke 1:74, 75, 'Being delivered from the hands of our enemies, that we might serve God in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.' The end of our redemption was not to destroy our service according to the law, but to fit and enable us to perform it according to the image of God restored in us, Eph. 4:24. The new man is created to restore in some measure those abilities we lost in Adam. God never yet gave man a liberty to be free from the obligation of the moral law. He would not pardon any sin against it without satisfaction made by Christ, and believed and pleaded by sinful man. Christ merited, and God restored the spirit of sanctification, that men might keep it. He will not spare his own children, when they transgress against it by heinous and scandalous sins, as to temporal punishments: Prov. 11:31, 'The righteous man shall be recompensed upon earth; much more the wicked and the sinner;' Ps. 30:31, David and Eli both smarted for their sins. No man hath interest in Christ unless he return to the obedience of this law: 1 Cor. 9:21, 'To them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law;' Rom. 8:1, 2, 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in

Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit: for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.' No interest in mercy else: Gal. 6:16, 'As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them.' We cannot have full communion with God till we perfectly obey it: Eph. 5:27, 'That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but it should be holy and without blemish.'

Reason 2. The great privilege of the covenant of grace is to be taught God's statutes, or to have a real impress of them upon the heart and mind, which is the way of divine teaching: Heb. 8:10, 'For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel in those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.' He will cure us of our wickedness, weakness, and carelessness, and enable us to keep his law; it is God's undertaking to do so, and that out of free grace and favour, for he is not indebted to us; it is to give us knowledge of them, and power to keep them. Much of the law natural cannot be severed from it, and that is the reason why the heathens have the law written upon their hearts, Rom. 2:15; but the writing is very imperfect, both as to knowledge and power to keep it. God will imprint them more perfectly; this is the true notion of the law. By the mind is meant understanding, by the heart the rational appetite. In the mind is the directive counsel; in the will the imperial and commanding power. There is the prime mover of all human actions; he giveth an apprehensive and perceptive power, whereby we apprehend things more clearly, and effectually desire and affect spiritual delights.

Use 1. To refute the claim of them that would plead mercy, but would still go on in their own ways, blessing themselves in their sins. Till

our hearts and minds are suited to God's law by a permanent tincture of holiness, we are not fit subjects to ask mercy and the promises of the covenant.

Use 2. If we would have this effect, we must go to God, who alone can work upon the immortal soul, to reform, mould, or alter it. A new man or angel cannot do it; they may by sense and fancy teach him many things; but to make these lively impressions must be the work of the Spirit.

## SERMON CXXXVII

**I am thy servant; give me understanding,  
that I may know thy testimonies.—VER.**

**125**

IN this verse he repeateth his plea and request also. In the former verse he mentioneth the relation of a servant, and prayeth, 'Teach me thy statutes.' And here again—(1.) Asserteth his relation to God, 'I am thy servant.' (2.) Reneweth his request, 'Give me understanding,' (3.) The fruit and effect of the grant, 'That I may know thy testimonies;' or, Then I shall know.

First, This repetition hath its use. This repeating his relation to God showeth that where the conscience of our dedication to God, and our endeavours to serve him, is clear and sincere, we should not easily quit our claim. Deal with thy servant in merey; yea, Lord, I am thy servant: I have my failings; but, Lord, it is in my heart to serve thee; I can and will avow it as long as I live. Our defects and disallowed failings do not deprive us of the title of being God's servants; we may take comfort in it, and assert our interest in the promises as long as

we delight to do his will. And though unbelief opposeth our claim, we must remove it in the face of all objections. Christ puts Peter to a threefold assertion of his love to him, John 21. It is supposed we do not lie, in these redoubled professions of our respect and service to God.

Secondly, This renewing his request showeth his earnestness to increase in spiritual understanding. Savoury and powerful knowledge of divine things is in itself so excellent a benefit, and our necessity of it is so great, that we cannot enough pray for it. Only observe, that in the former verse, the notion was statutes, here testimonies. Statutes are that part of God's word which we should obey; testimonies that part which we should believe, viz., the promises. But this may be too critical, the words being taken in this psalm in a greater latitude.

Doct. That it is a good plea, when we want any mercy, spiritual or temporal, to be able to plead that we are God's servants.

1. That there are a sort of people, that in a peculiar manner are God's servants.
2. These may plead it when they want any mercy, spiritual or temporal.

First, That some are in a peculiar manner God's servants. The saints of God are so called; it was Moses' honour: 'They sung the song of Moses, the servant of the Lord.' So Josh. 1:1, 'Now after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord.' So Paul asserts it of himself: Acts 27:23, 'The God, whose I am, and whom I serve.' Here is a true description of a Christian man; he is God's, and serveth God; he is God's by special appropriation and communion with God. He serveth God, that is, walketh answerable to his relation, and is ever about



God's work. Elsewhere he describeth himself by his service: Rom. 1:9, 'My God, whom I serve in my spirit;' 1 Tim. 1:3, 'God, whom I serve with a pure conscience.' But to know who in a peculiar manner are God's servants, we must distinguish—

1. God is served actively and passively—by necessity of nature, or voluntary choice. Passively, by necessity of nature, all creatures, even the inanimate, are his servants: Ps. 119:91, 'They continue this day according to thine ordinances, for all are thy servants.' But actively, to serve him out of duty and choice; so do only men and angels, who were made immediately for his service; the brute and inanimate creatures only ultimately and terminatively. They have a principle in their nature to incline them to it, are not only overruled so to do by the conduct of general providence. The water that driveth a mill serveth my purpose, but otherwise than the miller or overseer of the work. Fire and water is my servant, much more he.

2. We must distinguish between those who are God's servants de jure, of right, and those who are so de facto, in deed—servants of right, and actually his servants. De jure all men are God's servants; God made them for himself, Prov. 14:4, and Christ bought them for himself: Rom. 14:9, 'For to this end Christ both died and rose again, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.' He is δεσπότης, a Lord and master, where he is not κύριος, a covenant redeemer and Saviour: 2 Peter 2:1, 'They deny the Lord that bought them,' ἀγοράσαντα, a master that bought them for service, and may challenge a right and interest in them, having shed his blood for mankind. But de facto those are God's servants who yield themselves up to God's dominion, to serve and please him in all things with cheerfulness and consent. The covenant is represented under divers notions; as a covenant of friendship: James 2:23, 'Abraham was called the friend of God;' as a conjugal covenant: Hosea 2:19, 20, 'I

will betroth thee to me;' as a covenant between king and subjects: Isa. 33:22; as a covenant between master and servants, Isa. 56:6, that take hold of his covenant, and join themselves to the Lord to be his servants. The two former notions imply the sociableness and intimacy we have with God in the covenant; the two latter our inferiority and subjection. Both must be minded, that as on the one side we be not slavish and under bondage, so, on the other, we may not behave ourselves too fellow-like with God. We are such servants as are also friends, yea, as sons; yea, his spouse. The end of joining ourselves to the Lord is not to be partners with him, but servants to him.

3. Some are servants by visible profession and baptismal engagement; others really and indeed, by conversion to God, or an actual giving up of themselves to his use and service. By baptism we are professed servants and subjects to the God of heaven, bound to be so; for it is the seal of that covenant of service I spake of before, and so bindeth our service in it. We renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, and dedicate ourselves to the Lord. Justin Martyr saith, They did ἀναθεματίζειν ἑαυτοὺς τῷ θεῷ; and Ezek. 16:8, 'And entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine;' 1 Peter 3:21, 'The like figure whereunto even baptism doth now save us, not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God.' By profession, all baptized persons are God's servants; but in reality all converted persons are so, that are turned from idols to serve the living God, 1 Thes. 1:9. Without this, Christ will not be contented with an outside acquaintance and the flattery of empty titles, but will the more challenge us by virtue of our profession: Mal. 1:6, 'If I be a father, where is mine honour? if I be a master, where is my fear?' Cui res subjecta nomini negatur, is nomine illuditur. It was no honour to Christ, but a mere mockery, to be called King of the Jews, whilst they

buffeted Christ and spat upon him. If God be a master, he will have the honour, fear, and obedience that belongeth to a master, that we should be afraid to offend him.

4. There are some that are servants by general relation, to distinguish persons, and some by way of special attendance. A servant in general relation is every Christian; servants by special attendance are either angels, and they are called his ministers, Ps. 103:21, as being in near and special attendance about their master's person, courtiers of heaven, most in grace and favour with God. A man may have one to do his business, that yet hath not one to attend his person. Among men, the magistrate is the minister of God for good, Rom. 13:4. Ministers are servants in special attendance, therefore Paul so often calleth himself the servant of Jesus Christ: Rom. 1:9, 'Whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son;' ministers of God, not of the people, but for the people, because of their near service about and under God. David was both a holy man, and a king, and a prophet. David as a king might use this petition: it highly concerneth one in public rank and office to say to God, I am thy servant; yea, as private believers. I observe it not only to distinguish persons, but to distinguish the work of the same person. Christians have, besides their general calling, a particular calling wherein to serve God. God hath given us all talents to trade withal: Mat. 25:14, 'Who called his servants, and delivered unto them his goods;' Luke 23:13, 'Occupy till I come.' *Dona talenta*. Every one of us, as instruments of providence, are to serve God in our generations, Acts 13:36, and so not only to mind the work of our general calling, but that particular work which he hath given us to do in our way and place. The general and particular calling do not cross, but help one another. In your particular calling, as instruments of God's providence, you provide for your support during your service, and the relief of others; so that, as God's servants, you are not to be idle, but to have a lawful

employment and calling, that you may not cast yourselves upon temptations of using sinful shifts for your support and living. It is also a remedy against the evils that flow from idleness and too much ease, and that he may promote the good of church, family, and kingdom. And then the general calling helpeth the particular, by limiting it, and our endeavours therein, that so we may have time to save our souls; and directing us, that we do all things holily and justly, as become the servants of the Lord.

Secondly, These may plead it when they want any mercy spiritual or temporal.

1. It is not a plea contrary to grace. Indeed, no such plea can be allowed in the new covenant; partly because it is the mere mercy of God to advance us to this honour, to make us his servants, and the fruit of his goodness, rather than our choice: Rom. 9:16, 'It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth; but of God that showeth mercy.' Willing and running and working and serving are necessary afterwards, 1 Cor. 9:24, as our way and qualification. Again, our service is mixed with many weaknesses. Mercy there needeth to interpret our best actions, Gal. 6:16. Peace and mercy, when we have done most exactly; yea, the very plea of servant excludeth all thought of merit; for a servant ipso jure ministerium domino debet: Luke 17:9, 'Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded? I trow not.'

2. It is not contrary to humility. It is not, We are thy children, we are thy saints; but, We are thy servants. It is the meanest of relations; it speaketh duty rather than perfection, and pleads not property of the house, but propriety and interest in God. The best of us are but servants to the high God, and therefore should not carry it proudly either to our master or to our fellow-servants. It is a humble claim.

3. It speaketh comfort; for God will provide for his family, and will give maintenance, protection, direction, help, and finally wages, where he requireth and expecteth service: for the present, necessities by the way; for the future, a blessed reward. For the present, we may depend on him as servants on their lord: Ps. 123:2, 'Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hands of their masters, and the eyes of maidens to the hand of their mistress,' &c. Servants had their dole and portion from their masters—the males from the master, the females from the mistress; therefore is the expression of looking here used. (1.) God will give direction. In the text, David, upon the account of being God's servant, beggeth to know his will, as all good servants study what will please their masters; and will God appoint us work, and not tell us what it is? Ps. 143:10. 'Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God: thy spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness.' God doth not only show us what is good in his word, but teacheth us also by his Spirit, and directs us in every turn and motion of our lives; and we ask it of him as he is our God and Lord. (2.) Help and assistance. God is no Pharaoh, to require brick and give no straw; his grace is ready to help the endeavouring soul: Gal. 2:12, 13, 'Work out your salvation; for God worketh in you both to will and to do.' He exciteth the first motions, and still carrieth them on to perfection. (3.) Protection while he hath a mind to use us; ver. 122. of this psalm, 'Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me.' Under the law, if a servant was hurt, the master was to take an account, and satisfaction to be made to him for his servant, Deut. 24:14; so God taketh an account of the wrongs of his servants, and will demand satisfaction. (4.) Maintenance, 1 Tim. 5:8. Every man hath a care devolved upon him, to take care of his family, and provide for them, as instruments of God's providence; and will not God provide for his own? And then for time to come; God's servants have good wages: Heb. 11:6. 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' We need not seek another paymaster; there is a

sure reward. Prov. 11:18, 'But to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward;' and a great reward, Ps. 19:11, 'And in the keeping of them is a great reward;' and a full reward, 2 John 8, 'But that we receive a full reward.' No desire remaineth unsatisfied.

Use. To persuade us to become the servants of the Lord.

1. I will plead with you upon the account of right.

[1.] You ought to be so jure creationis; you were created by him. As a man expecteth fruit from the vine which he hath planted, so may God expect from the creature which he hath made; yea, you were made for this end. If God had made us for another purpose, our living to that end and purpose had been regular. But this was his end, that he might be served by us. Let us lay these things together; consider what an absolute power God hath by creation; no lord hath such a right over his slave or servant as God over us. The slave or servant is either taken in battle, or bought and hired with our money; but God made us out of nothing: he that made a thing at his own pleasure hath a greater right than another can have by purchase, yea, greater right than a master over his beast. A master hath a greater right over his beast than over his servant: the dominion over the beast is more natural to us than over a servant; the servant and master have the same common nature. When he gave us dominion over the beasts of the field, the one is founded in God's original grant, the other is but a civil right founded in temporal accidents. Something is due even to a slave, as our own flesh. Yet a man cannot absolutely do with his beast as he will; the law of God interposeth: a good man is merciful to his beast. God will not allow a cruel disposition, nor give us the absolute disposal over the creatures which we made not; nay, more than a potter over the vessels which he hath framed, or a workman over his work; he only giveth external

shape or figure by art, out of matter already prepared. But God giveth the whole being out of nothing; nothing but what is his. A potter hath power over his work to dispose of it as he pleaseth; here the law interposeth not. Surely, if a potter hath power to dispose of his vessels, God hath an absolute power to smite or heal, lift up or cast down, save or condemn; none can say, 'What doest thou?' He doth not fashion us out of matter prepared, but out of mere nothing. But this was his end, that we should love and fear and serve and glorify him. Our business was not to eat and drink, and please ourselves and others, and live a merry life. All things act to the end for which they were created, the sun to shine by day and enlighten the world, the moon and stars by night; and they answer their end. Their ultimate end is to serve God, their next end is to serve man. All things in the world are either subjected to our dominion or created for our use. The heavens, though not under our dominion, as beasts, yet are for our use; the lower heaven to give us breath, the middle heaven to give us light and heat, the highest heaven for our dwelling-place. The sun runneth and hasteneth to give us light. The sun shineth for us, the wind bloweth, and the water floweth for our use. The earth and air are for our use, the earth to tread on, the air to breathe in. And shall not we serve him that made the whole course to serve us? All the creatures are at work for us day and night, for a poor worm of six foot long! Yea, the creator is at work for us: 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' We complain if the creatures do not serve us, and shall not we serve God who gave us those servants?

[2.] A right of preservation. He is Lord alone, because he preserveth all things: Neh. 9:6, 'Thou, even thou, O Lord, alone; thou hast made heaven, and the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all things that are therein, the sea and all that is therein; and thou preservest them all.' At whose table are we fed? at whose cost and

expense are we maintained? upon whom do we depend every moment for being and operation? Acts 17:28, 'In him we live and move, and have our being;' Heb. 1:3, 'He upholdeth all things by the word of his power;' he doth every moment continue what he gave at first. Things were not made that they should act and subsist of themselves, as the house abideth when the inhabitant is dead and gone. A daily influence is necessary. As the beams depend on the sun, so do we every moment upon God; every day we are bound to serve him. If God should turn us off for preservation to ourselves, how soon should we return to our original nothing! God is disengaged if we serve him not. If, out of indulgence, he continues our beings, what vile ingratitude is it not to serve him! Isa. 1:3, 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.' Would you maintain a servant to do his own work? Since we live upon God, we should live to him.

[3.] A right by redemption: 1 Cor. 6:19, 20, 'And ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which is God's.' If a man had bought another out of slavery, all his time and strength and service belonged to the buyer. Christ hath bought us from the worst slavery with the greatest price, and shall we rob him of his purchase? This was his end; he did not redeem us to ourselves, but to God; not to live as we list, to exempt us from his dominion; that is impossible. Saul promised to make him free in Israel that would destroy Goliath, 1 Sam. 17:25. But to be free from God's dominion cannot be; that was not Christ's end in redeeming us, but that we might be put into a capacity to serve God. Well, then, when God hath such a right in us, we ought to obey him.

2. Consider what an honour it is to be God's servants. *Servire Deo regnare est.* The meanest offices about a prince are honourable. No



such honourable employment as God's service, both in respect of the person whom we serve, the great God, and the service itself; it is a service of righteousness and holiness, Luke 1:74. This is no drudgery; our natures are ennobled; the liberty and perfection of human nature is preserved by this service. And then for the quality of our reward, there is no such wages, no such reward in any service: John 12:26, 'And where I am, there shall my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.' Here is true honour, fitted for great spirits that will not stoop to trifles; and indeed God's servant is the only great spirit. The most eminent servants in the court of kings have but a splendid and more gaudy slavery in comparison of God.

3. What a happiness, as well as honour, both in respect of our present communion with him, and future fruition of him! The Queen of Sheba said of Solomon's servants, 1 Kings 10:8, 'Happy are the men, and happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom.' Happy those indeed that serve God; they are friend-servants: John 15:15, 'Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doth; but I call you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.' In regard of intimate communion, they are treated as sons, though they be servants. Now it is very comfortable to be taken into God's bosom, and to have access to him upon all occasions. Besides the reward and wages in the life to come, God's servants have great vails. Our earnest is better than the world's wages.

4. Consider what a hard master we were under before: Rom. 6:17, 'But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin.' You have obeyed many masters: Titus 3:3, 'Ye were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures.' You that were at the beck of every brutish lust, and were carried to and fro

with so many contrary passions and affections, that have left so many wounds in your consciences, alarmed by terrors every day, when you denied yourselves nothing, thought nothing too much or too dear to spend or part with in a sinful course.

5. If once we come to choose his service, we shall find a difference between the Lord and other masters: 2 Chron. 12:8, 'Nevertheless they shall be his servants, that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.' The sorrow of the one, the sweetness of the other; the misery of the one, the blessedness of the other; the bondage of the one, the liberty of the other: they that forsake or refuse God's service shall soon find worse masters. God hath ways enough to punish our straggling from duty and slighting his service; either by putting us under hard taskmasters, some that shall turn the edge of authority against us, push with the horns of a lamb, a barbarous enemy, making us to be mutual oppressors of each other; or by giving us over to Satan's power, or our own hearts' lusts.

6. Christ's service is not hard nor heavy: Mat. 11:30, 'My yoke is easy and my burthen light,' notwithstanding all your prejudices against it. These men live as they list; they think this a sweet liberty to be guided by their own wisdom, and live according to their own wills, according to their own ends, and that it is better than to be curbed, Ps. 2:3. But after a little while they have other thoughts, they will find the bitterness of such a course. On the contrary, the more we try the service of God, the sweeter we shall find it to be: 1 John 5:3, 'And his commandments are not grievous: and Prov. 3:17, 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.' Our work is wages, and our very work carrieth a reward in the bosom of it. So sweet and comfortable it is. Now for directions.

[1.] If we would be God's servants, we must sincerely, wholly, and absolutely give up ourselves to do his will; and never more to look upon ourselves as our own masters, to do what we please, but wholly to study what will please God. Isa. 56:6, they 'joined themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and be his servants;' Rom. 6:16, 'Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?' There is a solemn dedication made, we take up his service seriously, not upon example barely, or tradition, or fear, or constraint, or some base respects or sinister ends, or some sudden pang or motion; but after serious and due deliberation, out of judgment rightly informed, and affection thereon grounded, do engage themselves to perform humble service to God, without limiting or power of revocation, give up themselves wholly to follow his directions.

[2.] God's servants have work to do; none of them must be idle: Mat. 20:6, 'Why stand ye here all the day idle?' Luke 1:74, 75, 'That we may serve him in holiness and righteousness all our days;' Phil. 2:12, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling;' Acts 24:16, 'Herein do I exercise myself, to keep a good conscience, void of offence.' We must not put hands in bosom, having so much work to do. Many presume of being God's servants; but it is only in the notion; they do nothing for him.

[3.] This service must not be done grudgingly, but heartily: Isa. 56:6, 'And the sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and be his servants;' Deut. 10:12, 'To love the Lord thy God, and serve him.' God will not be served but out of love, not by necessity and constraint. We must yield *obedientiam servi*, but not *servilem*: we are delivered from a slavish spirit: Rom. 8:15, 'We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.' God's service must be gone about with ready affection and

good-will. The respect which we show to God is called service in regard of our strict obligation to it, but obedience in regard of our readiness of mind to perform it. Secondly, Not slightly, but with reverence and zeal: Mal. 1:6, 'If I be a master, where is my fear?' Ps. 2:11, 'Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling;' Phil. 2:12, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling;' and Rom. 12:1, 'I beseech you by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.' God will not be put off with anything by the by, it is a lessening of his majesty: 'I am a great king.' Thirdly, It must be done constantly, not by fits. He that is God's servant never ceaseth from his work; their feasting, walking, sitting, sleeping, waking, hungry, thirsty, hearing, or praying, it is all for God. He that doth any of these things merely for himself, to gratify the flesh, doth not act as God's servant: Acts 26:16, 'Serve God instantly day and night.' Fourthly, Orderly. All things in God's service must be regarded according to their weight: Rom. 14:18, 'For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men;' that is the main things, not in contests about ceremonies: if others carry these matters beyond their weight, let not us; it is not a pin to choose what party a man is of, if he doth not mind righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost: as if a servant should provide sauce for his master, and neglect to provide meat.

[4.] Our great end and scope must be to please God. They are true servants that make it their business to please their master: Isa. 56:6, 'They choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant;' John 8:29, 'The Father hath not left me alone, for I do always the things that please him;' 1 Thes. 4:1, 'I exhort you all by the Lord Jesus Christ, that as you have received of us how to walk and please God, so ye would abound more and more;' and 1 John 3:22. 'And whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his

commandments, and do the things which please him.' So Heb. 11:5, 'Enoch had this testimony, that he pleased God.' The property of a servant is not to please himself. They that set themselves to please God observe his will in all things. There is a great pleasing in the world, but few make it their business to please God. All inferiors please their superiors on whom they depend; and shall not we please God, who is infinitely greater than man, and on whom we depend every moment for all that we enjoy?

Use. Are we God's servants? We all say so; but we speak out of conviction of conscience rather than out of inclination of heart; not what *de facto* is, but what *de jure* should be; and it is well that we come so far as to own God's right. *Professio ipsa, saith Hilary, habet conscientiae necessitatem, non habet confessionis veritatem.*

1. If it be so, then God is our chiefest good and highest lord, whom we study to please and gratify. It is certain that is our master which hath the greatest part in us, and power and influence over us: Mat. 6:24, 'No man can serve two masters: ye cannot serve God and mammon;' Rom. 16:18, 'They serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly;' Phil. 3:19, 'Whose god is their belly.' It was a speech of Luther, *Venter in omni religione est potentissimum idolum.* It doth all with men. Where the belly is served, Christ is neglected. So far as his service will comply with the interest of the belly, or a quiet, pleasurable life, so far they can be zealous: their religion must feed them and maintain them, or else they care not for it—John 6:26, they followed Christ for the loaves—mind religion for outward advantages. When our interest and Christ's service go contrary ways, we can dispense with our duty to God for the sake of this. It is clear, to be servants is to want a power and right to dispose of ourselves, our actions, and employments. While any other thing hath an

interest in us to dispose of us, we are not God's servants; but that thing that hath such a power with us is our master.

2. A servant is chiefly known by obedience: Rom. 6:16, 'To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey;' Luke 12:47, 48, 'And that servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will,' &c. Men may talk high for God, know much; but whom do we ordinarily obey? When the flesh bids us go, we go; come, we come. If pride bids us display the pomp of wit in our duties, or to hang out the ensigns of our vanity, we yield straight. If lust bid us pamper the flesh; we presently obey; if coveteousness bid take the wedge of gold, we do it. But when a man knoweth anything to be the mind of God, and prepareth his heart to do it, he is one of God's servants.

3. A servant of God is one that the sight of God's will is reason enough to him: 1 Thes. 5:18, 'This is the will of God.' The will of God must be the prime and prevalent motive with a Christian; they are servants, not to do their own will, but his whose servants they are; they do nothing but what their master commandeth, and what he commandeth they see reason to obey.

Second branch, 'Give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.' This is subjoined to the former plea.—(1.) Because David would not be a servant in name and title only, but in deed and in truth; and therefore would fain know his duty. (2.) To show the difference between God's servants and the servants of other lords who command us: Prov. 14:25, 'The king's favour is towards a wise servant;' they see them wise, find them wise, and then love them: but God must begin with us; his favour maketh us wise.

Doct. God's best servants think they can never enough beg divine illumination.

David doth often enforce this request.

Reason 1. Our blindness in the matters of God is a great part of our spiritual misery: Eph. 5:8, 'Ye were sometimes in darkness.' There is a veil lying upon our hearts, not easily removed and taken away. All the mischief introduced by the fall is not cured at once, but by degrees; as spiritual strength increaseth we grow up into it; so spiritual light. The maim of the understanding, as well as the will, is not wholly cured till we come to heaven, for here we know but in part; till God give us understanding, we are utterly blind; the best of God's servants have cause to acknowledge it in themselves, the remnants of ignorance and incredulity. The apostle biddeth them to add to faith virtue, to virtue knowledge; that is, skill to manage the work of our heavenly calling.

Reason 2. None are so sensible of this blindness as they. It is some proficiency in knowledge to understand our ignorance: Prov. 30:2, 3, 'Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man.' I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy.' The most knowing see they need more enlightening. The best of our knowledge is to know our imperfections, 1 Cor. 8:2. He that thinketh he knoweth anything, knoweth nothing as he ought to know.

Reason 3. There is room for increase; for in the best we never know so much of God's ways but we may know more: Hosea 6:3, 'Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord;' Prov. 4:18, 'But the path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.' True sanctified knowledge is always growing. If we sit down with measures received, it is a sign we do not know things as we should know them. Christ grew in knowledge, not in grace, for the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in him bodily. Practical knowledge

is never at a stand; though a man may see round the compass and light of saving truth, yet he may know them more spiritually and more feelingly.

Reason 4. The profit of divine revelation as to these three things:—

1. A clear discerning of the things of God, not a confused notion; as the blind man in the Gospel saw men as trees walking. So 2 Cor. 4:6, 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ;' and 1 John 5:20, 'And hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true.' Every degree of knowledge is God's gift. What other men see confusedly, we see more distinctly in this light.

2. Firm assent. Then 'shall I know thy testimonies;' know them from others that have not divine authority. It is the spirit of wisdom and revelation that openeth our eyes to see the truth and worth of heavenly things contained in the promise: Eph. 1:17, 18, 'The father of glory may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understandings being enlightened, that ye may know the hope of his calling, and the riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints in light;' and Mat. 16:17, 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed these things unto thee.' Human credulity we may have upon the report of others, the evidence of the truths themselves; but this firm assent is the fruit of divine illumination.

3. Hearty practice. Let thy testimonies not only strike my ear, but affect my heart, command my hand, let me know them so as to do them, for otherwise our knowledge is little worth. God doth so direct, that he doth also enable us to approve our obedience to him sincerely and faithfully. There is a knowledge that puffeth us up, 1 Cor. 8:1,



which yet is a gift, and floweth from the common influence of the Spirit: Jer. 22:16, 'Was not this to know me? saith the Lord.' But there is a greater efficacy in practical knowledge, such as warmeth the heart with love to the truths known, John 4:10, 'If thou knewest the gift,' &c. Such a light as proceedeth from the gracious influence of the Spirit.

Use 1. Let us be often dealing with God in prayer, that our judgments may be enlightened with the understanding of the word, and our affections renewed and strengthened unto the true obedience of it; beg for that lively light of the Spirit.

1. We need it. In how many things do we err in the things which, we know! how weak are we both as to sound judgment and practice! The apostle saith, 'We know but in part,' 1 Cor. 13:9; 'We are but of yesterday, and we know nothing,' Job 8:9. Therefore we have need to go to the Ancient of days, that he may teach us knowledge, and kindle our lamps anew at the fountain of light. Alas! we take it in by drops, or by degrees, as a tender and sore eye must be used to the light. We have but little time to get knowledge in, and do not improve that little time we have.

2. We have leave to ask it: James 1:5, 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God;' and why do we not, seeing we have a liberty to ask it?

3. God hath promised to bestow it; he will give his Spirit to them that ask it, Luke 11:13. And to beget faith in us: 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, bow much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?' Here is a notable argument; he reasoneth and promiseth. And Prov. 2:3, we must cry for knowledge. Well, then, let us be earnest, that we may not miss that which is to be had for asking; beg for a heart to

know, Jer. 24:7, 'I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord.'

Use 2. It informeth us that there is somewhat more than the word necessary to give us knowledge. God must not only reveal the object, but prepare the subject. David having a law, beggeth understanding that he might know God's testimonies. The literal sense and meaning of the words may be understood by common gifts and ordinary industry, unless men be exceedingly blinded and hardened by their own prejudices. But to have a spiritual understanding of them, so as to profit and increase in sanctification, that is from the Lord. These things may be drawn into a system, wherein there will be nothing that exceedeth the understanding of a man. But to understand it so as to be affected with and changed by it, that is from the Spirit: 1 John 5:20, 'And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true;' and Eph. 5:8, 'Ye were darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.' He is the purchaser and author of that light.

Use 3. Is reproof to those that presume on their own wit to understand divine mysteries. Many think they have eyes in their head, and can see into matter as far as other men, and conceive and judge of a thing as soon and as well as others can do; and so will not acknowledge their dulness and blindness in heavenly things, take it ill to be told of it: John 9:4, 'Are we blind also?' In a rage scoff at those that talk of the enlightening of the Spirit, and being taught of God. Alas! you must be blind and be fools before you be wise, 1 Cor 3:18, in your own conviction and feeling.

## **SERMON CXXXVIII**

## **It is time for thee, Lord, to work; for they have made void thy law.—VER. 126**

IN the words we have—(1.) A prayerful suggestion, it is time for thee, Lord, to work. (2.) The reason of it, for they have made void thy law.

In the first branch take notice of—

1. The person to whom the address is made, for thee, Lord.
2. The suggestion itself, what and when; what they would have the Lord to do, to work; and when, even now, it is time to work.

To open these, I begin with—

1. The person to whom the address is made, the Lord. Some read the words, It is time to work for thee, O Lord, because they have made void thy law. It is time indeed to work for God, when so many work against him, in an evil generation; lest the law should perish and fall to the ground, some should keep up the authority of it, and they that fear God are to encourage one another, Mal. 3:16. The Chaldee paraphrase reads it, 'It is time to do the will of the Lord.' But the Hebrew original carries it as we do, it is time for Jehovah to do. The Septuagint, καιρὸς τοῦ ποιῆσαι τῷ κυρίῳ. The vulgar Latin, Tempus faciendi, Domine.

2. Here is the suggestion itself—(1.) What they would have God to do. It is expressed by a general word, work; as also Jer. 14:7, 'Do, for thy name's sake.' What should he do? Tempus mittendi Filium Dei, saith Augustine; to set about the work of redemption, to send the Son of God. But that is a work rather to exercise and show forth his justice,

power, and truth, both in punishing his enemies and delivering his people, to work his own proper work of justice, as becometh the judge of all the world to do; namely, to punish the wicked, and help his servants out of their hands. (2.) When it is time. Then it seemeth to be a time when man's wickedness is grown to the height: Gen. 15:16, 'In the fourth generation they shall come again, for the sins of the Amorites are not yet full.' Good men are put to the uttermost of their patience, and God's glory abused beyond measure, Isa. 52:5. Lord, it is time to work; they are as bad as bad may be; thy people have quite spent all their faith and patience; when thine ordinances and word are despised and affronted, and thy people trodden under foot, it is time for thee to work.

Secondly, Let us explain the reason, 'For they have made void thy law.' The law is made void two ways, formaliter et interpretative.

1. Formally, when any deny the authority of God, as Pharaoh: Exod. 5:5, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?' Or those rebels, Ps. 12:4, 'Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?' Or we make void the law when we deny it to be given of God, as Marcion and his followers, that the law was given by an evil god. Many now question the scriptures themselves, or deny the obligation of the moral law to believers, as the antinomians and libertines, as the apostle telleth us, Rom. 3:31, that we 'do not make void the law by faith; yea, we establish the law.' It was the greatest ratification to it that could be. Or, finally, those that take upon them to enact things contrary to the law of God, or besides the law, as necessary to salvation, and enforce their own traditions beyond and before the law of God. These make void the law, as Christ telleth the pharisees that they 'made the commandments of God of no effect by their traditions,' Mat. 15:6. Especially when they obtrude these things upon the consciences of others under the highest penalties.

2. Interpretatively, when men by consequence take away the honour and authority that is due to the law, by their wickedness and rebellion against God. Though in words they acknowledge the authority of God and the obligation of his law, yet they have no respect to it in their carriage and practice, doing whatever pleaseth themselves, stand in no awe of God and his word, reject it as a thing of nought. Obedience to the law is a ratifying and confirming the law by our consent: Deut. 27:26, 'Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.' Our words do not confirm the law so much as our works. So, on the contrary, they repeal or make void the law that observe it not in their practice. Finis operis is made finis operantis, as if they intended to abolish, whilst they make no reckoning of the law. Where observe, that this is a notion to make sin odious to us; it is not only ἀνομία, a transgression of the law, 1 John 3:4; but a despising the law, 2 Sam. 12:9; a judging or censuring the law, James 4:11; yea, a repealing and disannulling the law, which is the notion of the text.

Doct. That when a flood of wickedness is broken out, we may put God in mind of doing his work of punishing the wicked and delivering his people.

I shall give you the sum of this doctrine in these four considerations.

1. That God doth for a while hold his hand, and bear with the wickedness of his enemies.
2. Though he doth for a while bear with them, yet he hath his times to punish and proceed to execution.
3. This time is usually when the impiety and insolency of wicked men is come to a height.

4. When it is come to a height, we may and must mind God of doing his work, or arising to judgment.

The first consideration is implied in the doctrine and the text; the other three are express.

First, It is implied that God doth for a while hold his hand, and not seem to mind his work. Though the least sin deserveth the greatest plagues, even when it is first committed, yet such is God's patience and long-suffering, that he will not at first punish even the sins of his enemies, but will let them ripen and come to a height before he smite. This he doth—

1. To show his bounty and goodness to all his creatures. He will not easily destroy the workmanship of his hands, even the provoking wicked; but giveth them time to repent and change their course; Rev. 2:21, 'I gave her space to repent of her fornications, and she repented not.' The worst have leave to repent, means to repent, time to repent; and if they have not the grace to repent, they may blame themselves: Rom. 9:22, 'He endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction,' ἐν πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ. The reprobate taste of God's common goodness as they are members of the world, are forborne for a long time, till they be sear and rotten through, fit for the burning. Nay, let me observe this: God, that is very quick with his people, is very patient towards them that perish. God is quick with his own people; he will visit their iniquities with scourges, and will not suffer sin to lie upon them; and therefore they are chastened every morning. Yet this God is very patient to them that know no better, profess no better, have had no experience of his ways; and though they finally perish, it is long first, till their sins do even extort vengeance out of his hands.

2. To chastise, exercise, and prove his own people, he beareth with the wickedness of their enemies.

[1.] To chastise them for their sins, that they may be brought low, and their souls be humbled to the dust. Certainly this God expects before he will appear for us: 1 Peter 5:6, 'Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.' And because his people are backward to this work, he permitteth such instruments as will not spare, but lay on to the purpose: Isa. 10:5, 6, 'O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.' When God is angry with his people, he can easily find a rod for them; yea, not only a rod, but a staff, which is a more heavy instrument of correction: he can find instruments sufficiently exasperated, and full of malice, severe executioners; and he lets them alone till they have done his work, though they manage his controversy with cruel minds, and evil and destructive intentions. Sometimes God punisheth his people with divisions among themselves; and though they are very troublesome one to another, yet a sheep cannot worry a sheep, as a wolf will; they do it to the purpose, in a most cruel and despiteful manner. Now, though he will reckon with wicked men for their violence, for transgressing their bounds, and going beyond his revealed will and approbation, Zech. 1:15, yet not till his work be done upon Mount Zion and, Jerusalem: Isa. 10:12, 'When the Lord hath done his work upon Mount Zion and Jerusalem, I will punish the stout heart of the king of Assyria.' He will not cast the rod into the fire till we have felt the smart of it, and be thoroughly humbled under his mighty hand.

[2.] To exercise his people, that they may not contract rust, and languish and grow idle in heaven's way. Alas! when we live at ease,

and have nobody to trouble us, God is little owned, loved, and acknowledged, the throne of grace lieth neglected and unfrequented; and therefore he permitteth enemies to keep us in breath: Ps. 59:11, 'Slay them not, lest my people forget.' Things in conceit do not leave such an impression upon us as things in feeling. Scipio would have Carthage stand, to whet and exercise the Roman valour. We need vigilant enemies as a guard upon us, that we may be kept awful, serious, mindful of God, constantly in the exercise of faith and dependence. Wicked men have their ministry and service, to be as goads in our sides and scourges on our backs, to whip us to our duty, and make us mend our pace heavenward: Ps. 94:12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and teachest him out of thy law;' chastened by the molestations of the wicked, for all along he complaineth of the delay of vengeance on the persecutors; and in the next verse he saith, 'Until the pit be digged for the wicked;' as condemned men are suffered to live till their gallows and grave be made ready: if they trouble us in the meanwhile, it is to reduce us to a sense and practice of our duty; and that we may not securely go on in a course of vanity and sin. Till that be done, the pit is not ready for the wicked and ungodly oppressors; they dig their own pit by their sin and oppression.

[3.] To prove his people as well as to exercise them. To prove their faith and their patience; their faith, to see whether they can live by faith, and not by sense and present appearance; whether we are persuaded that there is a just and righteous God, that is the supreme governor of the world, notwithstanding all the oppositions and confusions they groan under: Hab. 2:3, 4, 'Because it will surely come, and will not tarry. Behold, his soul that is lifted up is not upright in him, but the just shall live by his faith;' that is, the Lord's purpose in delaying to perform the vision is to try and discover who are the lofty and unsound, and who can subsist and hold out by faith



on God's being, and providence, and promises, and world to come, and so wait upon God in hard times without fainting. If God should smite as soon as his enemies provoke him, faith would be of no use, and the whole world would be governed by sense. To believe the justice and mercy of God, though for the time we do not see any manifestation of it, that is the trial of faith. We know there is one that sits above and seeth all. Though the world be in an uproar, and they that work wickedness are set up, and God's servants persecuted, yet we know that God will reckon with them in due time. And secondly, to prove their patience, in bearing the present difficulties, and tarrying the Lord's leisure: Rev. 13:10, 'Here is the patience and faith of the saints;' that is, a sensible proof of it, when a powerful enemy carrieth all before him: there would be little use of such a grace but for such times. This is submission to God, when we are resolved to tarry for his season, though we know it not, and will wait as long as God will have us wait, when all human probabilities are taken away, and we have nothing but God's providence to live upon.

Second consideration. Though he bear long, yet he hath his times to punish and arise to judgment.

1. With respect to himself and his own glory: Ps. 9:16, 'The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth.' Little of God would be taken notice of in the world unless he did now and then give out sensible demonstrations of his power and justice, and mindfulness of human affairs. What strange conceits would men else have of God! as if no God, no providence, no distinction between good and evil; but as if God were indifferent to either, and did favour good and bad alike: and therefore it is in vain to trouble ourselves about the worship and service of God, no reward nor punishment. These are the uses the wicked make of God's forbearance, either to deny God and providence: Ps. 55:19, 'Because they have no changes, therefore

they fear not God.' If they have shifted from vessel to vessel, they corrupt and settle upon the lees, Zeph. 1:12; they say God will not do good, neither will he do evil, nor interpose; but suffereth enemies to trample upon his people and glorious name. Or else pervert the interpretation of providence: Ps. 50:21. 'Thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself;' as if he did favour their ways. They misinterpret providence, and make the sun go according to their dial, or else ascribe the act of providence to themselves; Deut. 32:27, 'Lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this.' When long permitted to prosper, they think they have mastered heaven, that there is no power superior to theirs, and they can carry all before them at their pleasure. Therefore God must vindicate himself by his works, and give out some demonstrations to sense that there is a distinction between good and evil; that God is differently affected to either, that he hateth the evil and loveth the good, and accordingly there is a reward and punishment: Ps. 58:11, 'Verily there is a reward for the righteous.' God is fain to teach them by briers and thorns, or else the stupid world would not take notice of it, but think the world is governed by chance, not administered by an almighty, all-wise, and most just providence. They knew not what to think of providence when they saw the godly oppressed and the wicked high in power.

2. With respect to his people. Surely God will not always chide; for God considers the weakness of man: Ps. 103:14, 'He remembers we are but dust.' The hearts of his people would fail and faint, and they would be tempted to some forbidden course to ease themselves, Isa. 59:16. He knows our spirits would fail; God would not have us utterly to be discouraged. We are liable to temptations: Ps. 125:3, 'The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous put forth their hands to iniquity.' Therefore he hath his breathing times, and times of intermission from trouble. The spirits

of a poor creature would soon be drunk up if there were not some well days; therefore he will show himself to his people.

3. With respect to the wicked, who would grow excessive and outrageous in sin: Rom. 2:5, 'But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath;' Eccles. 8:11, 'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil;' grow bold, resolute, and settled in an evil way; go on without remorse, because they go on without trouble, and so grow to be monsters in sin. It is only faith that can see afar off, but infidelity and atheism mind not what is to come, and look only to what is present. Well, then, lest wicked men should thus continue themselves in sin, God hath his time to reckon with them; his justice is not asleep all this while, but God keeps a petty sessions in this world before the general assizes. Now concerning this time, let me tell you four things:—

[1.] There is a time appointed. There is an end of all things, not only an expected end, but also an appointed end: Hab. 2:3, 'The vision is for an appointed time;' things are not left to their own hazard and chance to work out their own end; but ordered and appointed by the wise God: Dan. 11:27, 'Yet the end shall be at the time appointed;' ver. 35, 'To try them, and purge them, and to make them white, even to the time of the end; because it is yet for a time appointed.' There is a course of providence set by God which shall at length come to its end and period.

[2.] This is the best time: 1 Peter 5:6, 'That he may exalt you in due time.' There is a due time, as well as a set time. There is nothing in the whole administration of God preposterous, unseasonable, or disorderly. Wait but a little, and you shall see the reason of all this

course of dispensations; for God doth all things in number, weight, and measure. If it had come sooner or later, it would not have come so seasonably: Eccles. 3:11, 'He hath made everything beautiful in its time.' When God's work is done, and all things are put together, you will see a marvellous beauty in it. It is just with the work of providence as with the work of creation, every day's work was 'good;' but when God saw all his works together, in their frame and correspondence, all was 'very good,' Gen. 1:31. We would think that God should come sooner to our deliverance: God is not slack, but we are too hasty; if he should come sooner, it would be the worse for us. We would have thought God should have owned Joseph in the pit. No; God stays till he be cast into prison; and in prison Joseph would fain come out as soon as Pharaoh's butler was come out, but he forgot him. God would not have it so; he must tarry there till God's time was come, and then had not only deliverance out of prison, but preferment. So many times we would be contented with half a deliverance, and would have it now, but God will give it us in the best season.

[3.] It is but a short time. Say sense what it will, it is but μικρὸν ὄσον ὄσον, 'a little little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry,' Heb. 10:37. It is not so long as enemies would make it, for they would root out the memorial of God's children; not so long as sin would make it, or as fancy would conceive it. Suffering hours pass tediously; we count quarters and minutes when we are in pain or anxious expectation; we think an hour a week, a week a month, a month a year, and every year seven. Yea, not so long as reason would make it as to probabilities and the course of second causes. When things are fortified and backed with a strong interest, to reason it will be a long time. It is not so long as sense would make it; though we count the years, the winter is over, and the spring is come, and yet we are not saved, and can say, It is thus long; yet this is not long in

comparison of eternity, 2 Cor. 4:17. It is not long to faith, for to the eye of faith things future and afar off are present, Heb. 9:1. Not long to love, Gen. 29:20: seven years are as a few days; they that believe an eternity, and have any love to God, will say it is short. But a short walk is a long journey to the sick and weak; the impatience of our flesh makes it seem long.

[4.] When the time is come, God will make speedy work: Isa. 60:2, 'The Lord will hasten it in his time;' Luke 18:7, 'Shall not God avenge his own elect?' Rev. 18:7, 'Her plagues shall come in one day;' Isa. 66:8, 'A nation born in a day.' All these places show (and it is a comfort to us) that no difficulty shall hinder when the season calls for it. He that produced heaven and earth at once, what cannot he do? We are dismayed when we consider an evil party fortified with combined interests, strength of opposite factions, force of laws and worldly powers; but God can make a nation be born in one day. It will be quick work when God once begins.

Third consideration. This time is usually when the impiety and insolency of wicked men is come to a height. Indeed there are other notes; as when his people's hearts are prepared to receive and improve deliverance, when God's glory calleth for it. But this is the season mentioned in the text; therefore I shall show you—

1. That this is a season.

2. Inquire when iniquity is come to a height.

- 3 Why then God doth usually interpose.

1. That this is a season: Gen. 15:16, 'The sins of the Amorites are not yet full.' God showeth his patience to that wicked people, till the measure of their sins were filled up. So wrath came upon the

persecuting Jews when they had filled up the measure of their fathers, Mat. 23:32. While the enemy's cup is a-filling, God delayeth, and we must wait. So Dan. 8:23, 'When the transgressors are come to the full.' Once more, Joel 3:13, 'Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe; come, get ye down, for the press is full, the fats overflow, for their wickedness is great.' The Lord compares sinners to a field of ripe corn ready to be cut, full fats and wine-presses to be trod out. When sin is ripe, the execution of vengeance will not be long forborne.

2. When doth iniquity come to a height? I answer—Their iniquities may be considered as to the two branches of it—their rebellion and disobedience to God, and their injuries and vexation of the saints.

[1.] Their disobedience and contempt of God.

(1.) When this is general. All orders and ranks of persons have corrupted their way, as the Sodomites compassed the house, Gen. 19:4; both young and old, all the people from every quarter. Usually in making a judgment upon the state of a people, you will find it thus: If any part be right, it keeps off the judgment from the rest; if a zealous magistracy, though a corrupt people, or an unsavoury ministry, and a praying, mourning people, God holds his hand, and will not proceed to judgment. They are 'the salt of the earth,' Mat. 5:13; and Isa. 6:13, 'The holy seed shall be the substance thereof.' But when all join in one, in a neglect of God, and common enmity to his ways; then, I say, the judge of the earth will do his work, then wrath breaketh out.

(2.) When it groweth impudent and outrageous, as if they would obliterate and extinguish the law of God, or take away all force and authority from it by their perverse actions and pernicious examples. They do not obliquely, and under the show of divers pretences, break

God's laws, but openly set themselves against him, and break a commandment without any shame: Isa. 3:9, 'They declare their sin as Sodom, and hide it not;' yea, 'they glory in their shame,' Phil. 3:19; as if they would out-face heaven and religion at once, and all honesty and ingenuity by their debaucheries. Bold-faced sin doth not go long unpunished.

(3.) Desperate incorrigibleness. All remedies are unprofitable, and hope of amendment taken away, Jer. 6:3; Ezek. 24:13, 'When God would have purged them, they would not be purged.' He trieth them with several conditions, he hath a love for them as they are his creatures; judgments and mercies they had, yet they are no changelings, but go on as wicked as ever. God trieth key after key, one providence after another, yet not a whit the better or wiser; but are like men that have slept: still abuse his patience, and defeat all the methods of his grace, show the same corruption they did before.

(4.) When they run into unnatural sins, and the corruption of human society is endangered: Lev. 18:27, 28, 'For all these abominations have the men of the land done,' &c.; when men are so wicked and filthy that a man needs to be a criminal to be acceptable to them; they think it strange that others run not into the same excess of riot, 1 Peter 4:4; certainly then God needeth to strike in, that virtue may be upheld in some kind of reputation.

[2.] Their violence and vexation of the saints. It was Bede's observation, *Odiū in religionis professores, &c.*—that hatred of the professors of religion was that undid his country. God is angry when his people are wronged; the world is kept up for their sakes. Were it not for the elect to be gathered, time would be no more; for their sakes kingdoms and churches are preserved; they are the staff and stay, the chariots and horsemen of Israel. God is tender of them as

the apple of his eye; therefore, when they are wronged, and men are not only evil themselves, but haters of those that are good, and do not only break God's laws themselves; but would force others to do so, God will hold no longer. As their violence increaseth, so doth their ruin hasten, Rev. 12:12. When they abuse their power to such an end, though God may bear with them for a time till they have done their work, yet he will reckon with them: Zech. 1:15, 'I am sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease; for I was a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.' God will not forget his relation to his sinning people, and will not suffer them to be abused out of measure. When they would destroy and root out whom God would only correct and purge, it is a sign of their approaching ruin. Now these things should be considered by us to a good end; not to feed an evil humour, or to increase our hatred and exasperation against a party, whom, it may be, we hate too much already with a carnal hatred; but to a good purpose. Partly that we may not be too confident of carnal ease too soon. God will, it may be, have the enemies' cup yet fuller, and that they shall appear more in their own colours. And so our trials may be greater. We know not the bounds of the Lord's patience. We, that are apt to extenuate our own sins, are apt to aggravate the sins of others, look upon them in the glass of fashion, and cry too soon, It is time. But of this by and by. And partly that we may see the greatness of our transgressions, by which we have provoked the Lord to give us up into the hands of such men as blaspheme his name every day, Isa. 52:5. Our sins were full in our kind, in the abuse of God's truth and worship; and though not such moral wickedness, yet a great deal of spiritual wickedness. And God is more quick and severe upon us, and will not bear that in a professing people that he beareth in others: 'Judgment begins at the house of God,' 1 Peter 4:17. The cup of trembling goes round, and his own people drink first, and our staggering is not yet over; in time they shall pledge us. God beareth with Balaam, though he tempted



him again and again, when he would not bear with the young prophet whom the lion slew. He bore with the Philistines a long time ere they were plagued. We feel the smart of the rod sooner, Zech. 12. Yet it is apparent our kind of sins were grown to a ripeness, our self-seeking, factions, turbulency, unquietness under government, abuse of Christian liberty, uncharitable divisions among ourselves, vexing one another, vain opinions, slighting God's ministers and ordinances. And partly that we may be humbled for their sins. It should be a grief to us to see men break God's laws, to see men out-dare heaven. David fasted for his enemies, Ps. 35:14–16; and Ps. 119:136, 'Rivers of tears run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law;' because God is so much dishonoured, human nature so much corrupted. If more of this spirit were stirring, it were the better for us. And partly that we may fear ourselves. We are bound up in the same community, and when God judgeth them, how shall we escape? The Jews have a proverb, that two dry sticks may set a green one on fire. The meaning is, the godly man may fall in the common calamity: wheat is plucked up with the tares. God saith in Deut. 7:22, that they should not destroy all the Canaanites, 'lest the beasts of the field should increase upon them.' The safety of his people are involved in the safety of their sinning and persecuting enemies. A hedge of thorns may serve for a fence to a garden of roses, and all the relief we have is, The Lord can make a distinction: 2 Peter 2:9, 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.'

3. Why doth God take this time? (1.) For his own glory. His justice is more discovered when men have filled up their measure: Ps. 51:4, 'That thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.' It justifieth God's proceedings, and maketh us the more inexcusable. So also his power; it is God's time to send help and remedy, when all things are gone to utter confusion; when things are

at the most desperate pass, Ps. 124:3–5, in our low estate, then is God seen. (2.) Hereby God's work upon Mount Zion is promoted. His people are humbled when their adversaries are chief, and rage against them: Ps. 113:4, 'Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with contempt of the proud.' When things come to extremity their prayers are quickened: Ps. 130:1, 'Out of the depths I cried unto thee, O Lord.' They are fitted to prize mercy, Ps. 102:13, 14. They that thought it no great matter to have a standing temple, delight in the dust of a ruinous heap. Then shepherds' tents look lovely, we set a higher rate on despised ordinances. In short, they are waiting and praying, and humbling their souls before God.

Fourth consideration. When a flood of wickedness is thus broken out, we may mind God of the deliverance of his people. But what needs that? Doth not God know his seasons, and will not he exactly observe them? In the answer I shall show you why and how.

1. Why? (1.) Because God loveth to be awakened by the prayers of his people; and when he hath a mind to work, he sets the spirit of prayer a-work: Jer. 29:11, 12, 'I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.' So thus and thus will I do: Ezek. 36:37, 'Yet for this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel.' We are to give a lift by our prayers; it is a time of finding, Ps. 32:6. (2.) He hath put an office upon us. God acts the part of a judge, we as solicitors and remembrancers: Isa. 62:6, 7, 'I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace night nor day. Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.' We are to put God in mind, so that we but do our duty.

2. How? The principle and manner must be right.

[1.] The principle; be sure it be not the impatience of the flesh, or love to our own ease, or a mere tediousness and irksomeness of the cross. Be sure it be not passion and a principle of revenge, but a desire of promoting his honour and vindicating his glory. David doth not say how troublesome they were to himself, but, They make void thy law; as if he had said, Lord, if my own interest were only concerned, I would not open my mouth, nor ever call upon thee to revenge my private quarrels; but it is my zeal for thy honour and ordinances; not that I have received injury, but thy worship is corrupted. Work, else what will become of thy name and poor people? Offences done against God should grieve us more than our own injuries, and we should rather regard the general interest of religion than any personal offence done to us. There is often a carnal spirit breathing in our prayers, and our zeal is fleshly; the people of God beat it back: Ps. 115:1, 'Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory;' and Ps. 74:10, 'O Lord, how long shall the adversary reproach, and the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?' The godly can endure their own troubles better than they can bear the open dishonouring and blaspheming of God. This is the true sense, but because the heart is deceitful—(1.) Be sure your cause be good, your adversaries evil, that ye may say, Ps. 74:22, 'Arise, O Lord, plead thine own cause.' It is not for your sins, but your righteousness; the hatred is not against the body. Indeed they pretend some little faults. It is as if a leper should hate a man because he hath some pimples in his face. Something they would lay to their charge. (2.) That we use all means with God and men to reclaim them, praying for them: Mat. 5:44, 'Pray for them that despitefully use you.' Mourning for their sins: Jer. 23:19, 'My soul shall weep in secret for your pride.' Heaping coals of fire upon their heads by all acts of kindness, condescending to them as far as possibly we can, Rom. 12:18. These arts become his

kingdom, that is not to be planted by force, but consent, them that would have the zeal of God, not of a party. (3.) Be sure your principle be zeal for God's glory, not a desire to establish your own interest, and to see revenge on a party that differeth from you: Luke 9:54, 55, 'You know not what spirit you are of.' Religious affections overset us, and fleshly zeal puts on a holy spiritual guise and mask, and we think it is for the honour of Christ. (4.) Not against particular persons, but the opposite faction to godliness. In general, destroy all the enemies of Christ, &c.

[2.] For the manner how. We must seek to God, first, with submission, not prescribing to God, nor making a snare to ourselves. We, that have short and revengeful spirits, cannot judge aright of God's patience, which is infinite, out of fleshliness and affection to our own ease. And so our times, John 7:6. Your time is always ready; if none of these be, yet we are limited creatures, and great is the wisdom of God and his power admirable; it doth not belong to us to guide the affairs of the world, Ps. 78:41. We must not prescribe opportunity to him, fixing times. Besides that, it argueth a spirit too much addicted to, and eyeing of, temporal happiness. It doth much unsettle us and harden others. The devil maketh advantage of our disappointment. Therefore not only when it seemeth seasonable to us we may seek to him for deliverance. Once more, there are other things concur besides the enemies' ripeness for judgment,—preparing his people's hearts, fitting those instruments for his work; therefore all is left to God's will, and let him take his time.

Use of all is—

1. To teach us how to behave ourselves in these times with patience, and yet with hope and waiting. It is the time of Jacob's trouble, but there will be a time of deliverance, Jer. 30:7. With patience; God will

have a time to chastise his people. We must bear it patiently; it will make crosses sit easy; they may be greater and longer than our joys: Ps. 90:15, 'Make us glad, according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.'

2. With hope let us expect it. Certainly it will not exceed the time limited by God. That time is not long: Isa. 13:22, 'Her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged;' Ezek. 12:21–28, 'And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth? Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord, I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am the Lord: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged.' Faith should see it as present, approaching; and then let us wait his leisure, minding God in prayer.

## SERMON CXXXIX

**Therefore I love thy commandments  
above gold; yea, above fine gold.—VER.**

IN the words we have—

1. A note of inference, therefore.
2. The duty inferred, I love thy commandments.
3. The degree of that love, above gold; amplified by the repetition, with some advantage, in the expression, yea, above fine gold.

Gold, by a synecdoche, is put for all worldly things, the comforts and profits of this life, as in many other places; as Ps. 19:10, 'More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.' The two bastard goods with which the world is enchanted are pleasure and profit. Old people are all for profit, young people are all for pleasure. Now both these, truly so called, are found in the word of God. So in Prov. 8:10, 11, 'Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that are to be desired are not to be compared to it.' So Prov. 8:19, 'My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenues than choice silver.' So Prov. 3:14, 'For the merchandise thereof is better than gold; and the gain thereof than fine gold.' So Prov. 16:16, 'How much better is it to get wisdom than gold? and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver?' This comparison is used so often for two reasons:—

1. Because it is more prized in the world. All things that have a goodness in them have a certain bait suitable to the several appetites of men; but in most men's opinions gold seemeth chiefly to be desired, partly for its beauty, but chiefly for its use, it being the great instrument of commerce that doth all things in the world. The corruption of man's heart addeth a greater price to it, and therefore

is the thirst of it so unsatisfied, Now the word, and that wisdom and godliness which it teacheth, is far above gold and fine gold,

2. Because it is the usual temptation to draw off men from the love and study and obedience of the word. Babylon's abominations are offered to the world in a golden cup: Rev. 17:4, 'And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand, full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.' Preferments are the baits of that black religion. True Christianity consists in sound graces; pseudo-Christianity in pomp and state and worldly advantages; and the apostle telleth us, 1 Tim. 6:10, 'That the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith.' Therefore doth the Spirit of God so often compare spiritual things to gold; and here David preferreth his love to the word before the worldling's love to gold, yea, fine gold. For mark, it is not, More than I love gold, but, More than any man. Some have an ardent desire of it, however it be mortified in God's children.

First, For the note of inference, together with the duty inferred, 'Therefore I love thy commandments.' Some refer it to God's taking his time to work, as the judge of the world in punishing the wicked for their disobedience and contempt of his law; as if he had said, Lord, though thou dost connive, and hold thy hands for a time, yet I know thou wilt undertake the defence of the righteous, and not let the wickedness of the wicked go unpunished; it will cost them dear in the issue, 'therefore I love thy commandments,' &c. This sense I cannot exclude. If I thought fit to prosecute it, it would yield this doctrine, that a little faith would help us to continue our affection to the word of God, notwithstanding the wickedness of those that oppose it. For in truth here this wickedness doth soon come to an

end: Ps. 73:18, 'Surely thou didst set them in slippery places, thou castedst them down into destruction.' But I rather refer it to the latter clause, 'They have made void thy law; therefore I love thy commandments.'

Doct. The more others despise the ways and laws of God, the more should a gracious heart love and esteem them.

So doth David profess that his love to God's ways was so far from ceasing that he found it increased rather.

Reason 1. Because the ways of God are still the same they were before. If there be any difference, they only need to be more owned by us with greater zeal and cheerfulness because they are despised and forsaken by others. God is the same still, heaven the same, and the scriptures the same, whether we have company to walk with us in heaven's way, yea or no; and therefore, why should not a Christian be the same he was before? Their contempt and hatred of God's ways doth not make void our obligation to God and the bonds of our duty to him. If God had only required us to be good when we may be so with safety and ease, and would dispense with us at other times when religion is in disgrace, then indeed a Christian might change his course, and run with the cry as others do. But God had required in the worst times we should take God's part, and stand for him in the worst places, and keep his name even there where Satan's throne is, Rev. 2:13, and be saints, though in Nero's household, Phil. 4:22, under the nose of a raging persecutor. And as God is the same, so his ways are the same. Their contempt and hatred of holiness doth not hinder the loveliness of it to a spiritual eye. There is a beauty in God's despised ways: Heb. 11:25, 'Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.' He saw more excellency in the tents of Jacob than in the courts of



Pharaoh. When the outward glory of his ways is darkened, and they are put under reproach and trouble, yet their inward beauty still remaineth, and may be seen by a spiritual, though not by a carnal eye; by those that will not judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment, John 7:24. The external glory, which is the favour of the world, outward prosperity and countenance, is foreign and accidental; but this is essential, and ever remaineth. And as holiness is the same, so the scriptures are the same; they do not speak one thing today and another tomorrow, and leave us at a latitude to put ourselves into all changes and postures: 2 Cor. 1:19, 'For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, was not yea and nay,' saith the apostle, 'but in him was yea.' The scripture doth not allow saying and unsaying, and building again the things which we have destroyed: Gal. 2:18, 'For if I build again the things which I have destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.' Truth is the same in all ages; not like an almanack, to be changed every year, or calculated peculiarly for one meridian. Nor is it always the same. Indeed, in some lesser things, that serve only for the conveniency of religion, we may upon weighty grounds change practice, and do that which is good where best may not be had. So heaven is the same still; it not only serveth us as an antidote in prosperity, but as a cordial in adversity, and is at all times to be regarded. Well, then, since God, and holiness, and scripture, and heaven are always the same, why should not we? If there be change, it should be in the degree of our love, that it be greater than it was before, to repair God in point of honour, and to testify against the defection of others, that we are not of their stamp, who do not see by their eyes, nor walk by their principles, nor allow of their warpings.

Reason 2. God expects more from gracious hearts, because of their relation to him and acquaintance with him; and therefore, if others despise the laws of God, they should esteem them the more: John

6:66, 67, 'From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will you also go away?' It goeth nearer to Christ's heart that those should forsake him that are trained up in his bosom, that the devil should steal away souls under his own arm. Whatever defection others make, yet that those who have tasted of his mercy, drunk of his cup, feasted with his loaves, have had experience of his grace, will ye also? He stood not upon the multitude's going so much as his disciples'. Therefore they should rouse up themselves in evil times.

Reason 3. The good and the bad do exercise and keep one another in breath and vigour. When there are but two factions that stand in opposition to one another, one apparently for God, the other apparently for Satan, it addeth zeal and indignation to both sides, and they mutually inflame one another, and are as Jeremiah's two baskets of figs, the good figs very good, and the evil figs very evil, Jer. 24:3. When others are so very bad, it should not quench zeal but inflame it; we should be not only good, but very good. Corruption, the more it is opposed, the more it stormeth and groweth outrageous, as a river swelleth by opposing dams and banks against it, they rage upon restraints now the floods break loose. So on the other side, should grace be more earnestly and zealously exercised the more it is opposed, as the casting on of water sets the lime on fire. To be sure, their malice will put us to a great deal of trouble, and trouble is a time to exercise grace. To be much in prayer, and faith, and patience, and mortifying corruptions, and watchfulness, and wary walking, that we may neither take infection ourselves, nor give occasion to others to stumble at the ways of God: Col. 4:3, 'Walk in wisdom towards them that are without, redeeming the time.' When they lived among unconverted heathens they should carry it wisely towards them, that they might not be occasions of stumbling or hardening. So by proportion those who profess the ways of God

should carry it wisely towards such as they live amongst, who declare their non-regeneration by a profane life, and live like heathens, that they give no occasion to such adversaries of truth and holiness to speak reproachfully; but they should observe the apostle's rules, 1 Peter 2:12, 15. Christians should be good in bad times, that the times may not be worse for them, nor they the worse for the times. They should labour to live down the vices and errors of the age wherein they live, and labour to save themselves from this untoward generation, and should cut off occasions from them that watch for occasions against them, and, like fishes, keep their freshness in salt water. Ham will scoff to surprise a Noah in a fault; when their foot slippeth, they will magnify themselves against them. Experience of the madness and fury whereby others are carried on in the ways of sin should more confirm others in the ways of God that are opposed by them. Surely such men would not hate what is evil, and so earnestly persecute what is good. Non nisi grave bonum a Nerone damnari. A good man would not choose by their liking and loathing. If any argument may be taken from them, it is to like the things the better because they slight them, and to love them because they persecute them. For it is to be presumed they will hate what is good, and love what is evil; and though no certain argument can be concluded thence, yet their love is but an ill token; for Christ telleth us, 'The world will love its own,' John 15:19. All things love what is suitable to themselves.

Reason 4. Unless our love be increased when men oppose and despise the laws of God, it will not hold out against so great a trial. Sin is very infectious at all times, and when it is common it is less odious. But the force of example is great; we think we may do as others do: a cold neutral love, or loose and general owning of the ways of Christ, will not bear us out. I confess this is a very great temptation that prevaleth with many: Mat. 24:12, 'When iniquity

aboundeth, the love of many will wax cold.' Loose professors are soon shaken off, and dead fish swim with the stream. Yea, some of notable eminency in the church may miscarry, but yet always they are such as had their worldly affections unbroken and unmortified: 1 Tim. 6:11, 12, 'Some through the love of money, have erred from the faith; but thou, O man of God, follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, and patience, love, meekness, fight the good fight of faith.' There needs great diligence and fervency to increase in solid grace, or else we shall not dare to own God and his ways; yea, I confess the soundest may be sorely shaken, and therefore need warning and confirmation. The godly have seeds of the same evils which draw away others. Evil example is very forcible, especially when it is general. In a time of public infection it is hard to preserve health. And then usually sin is disguised and carried on under plausible pretexts, and evil men blinded by their interests may easily warp, *Ingeniosa res est esse Christianum*, as Hierom of an Arian time. It is a matter of skill to discern God's interest, and by consequence our duty. The prophet complaineth, 'I am a man of polluted lips, and I dwell among a people of polluted lips,' Isa. 6:5. We contract some contagion and taint from those among whom we live; grow careless of sabbaths by general profanation; take more liberty for the flesh when others wallow in all filthiness, and are given up to all manner of vanity. Therefore, as the force of example is great, the force of zeal should be greater, that we may stand for God, though we stand alone. As Elijah did: 1 Kings 19:14, 'And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets by the sword; and I, even I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away.' We must keep up our savour in a corrupt age, as Noah did: Gen. 6:9, 'Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation, and Noah walked with God.' Lot lived more upright in Sodom, where he was besieged with temptations that made him constantly to stand

upon his watch, than he did in the cave, when he neglected and grew secure. As fire burns hottest in the coldest weather, so a Christian's zeal, by a holy antiperistasis, should flame most in a corrupted, debauched age.

Reason 5. Because it is very acceptable to God, and a note of sincerity to hold out against trials, yea, to increase in zeal when others desert him. Many will flock to Christ, and resort to him in his prosperity. When religion is befriended, painted butterflies and gaudy carnalists will prove summer friends to him; but when winter frosts and blustering storms come, they are gone; like those that go to sea, not for a voyage to ride out all weathers, but for recreation: Christ maketh little of their friendship. But now, Luke 22:28, 29, 'Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations; and I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me.' When David was crowned king in Hebron, then those that followed him in the wilderness were not forgotten, but preferred by him. To serve God in a crowd, and with store of company, is not so praiseworthy. Every one will be in the fashion, and there is a revolution of fashions in religion; but to own him in a time of defection, when others look strange upon him; then to keep our zeal and strictness is commendable. *Temporibus malis ausus esse bonus.*

Use 1. Information. That the general corrupt custom and example of those with whom we live is not a sufficient excuse for our sinning. It is so in the minds of many, but it is not so indeed. It is indeed a temptation, and a strong incitement; but temptations to the contrary do not excuse from duty. This will appear to you if you consider—

1. The state of a Christian; he is not of this world: John 15:19, 'If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore

the world hateth you.' He was separated for God's use in baptism, and must make good his baptismal vow, live as one that is separated from, the world and their course of life, that he may act for God: Ps. 4:3, 'Know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself;' therefore it is no excuse for him to say, I do but as others do; he is to reckon his hours by the sun, not the town-clock; to take God's direction, not the voice of the multitude, as one of their stamp, and at liberty to comply with their fashions.

2. The course of God's dispensations, which is to exercise and try his children before he crowneth them. None go to heaven without their trials.

3. The duty of God's children, intimated in the cautions and descriptions and injunctions of the word: Exod. 23:2, 'Not to follow a multitude to do evil; nor to walk according to the course of this world;' Eph. 2:2, 'The lust of men,' 1 Peter 4:2; nor the corruptions of the times: Rom. 12:2, 'Be not conformed to this world,' &c. Many such hints everywhere, that show it a crime, &c.

4. The opposition of the wicked should make us more courageous; for then it is put to a plain contest, who shall have the better, Christ or Satan? Therefore we should discover that he that is in us is stronger than he that is in the world, 1 John 4:4. Wicked men have their end and purposes if they can overcome the disciples of Christ, and discourage them from owning their profession. We are to be more than conquerors, Rom. 8:37.

Use 2. We ought to be so far from being involved in the conspiracy of others against God, that our zeal should increase by others declining, and we should love religion when it is commonly despised. That is our commendation, *esse bonum facile est*, &c. Till we are in termino, we have our difficulties, till we are gathered to angels, ἔξω βέλους,

out of gunshot. Our business is not to give way to evils, but to resist them with the greater courage. Indeed it is hard for a man to keep himself free from the infection of the times he lives in. We all complain of the badness of the times; but let us not make them the worse for us. If we would be good in bad times, we need—

1. Much holiness and heavenly-mindedness, that we may be burning and shining lights, conducting men to Christ, as the star that shone at Christ's birth: Phil. 2:15, 'That ye be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.' Noah, by preparing an ark, condemned the world, Heb. 11:7. This is the way to appear for God in the lustre of real grace, when we are taken off from other means.

2. Much faith or foresight of things to come: Heb. 11:7, 'By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark.' To see the ruin of the wicked when prosperous, this kept David in his integrity: Ps. 73:17, 'I went into the sanctuary, then understood I their end.' When he was once able to look through their honours and greatness and riches by the light of the sanctuary, he overcame the temptation which did so greatly press and shake him. So here in the text, 'It is time for thee, Lord, to work, for they have made void thy law; therefore I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold.' There is a worm in the root; they are under God's curse: Job 5:3, 'I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation;' which predicteth their ruin, though little appearance of their fall.

3. There needs much zeal and strong love to God. When profaneness is in fashion, let us give check to it in our place, either as magistrates by appearing against evil-doers, as Nehemiah contended for God:

Neh. 13:11, 'Then I contended with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken?' and ver. 17, 'Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath-day?' Not like Gallio, that cared for none of these things. As ministers, more active against sin: Isa. 58:1, 'Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice as a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.' As governors of families, careful of ourselves and families: Josh. 24:15, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' As private Christians, give out more of the lustre of grace: Mat. 5:16, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven;' 1 Peter 2:12, 'Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.' Not only stop the mouth of iniquity, but bring about the conversion of wicked men. Thus should every one of us in our place glorify God, and strive to make the times better: Rom. 12:11, 'Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' That is a good time; serving the Lord can make a change, if we would ply this means. Thus did David serve his generation: Acts 13:36, 'For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep.' When you die, people will be able to say, We miss such a man; he was zealous against sabbath-breakers, and drunkards, and swearers; one that owned the people of God, a friend to religion.

4. Caution, that we be not carried away with the deluge of corruption: Gal. 2:13, 'The other Jews dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.' Example hath a kind of compulsion in it; the best men can hardly stand out against it. It secretly insinuateth itself, weakeneth our love to God, abateth our care; therefore we cannot be enough watchful, that we be not secretly tainted, as a man in the sun



tans unawares. As in times of common contagion, every man is careful of his diet and company, so should we watch to keep our garments clean and unspotted of the world.

5. Sincerity, not dissembling; as Josh. 14:8, 'I wholly followed the Lord my God;' not loving the ways of God on foreign respects, but their own internal reasons; otherwise a man soon miscarrieth, for these motives will be changed, and those very inducements that moved him to take up religion will move him also to cast it off. None but the solid Christian will hold out, whilst light chaff is carried about with every wind, and the carnal-minded cuts the coat of his profession to the fashion of the times. A false heart cannot long hold out: Prov. 10:9, 'He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely; but he that perverteth his ways shall be known;' that is, to his shame; cannot long dissemble his nature.

6. A fixed resolution, that we may not be easy, and merely do as others do. It is the resolved man that encounters temptations, and maketh them fly back, as arrows shot against a brazen wall. Though others fall, I will serve the Lord, whatever others do: Josh. 24:15, 'And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' If he meet with reproaches and scorns: 2 Sam. 6:22, 'And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight.' If enticed by evil company: Ps. 119:115, 'Depart from me, ye evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God.' If threatened: Acts 4:19, 'But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.' Thus they stood by a self-denying resolution; whereas the unresolving man, James 1:8, 'is unstable in all his ways;' is turned like

a weathercock with every wind, fitteth his religion to every interest. God biddeth us thus unmovably to fix ourselves: Jer. 15:19, 'Thus saith the Lord, Let them return unto thee, but return not thou to them.' A man that would live quietly must either bring himself to the times, or expect the times should come over to him. A resolved man stayeth God's leisure, doth not serve his conscience to fit the times, but waiteth till God fit the times to his conscience.

7. A true sight of the worth of spiritual things above carnal. This in the text, 'More than gold, yea, fine gold.' Till a man cometh to this, his conscience will not be guided by his religion, but his interest, and give up all for the world's sake: 2 Tim. 4:10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, and loved the present world;' Phil. 3:19, 20, 'Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.' Loath to suffer, turn themselves into all shapes. God doth not command them, but themselves.

Secondly, The degree of his affection; whence this doctrine—

Doct. We ought not only to love the word, but to love it above all worldly things whatsoever.

1. Let me explain the grounds of our love to the word.

2. Speak of the degree of it.

1. Let me explain the grounds of our love to the word. We love the word, as it is the charter of our hopes and the rule of our duty. We have both respects in this psalm. As the charter of our hopes, ver. 111, 'Thy testimonies have I taken for an heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.' As a rule of our duty, ver. 14, 'I have rejoiced

in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches;' and ver. 140, 'Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.' So that—

[1.] To love and esteem the word as the charter of our hopes is to love and esteem spiritual privileges, such as the favour of God, pardon of sins, peace of conscience, taking away the stony heart, and eternal life. To have a deep sense and value for such things is the fruit of faith. It is true that some loose velleities and general inclinations men, as men, have to their own happiness; but being but weakly persuaded of these things, they are but slightly affected with them and the promises that reveal them. Men that have no faith, but altogether live by sense, know nothing more excellent than gold or riches, which do all in the world. If God would let them alone here, to have their portion in Paris, they would part with their share in paradise, such dunghill-souls have they. Let God keep spiritual things for whom he will, so they may live at ease in the world, they never mind communion with God, or enjoyment of God; but gracious hearts love the word, as offering and revealing these things.

[2.] To love the word as a rule of duty is in effect to love holiness, loving things as suitable to our necessities, and as suitable to our dispositions. 'I love thy commandments,' saith David in the text, as urging and directing us to our duty. This is also proper to gracious souls, to them all outward things are but toys and trifles for our senses to play withal. The least grain of grace seemeth better to them than a mountain of gold. They have a spiritual discerning, and love things according to the nature and worth of them. The things themselves are not to be compared together, so should not our affections to them.

2. The degree of it, more than all riches, 'Therefore I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold.' Take riches as

riches, in that notion as the word implies happiness, abundance, contentment. The word of God containeth the true riches, both in the promises and precepts of it.

[1.] In the promises, to us are given, τὰ τίμια καὶ μέγιστα ἐπαγγέλματα, 'exceeding great and precious promises,' 2 Peter 1:4. There the great controversy is decided about the true happiness and salvation, God or the creature; there you have the 'unsearchable riches of Christ;' Eph. 2:7, 'That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus.' The riches of the glory of the saints' inheritance: Eph. 1:18, 'That ye may know what is the hope of your calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.' These are things that make us truly rich: Rev. 3:18, 'I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.' He is not rich that floweth in wealth and plenty, but he that hath Christ, and an interest in his benefits. They are possessors of all things, though they have nothing: 2 Cor. 6:10, 'As having nothing, yet possessing all things.' A little serves the turn; they have the good things purchased by Christ, happiness enough if he can make them happy.

[2.] So in the precepts, they are means to work grace, the least dram of which is more worth than all things in the world. He is rich enough that is rich in faith: James 2:5, 'Hearken, my beloved brethren; hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of a kingdom,' in paradise, 'which he hath promised to them that love him?' It is more precious than the trial of gold: 1 Peter 1:7, 'That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.' The smallest measure of saving faith, or love to God, or fear of God, or repentance, is of more worth than what is most precious. The word

of God does more enrich a man; and true benefit is to be preferred before counterfeit.

Reasons for the degree of our love.

1. From the worth of the word, the reward, and those benefits that are gotten by studying and obeying it; they exceed worldly things, as will appear, because the one suits with our bodily necessities, the other with our spiritual. Our bodily necessities are supplied by gold, our spiritual necessities by grace. Gold will not comfort a distressed conscience, no more than nosegay flowers a condemned man. *Quod si dolentem, &c.*, saith Horace: Prov. 11:4, 'Riches avail not in the day of wrath.' The one renders us acceptable to men, the other to God. The world knoweth all things after the flesh; they measure men by splendour and pomp of living; but it is grace that God approveth most, and accepteth most. Grace is of great price in the sight of God: 1 Peter 3:4, 'But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.' The one much embaseth our nature; it is something more vile than us, therefore that affection is debased. But grace always ennobleth our nature, and is something above us. A greater affection is due to things above us than to things beneath us. The one is useful to us in *via*, the other in *patria*. Surely that which is of eternal use and comfort to us is better than that which is only of a temporal use. In our passage to heaven, we need gold and silver for the supply of our bodily necessities, and the support of outward life, so far as we have to do in the world; but with respect to the world to come, gold doth nothing; there we leave our wealth behind us, but our works follow us. Our treasure we quit when we die, but our grace we carry with us. Once more; the price by which things may be purchased showeth the worth of them. Wisdom is of so great a price, that all the treasures of the world cannot

purchase it: Job 28:15–20, 'It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof; it cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire; the gold and the crystal cannot equal it, and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold: no mention shall be made of coral or of pearls; for the price of wisdom is above rubies: the topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold.' What cannot money do in the world? yet it can do nothing as to the procuring of grace. The apostle telleth us this is a dear-bought blessing: 1 Peter 1:18, 19, 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversations, received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot.' To despise the favour of God, the image of God, is to despise the price that was paid for these things, to have lessening thoughts of the blood of Christ. To conclude; those we count lesser gifts which we bestow upon friends than upon enemies. A man would give meat and drink unto enemies when they hunger and thirst; but other gifts of a greater value to friends and relations. God giveth his Christ, his Spirit, his grace to his friends, children, servants; but corn and wine and oil, these he giveth promiscuously, yea, to his enemies a larger portion. Surely, then, these are better than gold. Our love should be according to the value of things.

2. Because if the word be not preferred before earthly things, it is not received with any profit and good effect. Christ saith, 'He that loveth anything more than me, is not worthy of me,' Mat. 10:37. He that studieth to please his friends rather than Christ, or to gratify his interest more than his conscience, within a very little while his Christianity will be worth nothing. It is not a simple love, but a greater love that we show to worldly things: Mat. 13:44–46, 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which

when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.' We must part with all, rather than miss of his grace, all that is pleasant and profitable, renounce all other things. When Christ propounds his terms, he would have us surrender all to his will and pleasure: Luke 9:23, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.' He must not avoid the cross by sinful shifts: we are ready to do so every day. These are the necessary terms, else we are not fit for the master's use: 2 Tim. 2:21, 'If any man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.'

3. Unless we love the word above riches, we cannot possess riches without a snare; then it will be not only hard, but impossible, to enter into the kingdom of heaven: Mark 10:23–27, 'And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking about him, said, With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.' Riches will so prevail over us, and wholly sway us, if they be our chief good and portion, and we have not a higher end to check our love to them. If a man would have all things cleave to him, he must be sure the world doth not sit nearest his heart; for if they do, such a man, as he is unfit for heaven, so he is unfit for the world too.

If they be your good things, Luke 16:25, 'Son, remember thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things;' you will get and keep and use them otherwise than the word doth allow.

4. From the fruit of grace; where it is planted in the heart and prevaieth, the desire of wealth is mortified, worldly lust denied: Titus 2:12, 'Teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts;' and desires of grace enlarged and increased: 1 Peter 2:2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.' And when it prevaieth further, and to a higher degree, they come to Moses' frame, to count the worst of Christ better than the best of the world: Heb. 11:26, 'Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.' Not only the graces of Christ, or the benefits of Christ, but the reproaches of Christ. So much is the world lessened, and the desires of grace increased. The heaviest part of Christ's cross is sweeter than the worldly plenty, where sin accompanieth it.

Use 1. To press us to get this esteem and love of the word above all earthly things: by what names soever they are called, whether gold or fine gold. Consider—

1. The word of God containeth the true riches, in comparison of which all other things are but a shadow.

2. Except God's word be clearly esteemed above earthly things, it is highly contemned. You would think yourselves highly slighted if once it should be put to the question whether you or an ass or a swine be better. The case is as clear whether it be better to have a child's toy or land of inheritance. You think it a disparagement of their reason. It is so to compare spiritual things with carnal: Prov. 16:16, 'How much better is it to get wisdom than gold, and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!'



3. The word of God observed and obeyed bringeth all earthly things along with it; gold and fine gold, so far as they are necessary and good for us: Mat. 6:33, 'But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you;' and 1 Tim. 4:8, 'Godliness is profitable unto all things; having a promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.' It hath all kind of promises, it doth not come empty-handed; it bringeth in a portion in this life, and blessing in these outward things.

4. How constant the word is, and in one tenor: 2 Cor. 1:20, 'All the promises of God in him are Yea, and in him Amen; unto the glory of God by us.' But worldly things are uncertain: 2 Sam. 19:43, 'And the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye.' Compare this with the next words, 2 Sam. 20:1, 'Sheba blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse.' The people cry Hosanna to Christ, and presently after, Crucify him. Peter once made a glorious confession of Christ, and afterwards a gross denial. Paul was received as an angel by the Galatians: Gal. 4:14, 'My temptation which was in my flesh, ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus;' but afterwards accounted an enemy; ver. 16, 'Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?' Nebuchadnezzar flourishing in a palace of gold, Dan. 4:30, 'Is not this great Babylon that I have built, for the house of my kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the glory of my majesty?' But a voice came to him from heaven, ver. 31, 'O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, The kingdom is departed from thee.'

Use 2. Have we such an esteem and affection to the word of God?  
Then—

1. We will do that which in other cases a greater love would incline us to do; otherwise it is but a compliment; we will diligently exercise ourselves in the word of God. Labour is the fruit of love: 'Remembering your labour of love,' 1 Thes. 1:3. He that doth not take more pains in the pursuit of heavenly things than of carnal, doth not love the one above the other; for love is industrious: John 6:27, 'Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.' What a deal of pains do men take for a little pelf, to heap up treasure, and fill their houses with the good things of this world, and spend all their time and wit, their care and strength, on outward things! The stream runneth stronger for the world when there is no proportionable care taken for the benefits which the word offereth. God maketh offer of grace and glory. Men are as those that travel by water, and see buildings ashore, and praise them as they pass by, but never enter into them, never look after them more. If you are ready and earnest in the pursuit of the one, careless and cold in the other; you think no time enough for the one, but grudge all time for the other: it is a sign the one hath a greater share in our hearts than the other. We are to seek worldly things in some measure, because God hath appointed every one some work to do; but when there is such a manifest disproportion between our seeking the one and the other, it showeth which way our souls bend; if a nice difference, that hardly distinguisheth it, give suspicion, more especially when such a manifest disproportion.

2. We will part with the one for the other's sake, if carnal things can withdraw us from the pursuit of heavenly things: Heb. 12:16, 'As Esau, who for one morsel of bread sold his birthright;' and heavenly things cannot make us to part with carnal things. Many make void the law to seek riches and wealth: 2 Tim. 4:10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world;' break God's commands for a small hire, and do so constantly, frequently, easily; it is a sign they do

but compliment, and speak from their judgments, not from their hearts, when they say they love God better than the world, or fine gold, the chiefest excellency of it. Would a man dispense with his obedience to the word, and be thus affected? What is deliberately, habitually preferred, that hath the greater love. We can neglect our duty to God, trample upon God, Christ, heaven, scripture, conscience, duty, in the way to make speed after worldly things.

3. Wherein do we place the happiness of us and ours? To carnal men nothing is so dear as their present prosperity. Do you value yourselves to be more happy when you have a little grace and sense of God's love than if you had all the world: Ps. 4:6, 7, 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.' And for your children, do you rejoice to see them great or good? Many are delighted to see their children thrive in the world, do well in the world, but careless whether they have grace, yea or no. If you take the world still as a great part of your felicity, it is a sign you have low thoughts and respects for the word of God.

## SERMON CXL

**Therefore I esteem all thy precepts  
concerning all things to be right; and I  
hate every false way.—VER. 128**

IN this verse a child of God is set forth by two marks:—

1. His approbation and esteem of the law of God in all the parts and points thereof, I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be

right.

2. His hatred of all sin as contrary thereunto, and I hate every false way: the one as the effect of the other.

First, In the first branch, take notice of—(1.) The illative particle, therefore. (2.) His respect to the word, I esteem thy precepts to be right. In the Septuagint it is πρὸς πάσας τὰς ἐντολάς σου κατωρθούμην, I was directed or set right unto all thy laws. But it maketh no difference in effect from our translation; for they that esteem the law will embrace and practise it. (3.) The extent and universality of this respect: there is a double universal particle, all thy precepts concerning all things; the general drift of them, and every particular matter and circumstance that falleth under this law, it is all right; I approve of whatsoever thou commandest, without any reservation and exception; all, even all, have I approved.

1. Something might be observed from the illative particle: it is inferred from their making void of God's law.

Doct. In times of defection, when others slight, contemn, and forsake the ways of God, we should approve and esteem them the more.

The reasons are—

1. To make amends for the contempt of others: 1 Peter 4:14, 'On their parts he is evil spoken of; on your part glorified.' Let not God want his glory; if he be dishonoured by their sins, he should be the more honoured by your obedience. It concerneth us to look that God be no loser. As the sea, what it loseth in one place, it gaineth in another; or as a river, what it loseth in breadth, and is pent within narrow channels, it gets in depth; so you should give him the more respect

the more it is denied him by others; the sincere professors of the name of God should be the more earnest.

2. To show that we do not choose the ways of God upon foreign reasons, as public countenance and consent. Many men owe their religion not to grace, but to the favour of the times; it is in fashion; they may profess it at a cheap rate, because none contradict it. Indeed it showeth they are extremely bad, that are bad when they may be good without any loss to themselves; but it doth not show they are good, that are only good in good times. Dead fish swim with the stream. They do not build upon the rock, but set up a shed leaning to another man's house, which costs them nothing; carried with a multitude, are not able to go alone in a good way; if they be religious, it is for others' sakes. Then is integrity discovered when persons dare be good in bad times, as Noah was said to be an upright man, because he was perfect in his generation: Gen. 6:9, 'When all flesh had corrupted their way.' And so it is said, Job 7:9, 'The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger;' that is, when there are discouragements and oppressions, as a resolved traveller holdeth on his journey, whether he meeteth with fair way or foul, good weather or bad.

3. There is an antiperistasis in grace as well as nature. Every quality, when it is pent up, is the stronger. Stars shine brightest in the darkest night. Fountain-water is hottest in winter, when the heat is pent up. In bad times good men are best; wicked men's badness exerciseth and increaseth good men's graces. The more odious sin appeareth in them, the more grace is strengthened in the saints; their looseness maketh you strict; their vanity and carelessness maketh you serious; their intemperance maketh you sober; their worldliness and sensuality maketh you spiritual; as they are instances of the cursed vigour of nature, you are instances of the sacred power of

grace, Phil. 2:15, shining as lights in the world 'in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation;' to be eminently holy among a company of profane, godless, atheistical spirits, showing forth the lovely beauty of holiness.

4. To show the difference between the people of God and others; and this is a fruit of God's eternal choice. God hath made a difference in the purposes of his grace, and they discover the difference in the course of their conversations: John 17:25, 'The world hath not known thee, but these have known thee, that thou hast sent me, and hast chosen them out of the world.' The opposite ignorance and obstinacy of the world showeth their acknowledgment of Christ was of more value and acceptation. When the world neither knew nor believed on him, but rather opposed and persecuted him, they owned Christ, and so walked in a countermotion to the times.

5. To defeat the enemies' purpose, which is to hinder the success of the gospel, and destroy all affection and respect to the word and ways of God, and that the service of God should fall to the ground; as we hold a staff the faster, when one would wrest it out of our hands: Titus 1:9, 'Holding fast the faithful word.' The pastor of the church should be good at holding and drawing, as the word signifieth; so people's zeal should be the more kindled in the worst times. God hath a number that do fear him; Christ is never a king without subjects, nor a head without a church; he ruleth in the midst of his enemies, Ps. 110:1; therefore he hath some to rule over. Where Satan's throne is, there he hath some to confess his name. Elijah thought himself left alone, yet then God had reserved to himself seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal.

Use. It is very seasonable for us in these times to mind this; therefore

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1. That we may increase in practical godliness. Now wickedness is broken loose and the law is made void, this should not damp our zeal, but quicken it. You should walk with God, as Noah and David did, in the worst of times: yea, the badness of the age you live in should make you the more wise, more circumspect, more humble, more heavenly; as fire burneth hottest in the coldest weather. Study to serve God in thy generation. A man that is not good in the age he liveth in, would never be good. A lily will thrive in a wilderness, and a brier is but a brier though it grow in paradise. Their fury in sin should warn you of your duty to God. Shall a lust prevail more with them to damn themselves, than the love of God and the hope of salvation with you? shall they act more regularly to their ends? What zeal and earnestness have they in their course, and how open and bold-faced in sin! We read that Pambo wept when he saw a woman dressing herself curiously to please her wanton lover, to see her take so much pains to undo her soul, and that he had not been so careful to please God, and provide things honest in the sight of God, as she to please herself.

2. They are set up as warnings to us, as a beacon on fire warneth all the country to be in arms. You see what it is to give way to the beginnings of sin, not to be under the blessed conduct of God's Spirit. Some are notoriously wicked, judicially given up to be more visibly under the dominion of sin, that others may take warning how they come into that woful slavery: Phil. 3:19, 20, 'For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies to the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, who glory in their shame, who mind earthly things; but our conversation is in heaven.'

3. It should make us fly to God for grace when the whole world lieth in wickedness: Isa. 6:5, 'I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell

among a people of unclean lips.' It is hard to converse with defiled ones and not be defiled, to keep ourselves unspotted from the world: Ps. 106:35, 'They were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.' The contagion of sin overspreads presently, as a man by touching that which was unclean became unclean. We easily catch a sickness from others, but we cannot convey our health to them.

Use 2. Teacheth us to keep up our profession even in lesser truths: 'I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things.' When men would wrangle us out of our duty, we are to be πιστοὶ ἐν ὀλίγῳ, faithful in a little. Great matters depend on little things. We are tried, ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ ἀληθείᾳ, 2 Peter 1:12, by the 'present truths,' whether we will own the ways of God: Rev. 14:13, 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord,' or for the Lord, 'from henceforth, yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labour.' Why 'from henceforth?' Why! before the sufferings of Christians were from heathens and professed enemies, and they were acknowledged blessed as dying for the Lord. But now, when antichrist and false Christians came up, they did pretend to be for Christ, and friends to him, and this might be a discouragement to them in their suffering; but saith the Holy Ghost, 'From henceforth blessed are they which die for the Lord,' when pseudo-Christians begin to come up, and persecute the heavenly Christians. It is as blessed a thing to suffer under pseudo-Christians and antichristianism as it was to suffer under heathens and pagans, professed enemies to Christianity. I speak of this, because the orthodoxy of the world is usually an age too short. In things publicly received, it is easy to be right. Christ is forced to gain upon the world by inches. A man may acknowledge the Trinity, the satisfaction of Christ, among Papists; but it is exceeding praiseworthy to own Christ when others scorn and reject him. The world will allow us to esteem the ways of God in some lesser things, that are out of controversy and are not maligned; but this esteem must have that extent as



becometh the people of God, to have a hearty esteem of all the precepts of God, and all things contained therein.

Secondly, Let me come to his respect to the ways of God; and from his respect, with the extent, I shall observe this doctrine:—

Doct. That it becometh the people of God to have a practical heart-engaging esteem of all the precepts of God, and all things contained therein.

Let me show you what is this esteem the children of God have for his precepts.

1. There is something implied and presupposed.
2. Wherein it doth formally consist.
3. The qualifications of a right and saving esteem of the ways of God.

1. There is something implied and presupposed before we can come to esteem the precepts of God. As—

[1.] Knowledge and a right discerning. This is necessary, partly that a man may be able to make a distinction between good and evil, otherwise he cannot esteem the good and eschew the evil, for 'without knowledge the heart is not good,' Prov. 19:2. If we should stumble blindfold upon a good way, we are not the more accepted with God, nor advantaged in our spiritual course. The clearer our light, the warmer our love. The more clear and certain apprehension we have of spiritual things, our faith is more steadfast, love more vehement, joy more sound, hope more constant, patience more sublime, our pursuit of true happiness more earnest. And partly because a man can not esteem that which he knoweth not. The will being *cœca potentia*, blind in itself, followeth the direction and

guidance of the understanding. The ignorance of the nature and necessity of holiness is the cause of the neglect of it: John 4:10, 'If thou knewest the gift,' &c. Many condemn good for evil, take evil for good, boldly rush into sin, reject the ways of God for want of knowledge. But then it is spiritual illumination that begets estimation, 1 Cor. 2:14. The truth and worth of spiritual things must be seen by a spiritual eye. When the Spirit enlighteneth a man, he beginneth to see that which he knew not before, to see things in another manner.

[2.] Advertency, or application of the mind to the object or things esteemed; that he seriously consider the matter, and what it is best to do; it is not a sudden, rash undertaking. The scripture speaketh of 'applying our hearts to wisdom,' Ps. 90:12; and Prov. 2:2, 'Apply thy heart to understanding;' Prov. 23:12, 'Apply thine heart to instruction, and thine ears to the ways of knowledge.' Make it your business seriously to consider things that differ. But then—

2. Wherein lies this esteem, or wherein doth it formally consist? Esteem is an approbation of the will, or a hearty love. There is the approbation of the understanding, and the approbation of the will. The approbation of the understanding is a naked sense, or an acknowledgment of what is good: Rom. 2:18, 'Thou knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent.' There is an excellency in holiness that winneth esteem, even there where it is not embraced. All convinced men see the evil of sin, and are half of the mind to quit it; they approve the law which they violate by a bare naked approbation. But then there is the approbation of the heart or will; there is love and liking in it, and this is called esteem. This is seen in two things—consent and choice: consent, to take this law for our rule; and choice, whatever temptation we have to the contrary. Men choose what they highly esteem. In short, it is such an

approbation as doth engage affection, such an affection as doth engage practice. Esteem is the fruit of love.

[1.] There is a consenting to the law that it is good, Rom. 7:16. There is a difference between assent and consent. A man may assent to the truth and goodness of the law that doth not consent to the goodness of it; as the devils assent to the truth of God's being, that do not consent to take him for their portion, James 2:19. Therefore, besides the advertency of the understanding, there is the consent or approbation of the will. Paul speaketh good words of the law: Rom. 7:12, 'The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, just, and good,' νόμος and ἐντολὴ—the law in general, and that commandment which wrought such tragical effects in his heart, that rifled all his confidence and hopes, and left him wounded with the sense of sin; it is holy in teaching duty to God, just in prescribing duties to our neighbour, good in respect to ourselves; a law becoming God to give and us to receive, suitable and profitable. Thus should we approve and like the law of God.

[2.] Choice, whatever temptation we have to the contrary; a preferring or prevailing love, a heart-engaging approbation, that doth prevailingly determine the soul to the ways of God. Non differunt re consensus et electio, saith Aquinas, sed ratione tantum, ut consensus dicatur, secundum quod placet ad agendum; electio autem secundum quod præfertur his quæ non placent—consent to the law and choice of the law are all one and the same act, distinguished by divers respects and considerations. It is called consent to the law, as it approveth of what the law adviseth; and it is called choice or esteem, as it preferreth the law and our obedience to it above other things. It is actualis prælatio unius rei præ altera, a preferring one thing above another.

Thirdly, I come to the properties or qualifications of this esteem.

1. It is not a simple, but comparative approbation. There is a twofold act of judgment—the first act and the second. The first act is that whereby I distinguish good from evil, and pronounce the one to be embraced, the other eschewed; approve the one, disapprove the other. But there is a comparative approbation; that is, that which the understanding judgeth best, all circumstances considered, better than all other things that can be represented. This is the proper notion of esteem: Heb. 11:26, 'Esteeming the reproach of Christ,' &c. We approve of many things simply, and in the first act, which we disallow in the second, when we consider them as invested with some difficulty and unpleasantness, or overpoised with contrary desires, when we compare them with the pleasure and profit which we must forsake; it consents to walk in the ways of God, as Orpah will follow Naomi into the land of Israel, if she may do it without inconveniency, Ruth 1:14. The young man esteemed salvation worthy to be inquired after, Mark 10:20, but is loath to forego his earthly possessions to purchase that inheritance. When the judgment that we make of the thing simply considered in itself, and of the thing as considered with all circumstances, as it cometh in comparison with other things that must be endured or foregone.

2. There is a judgment of general estimation, and a judgment of particular application. By the one I bind duty upon others; by the other I engage my own heart, as the expression is, Jer. 30:21, 'Who is he that engageth his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord;' to engage his heart to take God for his portion. An instance we have in David: Ps. 73:28, 'But it is good for me to draw near to God.' I may approve many things as good, for which I have no appetite myself. Many will yield that it is good to serve God that cannot work, or do not engage their heart to it. Many approve piety in the general; it is

good to be religious, to live a holy life; but when it cometh to our own case, when we are to abstain from this or that sin, we draw back. Many know what things are more excellent, but do not practise or embrace them; commend those that are religious, but do not imitate them. Acts 5:13, the people highly esteemed the Christians, but yet would not become Christians themselves: Ps. 48:14, 'This God is our God for ever and ever.' Many a wicked man judgeth it best for him to continue his evil courses, and thinketh religion is good for other men, but it is not good for him; but God's children are of another mind.

3. It is not a slight and superficial esteem, but such as is deep and solid: Mat. 13:20, 'He heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it.' It is a blessed thing to hear of the pardon of sin, Heb. 6:5, to taste of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come; as they that cheapen wines taste, though they do not go through with the bargain; some inclination of heart, half a mind to be thoroughly godly and religious: John 5:35, 'They rejoiced in his light for a season.' They were much taken with John for a while, and the novelty and excellency of his doctrine. But when is this esteem deep and solid? It may be known—(1.) By the root of it; (2.) The ground and formal object of it; (3.) The manner or way how we come by it.

[1.] The root of it When the root of this esteem is a vital principle of grace: Mat. 13:21, 'He hath not root in himself.' The word is not ingrafted, James 1:21. The people had a good inclination: 'All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do,' Deut. 5:29. But, 'Oh! that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always,' &c. They had a mind to do well; but where faith, fear, and love are not planted, there may be some stirrings of conscience, but not a full purpose of heart. There is the approbation of an awakened and enlightened conscience, and the approbation of

a renewed heart. A convinced man approveth, and a converted man approveth, but in a different manner. The one is but a flash, like fire in straw, the other hath a durable affection.

[2.] When the ground and formal object of it is not a temporal, natural, or carnal motive, but the moral goodness of the law; because it is the pure and holy word and will of God, who is the lawgiver, whose authority is absolute. There may be carnal motives to incline us to esteem the word, as the novelty of John's doctrine: John 5:35, 'They rejoiced in his light for a season;' delight to hear a plausible and rational discourse, as Ezekiel's hearers, Ezek. 33:32, 'And lo thou art to them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, that can play well upon an instrument; for they hear thy words, but do them not.' Or carnal motives, as they Gen. 34:22, 23, 'Herein will the men consent to dwell with us, to be one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised. Shall not their cattle and their substance be ours? Only let us consent unto them,' &c. And so temporal interests. Religion hath a portion for which it is courted. The consent of many to the law is the same which Mahometans have to the Alkoran; education in it, ancestors embracing of it, the countenance of the law, the custom of the country, &c.

[3.] The manner or way how we come by it, by much prayer and serious deliberation. Some by chance are surprised and affected with a good motion, suddenly good, but habitually bad; they will in all haste become religious, but, alas! this estimation or approbation of God's ways is entertained but for a time, but afterwards vanisheth and cometh to nothing. There must be a clear distinct knowledge of the excellency of God's ways: otherwise in a fit, or in a good mood, we choose that which is good; but the interest in evil not being

renounced in heart, it causeth an easy retreat into the former sinful course.

4. It must be such an esteem as hath a lively and effectual influence upon our hearts and ways. There is a liking that only produceth a velleity and wish, and doth not engage the soul to prosecute the things willed, or forsake the things nilled; but there is such an effectual liking and esteem as will produce a constant, habitual willingness, that will have the authority of a principle, and hath a powerful command over the whole soul, to set it a-working to do the will of God, and will admit of no contradiction by contrary desires, but maketh us act with life, power, and earnestness. Cold and inconstant wishes produce no fruit in the heart. The general course of most men's lives is as if they had no liking to the law of God. It may be they may dislike and sacrifice some of their weaker lusts and smaller interests, which they can well spare, but corruption doth ordinarily bear sway in their hearts and lives. In the text it is, 'I esteem all thy precepts, and hate every false way.' It is true, a man that approveth the law is not wholly freed from sin. There are sins of ordinary infirmity, that cleave to us while we are in the world, yea, taint our best actions: Isa. 64:6, 'But we are all as an unclean thing, all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.' And sometimes, though there be a principle of grace, a child of God may be overborne by the violence of a temptation, carried into presumptuous sins, which may make strange havoc in the soul. David prayeth, Ps. 19:14, that God would keep him from presumptuous sins; but for the most part the children of God are influenced by their consent and esteem of the law of God. And the renewed part for the generality hath the upper hand, and prevaleth, and the flesh is weakened; as the house of David grew stronger and stronger, 2 Sam. 3:1, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.

5. It must be a universal, not partial esteem: 'I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right;' Ps. 119:6, 'When I have respect to all thy commandments;' Luke 1:6, 'Zachary and Elizabeth walked in all the commandments and ordinances of God blameless;' Acts 3:22, 'Him shall you hear in all things, whatsoever he shall say unto you;' and he shall fulfil all my will. It is not enough to be right in commands in general, or the lump, but in this and that particular; not in some, but in all. We pretend to give up ourselves to the will of God in the general, but particulars we stick at. Men are convinced that holiness is necessary, that they must have some religion; therefore when they take up duty in the lump, and abstract notion or naked consent, it doth not exasperate opposite propensions: 'Ye cannot serve the Lord,' &c., saith Joshua, Josh. 24:18, 19; but when they come to particulars, and see what it is to wait upon a holy and jealous God, they tire and grow weary: so that there must be a consent and purpose to obey, not some, but all and every one, without exception; not partial, like that of Herod to John: Mark 6:20, 'He did many things.' The worst man in the world loveth some good and hateth some evil, but he doth not esteem all God's commandments in every point. Nay, the great enemy of our salvation, Satan, can be content to let us yield to God in many things, if he would be contented with half our duty: one sin reserved keepeth afoot his interest in our hearts, as a bird tied by the leg is fast enough. The devil will suffer men to do many things, but if he hath them fast by one lust, be it an inclination to sensuality, or love to the world, he is contented. The world likes many things in religion; they are good and profitable for men; but sticketh at others. To live godly in Christ Jesus will draw on persecution, 2 Tim. 3:12. The flesh will dispense with us to do many things, for the more cleanly conveyance of others, if it can but get us to spare the bosom lust which the soul delighteth in. Every man, as he is enslaved by his own customs, opposeth one this law, another that; the proud man doth not approve



of that law that doth forbid his pride, nor the sensual man that which toucheth his intemperance and unbridled appetite, nor the worldly man his covetousness, cannot endure that part of the law that would abridge him of his gain. Nothing more common than to cast off what liketh us not in the law of God, and to wish there were no precept given in that kind. But our consent must be to all in general, and to this and that in particular. Many could be content with God's law, so far as it doth not cross their carnal interest, or hinder their corrupt desires; but we must esteem all the laws of God; they are all holy, just, and good, not one excepted; all conduce to perfect our nature, and make us happy creatures; they all conduce to the benefit of human nature; they are all enjoined by the authority of the same God: 'God spake all these words.' They are linked as rings in a chain; one preserveth another; they are all necessary for our eternal happiness; not one given in vain. So much thou continuest thine own misery, and art defective in the way that leadeth to true happiness, as thou art willing to indulge in any one sin. They are all written in the hearts of God's children, Heb. 8:10, all suited to the new nature; and he hath given grace to keep all, 1 Peter 1:15, perfection of parts, not of degrees. The new creature is not maimed in the birth. A child hath not the bulk and strength of a man. Want of perfection of parts cannot be supplied by any after growth. Nay, all are necessary to our communion with God: Ps. 66:18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me;' Mat. 5:19, 'Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments,' &c. If we dispense with ourselves in the least things, we are not fit for communion with God, 2 Cor. 7:1; having such promises of God's being in us, and dwelling in us, and maintaining communion with us, then 'let us cleanse our-ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit;' Col. 1:10, 'that ye might walk worthy of the Lord to all pleasing,' εἰς πᾶσάν ἀρέσκειαν. If you do not consent to keep all, you can keep none; for the same reasons that move us to break one, will move us to break all. Herod, that

heard John gladly, when his lust moved him to it, put him to death. To be sure it must be total.

Reasons of this esteem.

1. From the excellency of God's law. The law of God deserves it: Deut. 4:6, 'Keep, therefore, and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' We should esteem the law, because it doth not infringe our natures, but makes them perfect, puts an excellency upon us. But of this in other verses.

2. This esteem and approbation is the ground of practice. When we are convinced of the ways of God, and the excellency that is in them, the heart consenteth and embraceth them, and then followeth a ready practice; we will observe what we do approve. Whereas, on the contrary, if we have no esteem for the ways of God, we shall take no care to walk in them, but could wish such laws expunged; for still these two go together—hearty embracing and diligent practice. The will is the great master-wheel. Now esteem implieth the bent of the will or heart; it implieth consent and election; it is the act of the will, is the act of the man: Prov. 23:26, 'My son, give me thy heart.' The man is never overcome till then. You may kill him, but you cannot conquer him till he give his consent. There may be a kind of force and violence offered to the other faculties; the understanding may be overcome with light, which though it would, it cannot keep out. The conscience may be awakened, though men endeavour to lull it asleep; but the will is free, and is not conquered, but by its own consent and choice. The Lord will not force himself upon any; he dealeth with the reasonable creatures in a covenant way, to which our consent is required. It only bindeth as a law, till we consent to

yield to it as a covenant: 2 Chron. 30:8, 'Yield yourselves to the Lord.' Now bring your hearts once to consent, and heartily approve of the ways of God, and the rest will succeed without difficulty. It will not be hard to give a law to the tongue, to restrain the hand, govern the body; our affections will more easily come to hand if we have a will to the things of God. The smallest matters against our wills are grievous to us. It was no great matter for Haman to lead Mordecai's horse, but it was an unwelcome and unpleasant service; he had no mind to it. It is no great matter for men to do the things that God requireth; but they have no mind to it, and therefore are off and on: James 1:8, 'The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.'

3. This is some comfort to a child of God, that though he faileth in some part of his duty, yet he esteemeth all; for where this approbation is, you may use the apostle's plea, 'Not I, but sin that dwelleth in me;' Rom. 7:15, 'For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that do I.' The allowance or approbation of the will is there spoken of; he speaketh of willing and nilling, loving, delighting, and hating. Though you cannot do that good you would, in that purity and perfection which love requireth, and the renewed heart intendeth, yet your hearts are upon your work: 'The evil which I hate, I do.' The new nature hates and dislikes what the carnal part prompts to.

Use. Learn to approve the law of God in all things, as right and good for you.

1. Do not dispense with yourselves in anything. In two cases we are apt to do so:—(1.) In small things; it is nothing, we think; it is but a little one. Nothing that cometh from God should be light and contemptible; though the matter be never so small, if God hath interposed, it should be regarded by us. There may be great

obstinacy in small sins, as a slender line may be very crooked, or as in some cases the dye is more than the cloth. Will you break with God in a small matter? If some great matter were required, would you not have done it? as 2 Kings 5:13; dare you offend this holy God for trifles? (2.) Do not dispense with yourselves, though never so contrary to your humour and interest. This is to set up a toleration in your own hearts, or a court of faculties without God's leave: 'God be merciful to me, if I bow in the house of Rimmon.'

2. Do not so much as wish there were no such law. It is a contradiction of the law when you could wish there were no law to put a restraint upon your beloved lusts and darling corruptions. Carnal men wish there were no God, not as a creator and preserver, but as a lawgiver. There may be much enmity in such a thought. Every thought must be brought into subjection to Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. 10:5. Not a disallowing thought of God's government but doth much prejudice your hearts. God hath given such laws, that if all things were left to our own option and choice, nothing better could be devised to preserve the liberty and perfection of the human nature. It is an ill note to count the command grievous. Holiness is so amiable in itself, that men are not frightened unto God's laws, but choose them.

3. Bring thy heart to approve the law by mortifying that distemper that ariseth against it, be it pride, self-conceit, sensuality, covetousness. Appetite that is lost to wholesome food is restored by purging the stomach; there is a preparation of mind required to receiving of moral things. So in divine things: 1 Cor. 2:14, 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit.' We are prepossessed, *intus existens prohibet exitum*. Therefore bring your heart to approve God's law *removendo prohibens*, by mortifying those corruptions that rise against it.

4. When you see no other reason to yield to God's law, let his will and sovereign authority be reason enough to you. This is reason enough for God to use to his creatures: 'I am the Lord,' Lev. 18:4, 5, 'Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the Lord your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments; which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord.' This is the will of God. We owe God blind obedience. This should silence all perverse reasonings against God, both as to his laws and providence. His will is supreme, and our will must be yielded up to his.

Secondly, We come to the other branch, and I hate every false way. Where we have—the act, hate; the object, false way; the extent, every, whatsoever is contrary to the purity of God's word.

Doct. That it is a good note of a renewed and obedient heart to hate every false way.

This will appear from—

1. The sorts and kinds of hatred.

2. The causes.

3. The effects, or the comparison of hatred with anger.

1. From the sorts and kinds of hatred, which are reckoned up to be two—(1.) *Odium abominationis*; (2.) *Odium inimicitiae*.

[1.] *Odium abominationis*, a hatred of flight and aversion, called by some *odium offensionis*, the hatred of offence. It is defined by Aquinas to be *dissonantia quaedam appetitus, ad id quod apprehenditur ut repugnans, &c.* It is a repugnancy of the appetite to what is apprehended, as contrary and prejudicial to it. Such there is

in the will of the regenerate, for they apprehend sin as repugnant and contrary to their renewed will; to the unregenerate it is agreeable and suitable, as draff to the appetite of a swine, or grass and hay to a bullock or horse. Now this hatred is a good sign, that cannot be found in another that is not born of God. The mortification of sin standeth principally in the hatred of it. Sin dieth when it dieth in the affections; when we look upon it as an offence to us, destructive to our happiness, and as it is truly grieved for and hated by us. The unregenerate may hate sin, materially considered; that is, the thing which is a sin; but they cannot hate it formally considered, as sin under the notion of a sin; for then they would hate all sin, a quatenus ad omne valet consequentia. As, for instance, thus: A covetous man hateth prodigal and riotous courses, not as they are sinful and contrary to God's law, but as contrary to his humour and covetous will.

[2.] *Odium inimicitiae*, or the hatred of enmity. This enmity is nothing else but a willing of evil or mischief to the thing or person hated, and that out of mere displacency, dislike, or distaste of the person hated. This is a sure note; the regenerate hate their sins, in that they would have them arraigned, crucified, mortified; they would fain see the heart-blood of sin let out; therefore they oppose, watch against, and resist it as their mortal, deadly enemy. When a man pursues sin, would have the life of it, this enmity cannot be quiet; it is an active enmity, diligent in praying, mourning, watching, striving, using all holy means to get it out of our hearts, wishing, groaning, waiting, complaining, that we may get rid of it: Rom. 7:24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' They follow their work hard.

2. The causes of this hatred. There are three causes of it:—

[1.] Spiritual knowledge and illumination, that is one cause of hatred: Ps. 119:104, 'Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.' When the heart is thick-set, and well fraughted with divine knowledge, a man cannot sin freely. Those that are exercised in the word of God find some consideration or other to quicken to the hatred of sin. The word is a proper instrument to destroy sin: Ps. 119:11, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee;' Eph. 6:13. Our affections follow our apprehensions. We come to the heart by the mind: Jer. 31:19, 'After I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh.' In the word of God are the most proper reasons and arguments to kill sin.

[2.] The love of God: Ps. 97:10, 'Ye that love the Lord hate evil.' He doth not say forbear it, but hate it. The cause of hatred is the love of that good unto which the thing or person hated is contrary and repugnant. Love to the chiefest good is accompanied with hatred of sin, which is the chiefest evil. The one is as natural to grace as the other. The new nature hath its flight and aversation, as well as its choice and prosecution, to things that are hurtful to it, as well as good and profitable.

[3.] A filial fear of God: Prov. 8:13, 'The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride and arrogancy and the evil way and the froward mouth do I hate.' Certainly this is to fear God, to hate what God hateth, and as God hateth, and because God hateth. Now God hateth all sin, pride, and arrogancy; that is, sins of thought, which put us upon vain and foolish musings. And then the sins of the tongue are expressed by 'froward mouth.' Nothing so natural to us as filthy and evil speaking. And then the sins of practice, 'the evil way.' They that fear God will hate all these sins. These graces are strangers to unrenewed hearts. It argueth a divine nature when we hate when, what, and as, and because God hates it. *Eadem velle et nolle est summa amicitia.*

3. A third argument is from the comparison of hatred with anger. Unregenerate men may be angry with sin, because anger is consistent with love. One may be angry with his wife, children, friends, whom yet he tenderly affects.

[1.] Anger is a sudden and short, hatred a lasting and durable passion. Anger is furor brevis, curable by time; hatred incurable by the greatest tract of time. The unregenerate are displeased with their sins for a spurt, but the regenerate constantly disaffected towards them. There is, 1 John 3:9, σπέρμα, there is a constant principle of resistance in the renewed heart. Passion is a casual dislike, but the new nature a rooted enmity, a habitual aversion to what is evil.

[2.] Anger is only against singulars, but hatred is εἰς τὰ γένη, to the whole kind. Thus we hate every wolf and every serpent, every thief and every calumniator. So is this universal; it respects sin as sin, and hateth all sin, though never so profitable and pleasant. Not upon foreign and accidental reasons; as, Esther 3:15, Haman thought scorn to lay hands upon Mordecai alone, but sought the destruction of all the Jews. The same reasons that incline us to hate one sin, incline us to hate all sin. The violation of God's law is a contempt of God's authority, a breach of spiritual friendship; one grieveth the Spirit of God as well as the other. Every sin is hateful to God, so it is to those that are made partakers of the divine nature.

[3.] Anger may be pacified or appeased with the sufferings of the thing or person with which we are angry, but hatred is implacable; nothing can content and satisfy it but the ruin or not being of the thing and party hated. David was angry with Absalom, but loath to have him destroyed, only corrected and reduced: when he sent out forces against him, 'Deal gently with the young man.' So many deal with their sins; we reason, pray, strive, complain; but it is but an



angry fit; we are displeased with them at present, but could easily be reconciled. They seek not after the death, but the restraint and imprisonment of their corruptions and lusts, that they may not disgrace or otherwise prejudice them. Nothing contents the regenerate but the killing and mortification of them; they would have them dealt with as Samuel by Agag, hewn in pieces; therefore they study revenge upon their sins: Gal. 5:24, 'Crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts.'

[4.] From the state of the regenerate. They have sin in them, but yet they hate it. Their will and consent to sin is always abated, and made remiss by a contrary principle, the grace that is in their wills: Gal. 5:17, 'The spirit lusteth against the flesh.' Sin cannot reign in them with a full and uncontrolled dominion: Rom. 6:14, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you.'

Use 1. How few are there that are God's children, for how few are there that hate sin! Some love it, Job 20:12, 13, and the love of sin is the life of it; and what is it they hate? They hate the word that discovers sin, John 3:20; they hate God's messengers that do cry aloud against sin, and do rub their sores; as Ahab said of Micaiah, 'He doth never prophesy good of me.' They hate the magistrate that would reform them, they hate God's image in his saints; they cannot endure the lustre of holiness that shineth forth in them.

Use 2. Do we indeed hate sin? We had need look after this.

1. Because this is the true principle of resistance against sin. Till a man hateth it, the soul is not thoroughly resolved against it, as a man is never thoroughly gained to God till he love holiness for holiness' sake: his affections may be bribed with other considerations, but then he is rooted in godliness. So a man is not resolved against sin till he hate it for its own sake. He may be frightened out of sin for a

fit, put out of humour with it, but his heart is in again with his old lusts, till there be a detestation of sin; but when once he cometh to hate it, persuasions cannot easily move him, nor example draw him, nor difficulties compel him, to that which is evil; nor allurements, that have a great force upon us: 'Straightway he followed her.' But they cast away sin with indignation: Hosea 14:8, 'What have I any more to do with idols?'

2. This is a true distinctive note between good and bad. Men may forbear sin that do not hate it: they forbear it by constraint, for fear of punishment, shame, worldly ends; but regard it in their hearts, Ps. 66:18. The dog hath a mind to the pail, but feareth the cudgel. But God judgeth not as man judgeth.

## **SERMON CXLI**

### **Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.—VER. 129**

IN the words are two parts—

1. The dignity and excellency of God's testimonies, thy testimonies are wonderful.
2. The effect it had upon David's heart, therefore doth my soul keep them.

Accordingly two points—

Doct. 1. That the testimonies of God, when duly considered and thoroughly understood, will indeed be found to be wonderful.

Doct. 2. The wonderful excellency of the word should beget in our hearts a readiness and diligent care to keep it.

Doct. 1. The testimonies of God are wonderful.

1. The word in itself is wonderful, as containing truths of a sublime nature.

2. It is wonderful in its effects; as it produceth effects rare and strange.

1. In itself considered, it is sometimes called the mystery of faith, as it containeth principles of faith; and sometimes a mystery of godliness, as it containeth rules of practice. As it is a mystery of faith, there are many strange doctrines in it above the reach of man's capacity, which we could neither invent nor understand, unless we be enlightened by the Spirit of God; as that three to be one, and one to be three; God to be made man, &c.; these are riddles to a carnal mind. And as it is a rule of faith, still it offereth matter of wonder, the duty of man being represented with such exactness and comprehensiveness: Ps. 119:96, 'I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.'

2. What rare effects it produceth: where it is entertained it maketh a Christian become a wonder to himself and others.

[1.] A wonder to himself: 1 Peter 2:9, 'He hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.' There is no man converted by the word of God but hath cause to wonder at his own estate, at the condescension of God in plucking him as a brand out of the burning, or that woful condition wherein he was before, when others are left to perish: John 14:22, 'Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world?' And then that we are brought into the

possession of such excellent privileges as we enjoy in our new estate, peace that passeth all understanding, Phil. 4:7, joy unspeakable and full of glory, 1 Peter 1:8; privileges greater than can be imagined or expressed. So are their hearts ravished in the sense of their reconciliation with God and communion with him. So also in giving them such an undoubted right to an everlasting blessed estate in the heavens: 1 Cor. 2:9, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.' He hath promised them a happiness which they can never think of, but every day they must fall a-wondering anew; and all this wrought by an exceeding great power working together with the word, Eph. 1:19; as Peter wondered at his own deliverance, when chains and gates and bars did all give way to the power of the angel that brought him forth: Acts 12:9–11, 'And he went out, and followed him, and wist not that it was true that was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth into the city, which opened to them of its own accord, and they went out and passed on through one street, and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.' So may every one that is converted to God stand wondering, when he considereth how, from whence, and to what he is called by God; all this is wonderful indeed. There is more of God seen in inward experiences than in outward; in converting, comforting, quickening, and carrying on the work of grace in our own hearts, than in governing the courses of nature; therefore the apostle appealeth to this internal power, Eph. 3:20, 'Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.' He instanceth in that which God hath done for us in Christ, which is

beyond our prayer, conceptions, and hopes; transcending the hopes and apprehensions of the most enlarged hearts. Thus is a Christian a wonder to himself.

[2.] He is a wonder to the world, if he keep up the majesty and vigour of religion: 1 Peter 4:4, 'Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.' It was strange to them that they should be altered so of a sudden, that of filthy puddles they should become clear as crystal waters; a sink turned into a pure fountain. That men should live above interests of nature, row against the stream of flesh and blood, this is all strange to the world; and this is the fruit of the word; for 'the word of God is perfect, converting the soul,' Ps. 19:8. Every grace is a mystery and wonder; especially faith, for a man to believe that which he understandeth not, to hope for that he seeth not, to have that which he wants; to be tossed with tempests, and yet to enjoy a sweet calm in our own hearts; to be destitute of all things, and yet be as little anxious as if we indeed had all things; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things; to be a rock in the midst of a storm; as dying, and yet we live: 2 Cor. 4:8, 9, 'We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;' 2 Cor. 6:10, 'As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.' Thus is a believer the world's wonder, a very riddle to carnal sense. So in other graces; he can hate father and mother for Christ's sake, can also love enemies at Christ's command. He that doth even break his heart for the least sin can bear up against the greatest trouble.

Thus I might exemplify the point, but I must go a little largely to work.

1. God's testimonies are wonderful in their majesty and composure, which striketh reverence into the hearts of those that consider; it speaketh to us at a God-like rate. Jesus Christ leaves a character of his divine Spirit upon his words: Mark 7:28, 29, 'And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.' There was an impression of his authority upon his word, his hearers were convinced of a sovereign majesty proper to the dignity of his person. Those that went to take him returned this account, John 7:46, 'Never man spake like this man,' for authority, power, and evidence. Now the scriptures being Christ's doctrine, why should they not have the same power, authority, and divine character in them? It is the same doctrine; the voice could add nothing to it, and the writing take nothing from it. Could not God discover his sovereign majesty in writing as well as speaking? Look into the scriptures; are you not even compelled to say, This can be no other but the word of God? They speak not as conscious of any weakness, or as begging assent, but as commanding it. Thus saith the Lord, hear it, or ye are undone for ever. The wisdom, majesty, authority of the author showeth itself in every line almost of scripture. Longinus, a heathen, admired the majesty of that passage, γενέσθω καὶ ἐγένετο. Indeed, everywhere there is great authority mixed with simplicity and plainness of speech, such as moveth reverence and awe in the consciences of men. It may be it is not seen in every phrase and clause of a sentence, but it is clearly discovered in the whole frame; as the majesty of a man's countenance is not so fully discovered in any one part of the face as in the whole visage taken jointly together. Scriptura sic loquitur, saith Austin, ut altitudine superbos irrideat, profunditate attentos terreat, veritate magnos pascit, affabilitate parvos nutriat—scripture so speaketh that it laughs proud and lofty men to scorn with the height of it; with the depths of it it terrifieth those who with attention look into it; with

truth it feedeth men of greatest knowledge and understanding; with affability and sweetness it nourisheth babes and sucklings. Let a man have but anything of a prepared mind, and he cannot contain his wonder and reverence, but will tremble at the word of God: Isa. 66:2, 'To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.'

2. It is wonderful for the matter and depth of mystery, which cannot be found elsewhere, concerning God and Christ, the creation of the world, the souls of men, and their immortal and everlasting condition, the fall of man, &c. Here God is set forth to us in the clearest representation that we are capable of in this mortal state. God is in part seen in the creatures: Rom. 1:20, 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.' Everything that hath passed his hand discovereth somewhat of the author and maker of it. But as imperfectly as God is discovered there, we cannot behold him without wonder and reverence, if we use never so little of an attentive mind; those strictures of God that are seen in man's body—Galen wondered when he saw a man's hand—the sun, moon, and stars; yea, a gnat, yea, a pile of grass: but these discoveries are not to be compared with the scriptures revealing the glory of God in the face of Christ: 2 Cor. 4:6, 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.' If we wonder at so much of God as we find in a gnat, shall not we wonder much more at so much of God as we find in his law, in his gospel, in the whole economy and frame of his gracious dispensations? Besides that, the scriptures help us to interpret the book of the creatures: they show forth more of God than all the creatures can do; the book of nature is an imperfect piece in regard of the book of scripture. You cannot look upon the

book of the creatures, but in every page and line of it you will find this truth presented to your eyes, that there is an infinite eternal power that made all things; this is enough to leave the world without excuse. But in the book of the word, you may see more of God, and the way how to enjoy him. In the 19th psalm David doth first admire the glory of God by the beauty of the heavens, then by the light of the word. By reason the heathens found out  $\pi\rho\acute{\omega}\tau\omicron\nu\ \alpha\acute{\iota}\tau\iota\omicron\nu\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \kappa\acute{\omicron}\sigma\mu\omicron\upsilon\ \kappa\alpha\acute{\iota}\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \tau\alpha\acute{\xi}\epsilon\omega\varsigma\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\eta\varsigma$ , a first mover and a first cause; but when and how the world was made they were left in uncertainties, which was first, the egg or the hen, the oak or the acorn: Heb. 11:3, 'Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things that do appear.' A child is taught more than they could find out by their profound researches. So concerning the fall of man, conscience will inform us of a distinction between good and evil; and heathens, by the light of nature, could speak of virtue and vice as moral perfection and a deordination; but nothing of sin and righteousness relating to a covenant; and whence this mischief began they knew not. They complained of nature as of a stepmother, observed an inclination to evil more than to good, that vices are learned without a teacher, that man is born into the world crying, beginneth his life with a punishment; but the first spring and rise of evil was a secret to them, but clearly discovered to us: Rom. 5:12, 'Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.' Man's restitution and redemption by Christ is wonderful indeed: 1 Tim. 3:16, 'And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.' This could not be found by man; how could they know the free purposes of God's grace unless God revealed them? This is the mystery of mysteries, which angels desire to pry into, 1 Peter 1:12. So excellent and ravishing a



mystery is this plot of salvation of lost sinners by Christ incarnate, that the very angels cannot enough exercise themselves in the contemplation of it. So union with Christ, and communion with him, a mystery that nature could never have thought of. God's keeping a familiar correspondence with his creatures, God's dwelling in us, our dwelling in God: 1 John 4:13, 'Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.' Words we should not dare to have used if God had not used them before us; it would have looked like blasphemy to speak so, if we had not the warrant of scripture. So the resurrection of the body, and life eternal, they are all wonders: 2 Tim. 1:10, 'But is now made manifest by the appearance of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light, through the gospel.' Heathens might dream of a life after death, but could never understand it distinctly. It is brought to light. Their wise men saw it, like the blind man who saw men walking like trees, or a spire at a distance, no clearness, no certainty: Lord, 'thy testimonies are wonderful.'

3. It is wonderful for purity and perfection. The decalogue in ten words compriseth the whole duty of man, and reacheth to the very soul and all the motions of the heart. All the precepts of morality are advanced to the highest perfection. Those fragments and sorry remainders of the light of nature, that have escaped out of the ruins of the fall, will show us the necessity of a good life. But the word of God calleth for a good heart, a regeneration as well as a reformation, not only abstaining from acts of sin, but lusts: 1 Peter 2:11, 'Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, that ye abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.' Not only the outward work, but the spirit, that is weighed in the balance of the sanctuary: Prov. 16:2, 'All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits.' It mightily establisheth faith, fear, and

love to God, as the essential graces. When we consider duty in the lump, we have no admiring thoughts; but when we look abroad into all the parts and branches of obedience whereunto the law diffuseth itself, then the holiness which the law requireth is admirable; then we see it no easy matter to serve this holy and jealous God; it is no easy matter to go to the bottom of this perfection.

4. It is wonderful for the harmony and consent of all the parts. All religion is of a piece, and one part doth not interfere with another, but conspireth to promote the great end of subjection of the creature to God. The law hath a mighty subserviency to the gospel, and the first covenant shutteth up the sinner immediately under the curse, that mercy may open the door to him. The gospel is first darkly revealed, and still it groweth as the light doth till noonday. At first an obscure intimation, 'The seed of the woman;' to Abraham, 'In thy seed,' which after was repeated to Isaac to cut off Ishmael; then to Jacob, to cut off Esau; yet not what tribe: Gen. 49:10, 'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the lawgiver from between his feet, till Shiloh come;' yet not what family of Judah; to David: 2 Sam. 7:13, 'I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever;' then Isa. 7:14, 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and call his name Immanuel;' then John the Baptist, John 1:29, 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,' points with a finger to Christ. Thus while in short the scriptures do so set forth the mercy of God as that the duty of the creature is not abolished, so offers grace as not to exclude our care and use of means; justification and sanctification promote one another, all is ordered with good advice: 2 Sam. 23:5, 'Although my house be not so with God, he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.' Thus the wonderful harmony, order, and consent of all the parts with respect to the great end, which was the glorifying of God and the subjection of the creature, demonstrates the wonderfulness of God's

testimonies, the glorifying of God's grace and mercy in those that are saved, and his justice in those that are damned. With respect to this, God made man upright, furnished with abilities to do his will; but mutable, and, in case of a fall, to begin with a new covenant. He will have his mercy honoured without prejudice to his justice; the comfort of the creature established, so as duty not abolished; not all of commands, nor all of promises, but these interwoven, that they may serve one another. A promise at the back of a command, to make it effectual; command besides a promise, to cause humbling; neither looseness nor rigour. If the covenant had been left to our ordering, it had been a confused business. Now it is wonderfully suited; God keepeth up his dominion and sovereignty, notwithstanding his grace and condescension; justice hath full satisfaction, yet grace glorified.

5. Wonderful for the power of it. There is a mighty power that goeth along with the word of God, and astonisheth the hearts of those that consider it and feel it: 1 Thes. 1:5, 'Our gospel came to you not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost.' By this power it doth not only fill the head with notions, but pierceth the heart, alarms the conscience, awakens the affections: Heb. 4:12, 'The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.' This power was seen in the wonderful success of that doctrine and religion which the scriptures do establish. It hath diffused and spread itself like leaven in the mass and lump, throughout all parts of the known world, within the space of thirty or forty years or thereabouts. *Hesterni sumus, saith Tertullian, et tamen omnia vestra implevimus, urbes, insulas, castella, municipia, conciliabula, castra, tribus, decurias, palatium, senatum, forum; sola vobis relinquimus templa*—We are but of yesterday, and yet how are we increased!

Christians are found in all places, cities, villages, isles, castles, free towns, councils, armies, senate, markets; everywhere but in the idol temples. Such a wonderful increase and success was there in a short time! The apostle: Col. 1:6, 'The word of the truth of the gospel is come unto you, as it doth to all the world, and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you.' The doctrine itself is contrary to nature; it doth not court the senses, nor woo the flesh; it offereth no splendour of life, nor pleasures, nor profits; but biddeth deny all these things, and expect persecution: Mat. 16:24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.' It only telleth us of spiritual comforts, and the recompenses of another world. Mahomet allures his followers with fair promises of security and carnal pleasure; there wind and tide went one way. Man is credulous of what he desireth; but Christ telleth us of denying ourselves, taking up the cross, cutting off right hand, and plucking out right eye, rowing against the stream of flesh and blood, bearing out sail against all the blasts and furious winds without: here is nothing lovely to a carnal eye. This was the doctrine. It taught the proud world humility; the uncharitable world love of their enemies; the unchaste world that a glance is adultery: Mat. 5:25, 'Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart;' the revengeful world to turn the other cheek to the smiter; the covetous man to be liberal, not to cark and take thought for worldly things, but to lay up treasures in heaven; the dissolute world to walk circumspectly in all godliness and honesty. The persons and instruments that were to manage the doctrine were in the world's eye contemptible: a few fishermen, destitute of all worldly props and aids; of no power, wealth, secular wisdom, authority, and other such advantages as are apt to beget a repute in the world; yet they preached, and converted many nations, though they had no public interest, were not backed with the power of princes, as superstitions are wont to prevail by their countenance and example: 'Every one

seeketh the ruler's face;' but the gospel had gotten firm footing in the world long ere there was a prince to countenance it; there were many to persecute it, none to profess it. As the instruments were poor, so the persons that received their message: James 2:5, 'Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him?' 1 Cor. 1:26, 'Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.' When destitute of worldly succours and supports, it held up head. *Ne videretur authoritate traxisse aliquos, et veritatis ratione, non pompæ gratia prævaleret,* saith Ambrose. It was much it should hold up head; yea, the powers of the world against it, bonds and sufferings and deaths did abide for them everywhere that professed this way. Horrible tortures; never did war, pestilence, and famine sweep away so many as the first persecutions; poor Christians were murdered and butchered everywhere; yet still they multiplied, as the Israelites did in Egypt, under oppression; or as a tree lopped sends forth more sprouts. As without worldly interests; they had not such gifts of art, eloquence, and policy as the world with whom they had to deal; all was carried on in a plain way, without pomp of words. Paul was learned, but he laid aside his ornaments, lest the cross of Christ should be of none effect: 1 Cor. 2:4, 5, 'And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.' They were to deal with men of excellent parts and learning, some of which received the gospel. This plain doctrine was set afoot in that part of the world where arts and civil discipline most flourished at that time, and were in their ἀκμῆ. Thus as Aaron's rod devoured the magicians' serpents, so was the gospel too hard for the wisdom of the world: it prevailed not by force of arms and the power of the long sword, as all dotages do, and superstitions are planted; but 'overcame by the

blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death,' Rev. 12:11. Christ's sword is in his mouth: Ps. 8:2, 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.' This way seemed to the world a novel way; they were leavened with prejudices, and bred up by long custom, which is a second nature, in the worship of idols: 1 Peter 1:18, 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers.' Men keep to the religion of their ancestors with much reverence. Christ did not seize upon the world as a waste is seized upon for the next owner. The ark was to be set up in the temple that was already occupied and possessed by Dagon. Before Christ could be seated in the government of the nations, first Satan was to be dispossessed, and superstitions received by a long tradition and prescription of time were to be removed, the wolf hunted out. Thus the power great.

But this is past and gone. There is a wonderful power that goes along with the word.

[1.] A power to humble and terrify those that scoffed at the miracles: Acts 2:37, 'When they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?' The word can do that which a miracle cannot; make the stoutest hearts relent and yield. One instance more: Acts 24:25, 'And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.' Mark the disadvantage; the prisoner maketh the judge tremble, the man none of the tenderest, a pagan, and to boot an obdurate sinner; but Paul by his power caused these. Terrors of conscience, which are raised by the word, all wicked men feel not, but soon may; they fear them that feel them not: John

3:20, 'For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.' Conviction in one of these spiritual agonies exceeds all natural passions; fears of the wrath of God scorch more, and breed more restlessness and disquietness to the soul, their thoughts become a burden to them: 'He is convinced of all, and judg'd of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest, and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth,' 1 Cor. 14:24, 25. His sins revived, the poor creature lieth grovelling.

[2.] There is a converting and transforming power in the word of God: Rom. 1:16, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth;' 1 Thes. 1:9, 'For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God;' from a false to a true, a bad to a better. Men brought up in a false religion, there is much ado to take them off: 'Have any nations changed their gods?' Though their worship be never so vain and foolish, yet this power the word hath, even over those that have been rooted and habituated in superstitious customs. The gods they had prayed to in their adversities, praised in their prosperity, deprecated their anger when any judgment upon them, magnified their goodness when any good received, built them temples, offered them gifts; must they break those images, destroy those temples, deny those gods? How dear idols are, Rachel's stealing away her father's images clearly showeth, Gen. 31:34. She was one of them that built God's Israel, yet she hath a hankering after her father's idols. No humours so obstinate and stiff as those that are found in religious customs. They accused Stephen for changing the customs Moses delivered, Acts 6:14; and Paul, that he taught customs which were not lawful for Romans to observe, Acts 16:21. Certainly it is a very hard thing to bring men out of an old

religion into a new one. Again, the converting of man from a state of nature to a state of grace, so that they are, as it were, born again: James 1:18, 'Of his own will begat he us, with the word of truth; that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creation.' It is a hard matter to change natures, to turn a lion into a lamb: Isa. 11:6, 'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.' Yet this will the gospel do, make him that resembleth the devil in his contempt of God, envy, revenge, to be like Christ; I say the gospel doth it: 2 Cor. 3:18, 'But we all with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' To bring us to love what we naturally hate, and to hate what we naturally love; that the heart should be turned from all creatures, himself and all, to God; that they should be induced to turn from the creature to God, to seek out happiness in him; from self to Christ, from sin to holiness; that God's desires should be our desires, his will our will, his delights our delights; the natural heart is averse from this: Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' That the hearts, spirits, dispositions of men should be turned upside down: 1 Cor. 6:9–11, 'Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God;' Isa. 55:13, 'Instead of the thorns shall come up the fig-tree; and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree.' A mighty change wrought, to be changed not only in their lives, but natures.



[3.] In comforting poor distressed souls. Their sore runneth upon them, and their soul refuseth comfort, when they have all things in the world; but yet as there are no sorrows like wounds of conscience for degree, so no comforts: groans unutterable, so joys unutterable: nothing left that will comfort; it is as the whole of their joy. The reviving of poor wounded spirits is one of the greatest wonders in the world. Creatures can do nothing, reason and human discourse can do nothing; it proceedeth from the apprehension of God's wrath provoked by sin: Job 33:23–25, 'If there be an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness, then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom: his flesh shall be fresher than a child's; he shall return to the days of his youth.' Nothing but the covenant of his peace will still such a soul; a scripture wound will only be cured by scripture plasters. He that puts the soul on the racks of conscience can only release us: 'I create the fruits of the lips to be peace;' Jer. 6:16. 'Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls;' Mat. 11:28, 29, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'

[4.] The confirming and strengthening power of the word, that we may despise the world, encounter all difficulties and discouragements, and to be cheerful as the martyrs were in the midst of flames, all the oppositions of Satan: 1 John 2:14, 'I have written unto you young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one;' Acts 20:32, 'And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified.' In the word of his grace God hath

assured us of the great privileges of Christianity, support and defence here, and glory hereafter; and that is a mighty strengthening to the soul, and maketh a Christian also glorious and becoming all those hopes and promises that are given him.

## SERMON CXLII

### **Thy testimonies are wonderful; therefore doth my soul keep them.—VER. 129**

USE 1. Reproof to several sorts.

1. Of those proud carnalists that scorn the simplicity of the word. Many wit themselves into hell by lifting up the pride of reason against the word of God; think all respect to the word to be fond credulity. To them the gospel seemeth a base and a mean doctrine, whereas it is indeed wonderful. They never studied it, and therefore think nothing but plain points in it, have no spiritual eyes, and are looking On what is uppermost. There is nothing vulgar. The angels prize what they contemn: Eph. 3:10, 'To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.' They despise the word, as if it were too low a discipline for their wit and parts, scoff at that as mean which a gracious heart findeth to be mystery; they see none of this sublimity that we speak of; this pearl of price seemeth to them but as a common stone. This is pride not to be endured, for the foolishness of man to contemn the wisdom of God. The excellency of scripture can never be sufficiently understood; they never pierced the depths of scripture, else they would find it sublime and subtle enough; but they are ignorant of what they seem to understand so well: 1 Cor. 8:2,

'If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.'

2. Others that give up themselves to the itch of curiosity must have mysteries made more mystical, and therefore fly from the letter of the scriptures to ungrounded subtleties and spiritualities, as if all the written word were an allegory: Rev. 2:24, 'But to you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan.' Men must have βάθη, but βάθη τοῦ Σατανᾶ, are loath to be tethered, and tied up to a few common truths. The bait to our first parents was the fruit of the tree, it is good for knowledge: Gen. 3:5, 6, 'God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat.' If any be of such a rigid temper and constitution as not to be moved with the pleasures of the senses, Satan draweth them to nice and ungrounded speculations; they would be wise above the rate which God hath allowed, run into strange and uncouth notions; and so many, otherwise of a sober life, have an unsound judgment.

3. Those that would fathom these mysteries by the line and plummet of their own reason, believe God's word, and the things contained in it, no further than they can see natural reason for it, these are not disciples of the doctrine of Christ, but judges, and set a prince at the subject's bar; the scantling of their own private senses and reason is made the standard for the highest mysteries to be measured by. They come to judge the word rather than to be judged by it. Mysteries are to be admired, not curiously searched and discussed by mere human reason. Every light must keep its place; sense, reason, faith, light of glory. If sense be made the judge of reason, there is wrong judgment.

Some things we apprehend by reason that cannot be known by sense, as that the sun is bigger than the earth. So faith corrects reason. Shall we doubt of that to be true which droppeth from God's own mouth, because it exceedeth our own understanding?

4. Those that prostitute their wonder to every paltry, carnal vanity. Oh, what trifles are these to the wonders of God's law! If we see a fair building, we cry out, Oh wonderful! as the disciples: Mark 13:1, 'Master, see what manner of stones, and what buildings are these.' Oh! there are God's testimonies; a more noble nature, the person of Christ: Col. 2:9, 'In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.' Oh, wonderful! at an heap of money: what are these to the unsearchable riches of grace? Rare plot! μέγα μυστήριον: all in and about Christ is rare; his name is Wonderful. He that found out the causes of things by philosophy could say, Nihil admirari; but he that hath the most knowledge of religion as to divine things may say, Omnia admirari—the transcendent goodness of God in the pardon of sins, riches of everlasting glory, purity of divine commands; but as to the world, Nil admirari. You know better things in God's testimonies.

5. Those that find more favour and more matter to wonder at in other books, in Plato, in Aristotle, or heathen writers, they have a savour there, a wonder there; but are not affected with those mysteries and those notions which are in the gospel. They like those books where they find flowers of rhetoric, chemical experiments, philosophical notions, maxims of policy, but they slight the word.

6. Those that admire more what man puts into an ordinance than the word of God. The further off anything is from the majesty of the scriptures, the more it taketh with unregenerate men, taken with toys and baubles of delight more than the substantial goodness of Christianity. We are apt to say of the labour of man, excellences of

man, admirable! but we little regard the truths of God; as in a field of corn, prize the poppies and well-coloured weeds, but slight and overlook the more valuable corn.

Use 2. Instruction. To instruct us how to entertain the word of God. We never entertain it rightly till we entertain it with wonder.

Considerations.

1. We have not a true sight and sense of the word if we admire it not. There is such transcendent love, admirable depths of wisdom, unsearchable treasures of happiness, raised strains of purity, a harmonious coincidence of all parts. What would we admire but that which is great and excellent? Why are not we then transported and ravished with those wonderful felicities, as the favour of and fellowship with God, everlasting enjoyment? Nothing is of such weight and importance as this is; all is nothing to this: Phil. 3:8, 'Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.' Would we admire what is rare and strange? As the object of wonder is *inauditum et insperatum*, it could not enter into the heart of man to conceive what God hath done for us in Christ; unheard of, unlooked for: 2 Sam. 7:19, 'And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come; and is this the manner of man, O Lord God?' If we wonder at what is wise and deep, the terms upon which salvation is dispensed and propagated are with excellent wisdom: 1 Cor. 2:2, 'We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world, to our glory.' These are mysteries that lie out of the road of vulgar understandings.

2. Upon every new looking, it argueth some distemper unless we wonder. Either carelessness of soul-necessities, or stupidity, and

inattentiveness, or else carnal savour, prevailing too much.

3. It is a great help to practice. The more the word is admired, the more reverence it striketh into the conscience; the more it is submitted unto, the more should we frame our practice. In the text, 'Therefore doth my soul keep them.' The word must be kept; not only affected with it, but our esteem must last, and we must ever be tender of doing anything contrary to it. It must be kept by the soul; there is the directive and commanding power; it must be preserved or kept there, not confined there. If not kept there, it will not be kept elsewhere. There understanding is clear, conscience awful, heart ready. Human authority reacheth no further than to bind men to conform to order in the course of their practice; but divine authority bringeth under the heart and thoughts to the obedience of Christ, 2 Cor. 10:5. It bindeth the conscience to approve of God's commanded will, to choose it with affection, to embrace it with the whole man, to follow on with strength and constant endeavours. Therefore wonderful, partly because a renewed esteem is the beginning of a pure and entire subjection to it. Why did any give up themselves to the discipline of it? Plato and Zeno's doctrine was admired. So to God; reverence is the mother of obedience. If we have not a slight esteem of the word, we shall look more after keeping of it. And partly because wonderfulness of promises evidenceth them to be of God; it commendeth itself to the consciences of men.

Means.

1. A spiritual gust to relish knowledge and spiritual things. A brutish soul admires the sweetness of carnal things; the sober part of the world, that prize intellectual food, the perfections of the mind, they have a taste and relish for those things: Ps. 119:103, 'How sweet is

thy word to my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth.' A sensual heart is not affected with these things.

2. A diligent search: Eph. 3:9, 'And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God.' The more diligently we search into these things, the more we admire them. A superficial view satisfieth and contenteth sooner than a deep search. Herein they differ from other things, for the more they are searched into, the less they are admired; imperfections which formerly lay hid then come in view.

3. A thorough insight or spiritual illumination: Ps. 119:18, 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law;' and ver. 27, 'Make me to understand the way of thy precepts; so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.' The testimonies of God have more in recess than in open view.

4. Experience; if we have felt the wonderful power, majesty, and authority of the word: John 8:32, 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' Where there is no such effect they have no experience.

5. Show forth the wonderfulness of God's testimonies by the raisedness of your conversations. They disparage the word that live at a mean rate: 2 Tim. 3:5, 'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power;' 1 Peter 4:14, 'If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.'

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## SERMON CXLIII

### The entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple.—

#### VER. 130

IN the former verse, David had commended the word from the wonderfulness and mysteriousness thereof; here from its clearness and perspicuity, 'Thy testimonies are wonderful;' yet they give light, 'The entrance giveth light to the simple.' The one property doth not hinder the other, upon a twofold account:—

1. Because the truths revealed in scripture are of two sorts: some are plain doctrines, fit for the entertainment of novices, and may be called the porch and entrance; others are deep mysteries, to exercise the wits of the strongest. In the waters of the sanctuary in some places the elephant may swim, in others the lamb may wade. The penmen of the scripture acknowledged themselves to be debtors to wise and foolish, learned and unlearned: Rom. 1:14, 'I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise.' And accordingly were made use of to discover truths of all sorts. There are *δυσνόητά τινα*, not all things, nor the most material, but some things hard to be understood, 2 Peter 3:16. God hath expressed his mind in some points so, that the sharpest-sighted will not at first glance easily take up the meaning of it. Other things are plain and easy and obvious, so that the very entrance or first sight of them giveth understanding.

2. From the manner; because though there are mysteries, and things naturally unknown to us, yet they are not obscurely delivered, so as that we should despair to understand them; but in a plain and



familiar style, depths of mystery in plainness of words. Therefore the simplest who desire to know so much as may comfort and save their souls, ought not to be hindered and discouraged in the study of the scriptures. The sum is: some things are open and clear, other things dark and mysterious; but though hard to be understood, yet not impossible to be understood; most things plain, none impossible: 'The entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple.' In these words—

1. What, or the benefit we have by the scriptures, set forth by two words, the one metaphorical, giveth light; the other literal, it giveth understanding. That is it which is meant by light.
2. How or whence we have this light, from the entrance of the word.
3. To whom, to the simple.

The first thing is explained in the text; it giveth light, that is, it giveth understanding. Two questions then remain by way of explication:—

1. What is meant by 'the entrance of thy word'? Some render it ostium, the door, as Jerome; the Septuagint, δῆλωσις; the vulgar, the declaration; we, the entrance. The word petack signifieth door, gate, or opening. The expression giveth us occasion—

[1.] To distinguish of truth in scripture. There is ostium and penetrale, the porch of knowledge and the secret chambers of it. The porch I should take for the first vital essential necessary truths that concern faith and practice: those are obvious to every one that looketh into the scriptures. The inner chambers are those more abstruse points, that do not so absolutely concern the life of grace, but yet conduce ad plenitudinem scientiæ, serve for the increase of knowledge. Those that are in the porch, and have not as yet pierced

into the depths of scripture, may yet have so much light as to direct them into solid piety.

[2.] Every door hath a key belonging to it, so hath this a key to open it, which Christ hath in his keeping: Rev. 3:7, 'He hath the key of David, which openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.' The officers of the church are in part intrusted with it for the good of the church. Christ saith, Luke 11:52, 'The lawyers had taken away the key of knowledge, and entered not into the kingdom of God themselves, and them that were entering in they hindered.' Such unfaithful ones hath every age almost afforded; that shut the door of knowledge against the people. Papists, that lock up the scriptures in an unknown tongue, are grossly guilty of it. Others that hinder plain and powerful preaching, cannot excuse themselves from being accessory to this guilt; yea, those that obscure the plain word of God by philosophy, traditions of men, or careless handling: Tertullian complained long ago of those, *qui Platonium et Aristotelium Christianismum procidunt Christianis*.

[3.] By this door opened there is entrance, and so cometh in our word. This entrance may be understood actively or passively; when the word entereth into us, or we enter into it.

(1.) Actively, when the word entereth upon a man's heart, and maketh a sanctified impression there; as the expression is, Prov. 2:10, 'When wisdom entereth into thy heart, and knowledge is pleasant to thy soul.' This entrance of the word bringeth light with it. The first creature God made was light, so in the new creature; therefore it concerns us to know what manner of entrance the word had upon us: 1 Thes. 1:9, 'For they themselves know of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God.'

(2.) Passively, when men do first enter upon the study of the word. It may be read 'the entrance into thy word,' as well as 'of thy word.' When once acquainted with it, and the first rudiments of knowledge, we should soon discern the Lord's mind in the necessary truths that concern faith and practice.

2. The other question is, what is meant by the simple? The word is sometimes used in a good sense, sometimes in a bad.

[1.] In a good sense. (1.) For the sincere and plain-hearted: Ps. 116:6, 'The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me;' 2 Cor. 1:12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-wards.' (2.) For those that do not oppose the presumption of carnal wisdom to the pure light of the word: so we must be all simple, or fools, that we may be wise: 1 Cor. 3:18, 'If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise;' that is, in simplicity of heart submitting to God's conduct, and believing what he hath revealed. The Septuagint in the text, φωτίζει καὶ συνετιζει νηπίους, it enlighteneth and giveth understanding to the babes; and so they often translate this word, babes or little ones: thence Christ's saying, Mat. 11:25, 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.' Not to worldly wise, but babes in comparison; not to conceitedly wise, but those that are sensible of their own ignorance.

[2.] In a bad sense, for the ignorant. (1.) In the general, every man is naturally dull and ignorant in divine things: Job 11:12, 'Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt;' for

grossness as well as untamedness. So every man is simple. (2.) Those that are naturally weak of understanding, or of mean capacity: Prov. 1:4, 'To give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion;' Prov. 8:5, 'O ye simple, understand wisdom, and ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart.' In all these senses may the text be made good. I take the last chiefly intended.

Observations.

1. Observe somewhat from that word 'the entrance.'

Doct. 1. That in getting knowledge there is a porch and entrance that we must pass through before we can attain to deeper matters.

As in practice there is a gate and a way: Mat. 7:14, 'Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth to life.' An entrance and a progress. An entrance by conversion to God, and a progress in a course of holy walking. So in knowledge there are τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς ἀρχῆς τῶν λογίων τοῦ Θεοῦ, 'the first principles of the oracles of God;' or some elements and afterwards deeper mysteries, milk for babes as well as meat for stronger men: Heb. 5:12–14, 'For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe: but strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.' There is an order in bringing men to knowledge.

[1.] There is something obvious and lies uppermost in all truths, that is soon understood, and this we put into catechisms. We must teach as able to bear: Mark 4:33, 'And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.' Indeed, afterwards

we come to dig into the mines of knowledge, and to dive deeper, as choice metals do not lie on the surface, but in the bowels; therefore we should not content ourselves with a superficial search, but dig as for treasure in a mine: Prov. 2:4, 'If thou diggest for her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures.' So Paul, 1 Cor. 3:1, 2, 'And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ: I have fed you with milk, and not with strong meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.' By milk be meant the plain handling of the doctrines of Christian religion, accounting to the capacity of those that are weak in knowledge and by meat, the more exact and curious handling those points. Our weakness enforceth that we begin with the one, but we must go on to the other, for several reasons. Partly because we are to grow in knowledge as well as other graces: 2 Peter 1:5. 'Give all diligence to add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge.' Besides that knowledge that maketh way for faith and virtue, there is a knowledge to be added to it, a great skill in divine things. Partly because those obvious truths will be better improved and retrained when we look more into them: after notions do explain and ground the former. First we receive the truth, and after we are readed and grounded in it: Col. 1:23. 'If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.' A half light makes us very unsettled in our course; but when we grow judicious, have a faller and clearer apprehension of truths, we are the more continued against the error of the wicked; whereas otherwise light chief is carried about with every wind. Partly because the more we understand a truth, the more dominion in hath ever our faith and practice; for God beginneth with the understanding, and grace is multiplied by knowledge: 2 Peter 1:2, 'Grace and peace be multiplied unto you, through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.' A truth simply understood hath not such operation and force as when in is soundly and thoroughly understood. Love aboundeth

with judgment: Phil. 1:9, 'And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more, in knowledge and in all judgment.'

[2.] There are first principles and fundamental doctrines that must be first taught in a plain and easy way. I say, some things are initial and fundamental, others additional and prespective; we must regard both—the one in our entrance, the other in our growth. The one are called the first principles of the oracles of God, Heb. 5:12, &c., purely because they are first in order and first to be taught and learned; partly because they are chief and fundamental truths of the gospel, upon which the rest depend, most conducing to salvation: the foundation laid well, the building will stand the stronger. They are reckoned up, Heb. 6:1, 2. 'Therefore, having the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of the faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptism, and of having on of hands and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment'. In the general he calls them the principles of the doctrine of Christ. The doctrine of Christ is the sum of religion; he that hath learned it well hath learned all. In particular, repentance from dead works is made the first, or that a sinned creature must turn to God by Christ leave he can be happy. The next is faith towards God, believing the promises and privileges of the gospel, and depending on him till that be accomplished. Indeed, in these two is the sum of religion sometimes comprised: Acts 20:21, 'Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks reponse towards God, and faith towards and Lord Jesus Christ'. So Acts 5:31, 'Him hath God raised up to be a prince and a saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins.' Doctrine of baptism is the initiating ordinance, what it signifieth, to what it obligeth. Laying on of hands, the way of Christ's officers entering the church. Resurrection and last judgment bindeth all. Again, because the prime truths are few and clear, ignorant and

unlearned people may know them; they are milk, babes and ignorants may swallow them, as most easy of digestion, God's end in the scripture being to guide his people to true happiness. Those truths that are necessary to this end are few and clear, and plainly set down, that he that runneth may read them. Though we reach not other points, yet if we get but to this door, there is a great deal of profit.

[3.] They which do not first learn these, cannot profit much. Some confused knowledge they may acquire, but distinct, clear, and orderly understanding they never grow unto. When men run before they can go, they often get a knock. They that were never well grounded are always mutable; therefore before we are brought into the chambers of knowledge, we must stay in the porch, begin with most necessary things, which are most clear and plain, and thereby we are made capable of higher mysteries.

2. Though all Christians must come to this pitch, to know what is necessary to salvation, yet we must not stay here, nor always stay in the porch, nor always keep to our milk, nor be always infants in understanding: 1 Cor. 14:20, 'Brethren, be not children in understanding.' Other things must be regarded, or why hath God revealed them? No part of scripture is expressed in vain, or at random, but all by divine direction; though the first points are most necessary, yet the rest are not superfluous, but have their use: 2 Tim. 3:16, 'All scripture is given by inspiration, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;' one part of scripture as well as the other, and maketh much for the increase of spiritual knowledge, comfort, and godliness. One part is milk, another stronger meat; but all is food for the soul. The grown are more ready to every good work, more strong in the resistance of sin, more steadfast in the truth; therefore we should improve our

knowledge. If a man layeth the foundation, and doth not carry on the building, he loseth his cost; therefore let us go on to perfection.

Use 1. Let us bless God for this door and porch, that the scriptures are so plain and clear in all things necessary to salvation. Many complain of the difficulty and obscurity of religion, and the many controversies that are about it, and they know not what to choose, nor where to find the truth, till the world be more of a mind. It is true, in some things there is difficulty, but not in the most necessary things. *Pascimur apertis, exercemur obscuris; ibi fames pellitur, hic fastidium.* God has made his people's way clear and sure in necessities, for which we have cause to bless his name, for exercising our diligence and dependence. Something is difficult: if those that complain of this difficulty would enter into the porch that standeth open, other things would soon be understood. Whatever differences there are in Christendom, all agree that there is one God, Jesus Christ his only Son, who died for the world, and accordingly must be owned by his people; that a man must be converted to God, and become a new creature, and walk holily, or else shall never see God; all are agreed in this. Prepare thy heart for entertaining the light and power of these truths, and in due time God will show thee other things. In the meantime bless God that whatever is necessary is plain to them that are docile and heedful, and willing to do the will of God. As in the world, the most necessary things are at hand, the less necessary are hidden in the bowels of the earth; so in scripture, necessities are facile and easy.

Use 2. Let us use this method in learning, and teaching of others. In learning ourselves, first, be sure to get a clear understanding of, and firm assent unto, the main plain truths of scripture; that there is one God: Heb. 11:6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is;' that Jesus Christ is the Son of God: John 17:3, 'This is life eternal, that



they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' It is a corner truth, that enliveneth all religion: Mat. 16:16, 'Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God;' then, 'Upon this rock will I build my church;' John 6:69, 'We believe and are sure that thou art Christ, the Son of the living God.' This is the great enlivening truth, that hath influence both on faith and obedience. We must believe that he is able to bring us to God, John 14:6, Heb. 7:25, and must be obeyed, Heb. 5:9; that every man needeth this Christ to bring him to God, Acts 4:12. There is a necessity of his merit, that God may be propitious; of his Spirit, as the foundation of a new life, that we may be reconciled to God; that we should live holily, because there is a day of account when every one shall receive according to his works. We should bestow more cost upon the main truths, to get a clear distinct knowledge of them; there must be a removing of rubbish, and digging, to lay the foundation of the knowledge of the principles of the doctrine of Christ, before there can be any safe building or going on unto perfection, Heb. 6., and firm assent to them; for he is the best Christian that doth most clearly understand and firmly believe these things, not the opinionist, the disputer, he that best promotes the interest of his party or side, which are the distempers now afoot in Christendom. Those truths well accepted would so purify the heart as we should sooner discern God's interest in other things, and be able to find out that. So for teaching our children, God reckons on it from his people: Gen. 18:19, 'For I know Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment;' Deut. 6:6, 7, 'And these words that I command thee this day shall be in thy heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.' Train them up in wholesome truths, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, Eph. 6:4; how to carry themselves

towards God in matters of religion; how towards men, in righteousness, civility, and good manners; chiefly that they may be instructed in the knowledge of Christ, and salvation by him.

Use 3. Let the entertainment we have upon our first entrance into the study of religion encourage us to follow on to know the Lord, that we may see more into his mind and counsel concerning us. When we are first serious, we have notable experience of light and comfort and power; this is a bribe to draw us on further; more light, for it is a growing thing: Prov. 4:18, 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more to the perfect day;' more taste, 1 Peter 2:3, 4, 'If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious, to whom coming as to a living stone,' &c. It should sharpen and put an edge upon our desires; more power: James 1:18, 19, 'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creation; wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.' You saw the entrance, and your first acquaintance with the word succeeded well.

Doct. 2. By the word of God we get light, or our understandings are enlightened: Prov. 6:23, 'For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.'

1. Light is a great benefit. This is the perfection of the rational nature, the benefit that we have above the beasts: 'He teacheth us more than the beasts of the field.' They are guided by instinct, ruled by a rod of iron; we have reason, and in it more resemble God, who is light, and in him is no darkness at all, 1 John 1:5; we come nearest to our happiness in heaven; it is called 'The inheritance of the saints in light,' Col. 1:12. Our knowledge is perfected, and the vision of God is our happiness: 1 Cor. 13:12, 'For now we see through a glass darkly,

then face to face; now I know in part, then I shall know even as also I am known.'

## 2. This light hath excellent properties.

[1.] It is lux manifestans; it manifesteth itself and all things else. How do I see the sun but by the sun, by its own light? How do I know the scripture to be the word of God, but by the light that shineth in it, commending itself to my conscience? So it manifests all things else. By this light a man may see everything in its own colours; it layeth open all the frauds and impostures of Satan, the vanity of worldly things, the deceits of the heart, the odiousness of sin: Eph. 5:13, 'All things that be reprov'd are made manifest by light, for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.' It sets out the odiousness of sin as a breach of God's most holy law, enmity against the great God, the procurer of his eternal wrath. Nothing manifests things as this light doth.

[2.] It is lux dirigens, a directing light, that we may see our way and work. As the sun lighteth man to his labour, so doth this direct us in all conditions: Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.' It directs us how to manage ourselves in all conditions, in prosperity, adversity; in all affairs, paths, steps; in all the particular actions of our life; it filleth us with spiritual prudence; the wayfaring, the fool, the man of parts that is a stranger, the man of mean parts, all may meet with plain and clear directions hence to guide them in the way to heaven.

[3.] It is lux vivificans, a quickening light, lux est vehiculum influentiarum: John 8:12, 'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life;' Eph. 5:14, 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' That light was the life of men, so is

this spiritual life; it not only discovereth the object, but helpeth the faculty, filleth the soul with life and strength.

[4.] It is *lux exhilarans*, a comforting, refreshing, cheering light: Eccles. 11:7, 'Light is sweet, and it is a comfortable thing to behold the sun.' It is so in two respects:—

(1.) It presents us with excellent grounds of comfort, not only against afflictions, but against distress of conscience, which is the greatest trouble that can befall the creature, such as the sense of God's love in Christ; so it rejoiceth the soul: Ps. 19:8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandments of the Lord are pure, enlightening the eyes.' It doth good to the heart. Others tickle the senses, but are not affliction-proof, stead us not when God rebuketh us for sin. The light of God's countenance is displayed in the word: Ps. 4:6, 7, 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased.'

(2.) Because it is a soul-satisfying light, as light easeth of trouble and restlessness of mind, which we always lie under till we find a safe way of salvation, which we never do till we give up ourselves to the conduct of the word: Jer. 6:16, 'Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your souls.' There we find enough to satisfy conscience, though, it may be, not to satisfy curiosity, which is *libido intellectus*—thirst of a sober man and thirst of a drunkard, the one satisfied, the other mortified.

Use 1. Information.

1. That without the word men lie in darkness, whatever learning they have, if they want the gospel. As the Ephesians, before it came to them, though given to curious arts, the apostle telleth them they 'were sometimes in darkness,' Eph. 5:8. The wisest heathens could only grope and feel about for happiness. If they neglect the light, though it be among them, it is not excusable: John 1:5, 'And the light shineth in darkness, but the darkness comprehendeth it not.' But if they refuse the light, and this carelessness groweth obstinate, their condition is the worse: John 3:19, 'This is the condemnation, that light is come, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.'

2. If we get not understanding of the mysteries of salvation, we may blame ourselves: 2 Cor. 4:3, 4, 'But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.' If thou miss the way to heaven, accuse thine own blindness; thou canst not accuse the gospel, plead its darkness. The true cause of their non-proficiency is unbelief, they believe not; the superadded cause is spiritual blindness.

Use 2. Exhortation to look after this light, without which we shall be in the dark as to comfort: Isa. 50:10, 'Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and seeth no light?' Either under actual horrors or doubtfulness and uncertainty. Every wicked man is troubled, as the leaves of the trees of the wood are shaken with the wind. Now who would live in such a condition, to be at the mercy of the tempter? You are in the dark as to duty; our own reason, the counsels and examples of others, will mislead us; and we shall be unsteady, carried away with every deceit of sin, at least unsatisfied whether in God's

way or not: 1 John 2:11, 'He that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.' Oh! study the word.

But who have this light? He that heartily desireth knowledge: Prov. 2:3, 'If thou criest after wisdom, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;' he that diligently labours for it: Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' That propoundeth a right end, to be Christ's disciple, to do God's will: John 7:17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' That humbleth himself for his ignorance. John got open the book with weeping: Rev. 5:5. 'And one of the elders said unto me, Weep not; behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book.' Those Bereans were πρόθυμοι: Acts 17:11, 'They received the word with all readiness of mind,' εύπειθής; James 3:17, 'Easy to be entreated.' The opposite on the one side is slowness of heart: Luke 24:25, 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!' Or obstinacy on the other, a sluggish easiness, when light of belief, to believe anything without searching into the reason of it, or given up to a foolish credulity: Eph. 4:14, 'That ye be not as children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;' like a reed shaken with every wind. But he that is endued with this light is one that doth not depend on his own wit, but submits his reason to God: Prov. 3:5, 6, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' Well, then, this earnest desire in the next verse, 'I opened my mouth and panted: I longed for thy commandments.' This painful seeker will find out this treasure; this humble trusting soul will have it.

Doct. 3. That the scriptures are written so that plain and private men may get this light and spiritual understanding by them: Ps. 19:7, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.'

1. From the author, God, who is the fountain of light; and surely he was able and willing conveniently to express his mind to his creatures. Cannot God speak plainly? Deus et mentis, et linguæ, et vocis artifex, as Lactantius calleth him. He that is so wise, so loving of mankind, our supreme judge and king, would he hide this light under a bushel? Would he conceal his mind, and leave thee in the dark? Micah 6:8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'

2. For whom the scriptures were written; not for ministers or professed students. God speaketh to all sorts of men in the scripture, and therefore would have all understand them. He wrote the scripture that it might be read of all, young and old: Deut. 30:11, 12, 'This commandment which I command thee this day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off: it is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it,' &c. Rich and poor; the king was to read in it all the days of his life: Deut. 17:18, 19, 'It shall be that when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, he shall write him a copy in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life.' Every good man is to meditate in it: Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night;' Deut. 6:6, 7, 'These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and

when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.' The apostles wrote epistles to the whole church, spake to old men, youth, little children: 1 John 2:13, 'I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.' To kings, judges, men, women, husbands, wives, fathers, children, masters, servants, was it written for their use; nor must it be taken out of their hands, nor is it above their reach.

3. The end why it was written, to be a sure and infallible direction to guide us to eternal life, and make us wise unto salvation: 2 Tim. 3:15, 'And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.' Not only so, but it is our food and means of growth: 1 Peter 2:2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.' Every life hath food convenient for it. It is our weapon in temptation: Eph. 6:17, 'And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.' To be read by all in this spiritual warfare they are all engaged in. It is God's testament, therefore should be viewed by his children; the epistle of the creator to his creatures, therefore to be read by them to whom it is sent. God's letter must not be intercepted upon all these reasons. There is enough to make wise the simple in scriptures.

But is there nothing difficult in scriptures? Ans. Yes, to subdue the pride of man's wit, to quicken us to wait and depend upon him for knowledge, to prevent contempt, to exercise our industry and diligence, and to fasten truths on our minds. There is some difficulty, but not such difficulty as that the people neither can nor ought to read them with profit, which is the dispute between us and papists. There is no difficulty but what is conquerable by that grace that God



ordinarily dispenseth, and the means of explaining or applying; not a whole loaf, but a dimensum, his share; for it distributes to every man his portion.

Use 1. For the confutation of them that forbid the simple use of the word. The papists say, God's word is dark and hard to be understood; therefore they lock it up from the people in an unknown tongue, as if none could profit by it but the learned sort. Yea, many among us are ready to say, What should simple men do with scripture? and think that all the confusions and troubles of the world come from giving people this liberty. Ans. Though in the word there are mysteries to exercise the greatest wits, yet there are plain truths to edify the simple. This text is a notable proof against them. It is good to have a text against every error of theirs. They are injurious to God; as if he had revealed his mind so darkly, or his word, that it were so doubtful and harmful that there were danger in reading it: injurious to the scriptures, while they tax them with obscurity; injurious to the people of God, while they despise those whom the Lord inviteth with their pharisaical pride: John 7:49, 'But this people who know not the law are cursed;' hinder them of their comfort; the simple have souls to save, therefore have need to see with their own eyes, to consider God's charter. They pretend they do it in mercy to the people, lest by their mistakes they should ruin themselves, and introduce confusion into the world. They should as well say all must be starved, and deny meat and drink because some surfeit. But certainly they do it for their own interest; they have false wares to vend, and to keep the people from discovering the errors they impose upon them, they would conceal the scriptures from them. Ignorance is a friend to the devil's kingdom. The blind go as they are led. They are afraid of the scriptures as a thief of a candle or the light which would discover his villany and hinder his design, John 3:20.

Use 2. Of encouragement to poor Christians that have a sense of weakness. Before Plato's school was written, 'Let none but the learned come in hither;' but Christ inviteth the simple. That none might be discouraged, he speaketh to all sorts: Prov. 8:4, 5, 'Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men: O ye simple, understand wisdom; and ye fools, be of an understanding heart.' That which is spoken to all is thought to be spoken for none. Christ speaketh to men under their several distinctions, noble, base, young or old, rich or poor. If any earthly profit be offered to any that will take it, who will exempt themselves? None are so modest. But in spiritual things persons are more stupid. Let none be discouraged by weakness of parts; all are invited to learn, and here they may be taught, of any capacity. Oh! but how many will say, I am so weak of understanding, that I shall make no work of such deep mysteries as are contained in the scriptures. I answer—

1. Many times this objection cometh from a sluggish heart; to ease themselves of the trouble of a duty, as meditation or prayer, they pretend weakness, they would have a rule that would make knowledge.

2. If it be serious, God is able to interpret his own book unto thee. He must indeed open the door, or we cannot get into the knowledge of truths there. If you had better parts you would be but groping about the door. He that hath not the right key is as far from entering the house as he that hath none. If the Spirit of God be thy master, thou shalt learn, though never so blockish.

3. Wisdom stands upon the threshold, or at the door of God's word, as ready to open the treasures of knowledge: 'The entrance of thy word giveth light.' No sooner is a soul entered into the Spirit's school but he becometh a proficient; on first acquaintance with scriptures

he seeth great light. Yea, she sendeth abroad to invite comers: Prov. 9:3–5, 'She hath sent forth her maidens, she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple let him come in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.' Therefore go on with thy duty. He that sent an interpreter to the eunuch to guide him, when reading part of Isaiah's prophecy which he understood not, will direct and guide thee in the knowledge of all necessary truths, Ps. 25:8, 9; Prov. 2:2–5.

4. It is a good advantage to be sensible of our blindness: Rev. 3:17, 18, 'Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and stand in need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thee thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest see.' The first thing a man seeth is his own blindness, nakedness, and wretchedness: John 9:39, 'And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into the world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind.' Many times they which conceitedly think they see are made blind. Those that are ignorant and humbled under the sense thereof, Christ will open their eyes; but they that are conceited of their own parts and knowledge, their hearts are darkened more and more, and they are given up to follow their own fancies. The simple may see further than others, because they swell not with the presumption of their own wit. *Surgunt indocti, et rapiunt cœlum, cum nos doctrina nostra detrudimur in gehennam.* Sometimes simple people are more forward and earnest than others, and men of weak parts and small breeding may have strong affections. A blunt iron, when heated, may enter deeper into a board than a sharp tool when cold. Great doctors

and rabbis are proud and careless, and poor broken-hearted sinners are warm and serious. Your labour will not be in vain.

## **SERMON CXLIV**

## **I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments.—VER. 131**

HERE is the use that the Psalmist maketh of the former commendation of the word; it is wonderful and mysterious, clear and perspicuous; now he declareth his great affection to it. These words were used by Nazianzen when his father committed to him the care of the church, of Nazianzum; he beginneth his speech with it, Orat. viii., as being a word of more than ordinary comfort and grace and direction. David was in a fainting condition through the passionateness of his desire, 'I longed;' and that longing caused a languor, as all strong desires do. His affection wrought upon his body, or else affected his soul, as bodily refreshments desired and wanted do the body, 'I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments.' In the words there are—

1. The vehemency of his passion, I opened my mouth, and panted.
2. The reason or cause of it, for I longed for thy commandments.

First, 'I opened my mouth, and panted;' a metaphor taken from men scorched and sweltered with heat, or from those that have run themselves out of breath in following after the thing which they would overtake. The former metaphor expressed the vehemency of his love, the other the earnestness of his pursuit; he was like a man gasping for breath and sucking in the cool air. Judea was a hot country, and therefore such expressions are frequent. The like expressions, that come somewhat near it, are those: 2 Cor. 6:11, 'O ye Corinthians, our mouth is opened to you, our heart is enlarged;' when he did vehemently desire their profit. And Job saith, 'They waited for my speech as the rain; they opened their mouth wide, as

for the latter rain,' Job 29:22. A vehement, passionate desire affects the mind as an insatiate thirst the body. Thus will they be affected that are sensible of the wonders of the law, and enlightened by it. The reason of this passion: 'I longed,' noteth a high degree of desire. What did he long for? God's commandments; that is, the saving knowledge of the doctrine of salvation, or to find the use, benefit, light, comfort, and power of the word of God.

Doct. That God's children have strong and vehement affections and desires after the comfort and benefit of the word of God.

Here is—(1.) Opening the mouth; and (2.) Panting, as for fresh air; and (3.) Longing for the commandments. All three expressions imply an intensiveness of affection. Surely David prized holiness at a greater rate than we do, or else he would not use expressions so strange to us! See the like, Ps. 119:20, 'My soul breaketh for the longing it hath unto thy judgments at all times.' Desire is the stretching forth of the soul to the thing desired. Now his soul did so stretch towards these spiritual comforts, that it did even break and crack again in the stretching. So Ps. 42:1, 'As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.' Harts are thirsty creatures, especially when chased, or having eaten serpents.

Considerations.

1. The soul never worketh better than in the strength of some eminent affection. In all things that we take in hand we do but so-so, act but chilly and weakly, while we have a listless and remiss will; but when the force of affection is upon us, the soul is carried on strongly, either in abomination or prosecution; for affections are the forcible and vigorous motions of the will. Now the soul never doth well but under such an affection. Were it not for affections, our nature would be sluggish and idle; as Plutarch, ὡσπερ κυβερνήτης πνεύματος

ἐκλίποντος, like a pilot at sea without a wind. The ship moveth slowly when there are no winds stirring to fill the sails; or like a chariot without wheels or horses, or a bird when her wings are clipped. They spur us on to what we affect. Men are heavy and lazy because they have no affection: Exod. 36:2, 'And Moses called Bezaleel and Aholiab and every wise-hearted man, in whose heart the Lord had put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it.' Man findeth a force within himself, his heart maketh him willing; the stronger the affections, the better the man acteth, with greater strength and vivacity; for they are the vigorous motions of the will.

[2.] Of all affections, desires are most earnest and vehement, for they are the vigorous bent of the heart to that which is good, the motion and endeavour of the soul after it. As to good, the will chooseth it, and the heart affects a union with it, or desires to obtain it. This affection of union, simply considered, is love, which is an inclination of the soul to good, it presseth the heart to it; but as it is an absent good, it is desire, which exciteth to pursue it earnestly. Desire doth all that is done in the world, for it lifteth up the soul to action, that we may possess those things that we desire; I desire it, and therefore I labour for it. Therefore the main thing that God craveth is the desire: Prov. 23:26, 'My son, give me thy heart,' which is the soul of desires; and therefore the people of God plead their sincerity: Isa. 26:8, 9, 'The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee; with my soul have I desired thee in the night, yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.' Get but a desire to good things, to God, to his word, and it will be a great help to you in spiritual things: Prov. 11:23, 'The desire of the righteous is only good.' It is well when the soul is set right; this is a strong, active, commanding faculty.

3. Of all desires, those which carry us out to holy things should bear sway, and be the greatest; for affections are not rationally exercised unless they bear proportion to the objects they are conversant about. Now the word and things contained therein are the most noble objects, and so most suitable for our desires, if we would act rationally. That appears upon these accounts:—

[1.] Spiritual things are more noble; partly because they concern the soul, whereas carnal things concern only the outward man. Our liveliest affections should be exercised about the weightiest things. Can we desire riches and honours and pleasures, which only concern the body, and shall we not desire comforts and graces, which are necessary for the soul? It is irrational, for by this means we grow brutish and sensual. If our appetite desire only food and good pastures, and propagation of our kind, these desires soon exceed, and grow tempestuous and hurtful to the soul: Rom. 13:14, 'Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.' There is a lawful care for the body, but this desire should not be chief, because the body is not the chief part of a man: Mat. 6:33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof, and all these things shall be added unto you.' The ennobling of the soul with grace, the settling of our conscience, the assuring of our everlasting estate, these things deserve our chiefest care. Partly because these things are only useful to us in our passage, and so for a time; they are not useful to us in our home, and so for ever: Deut. 23:24, 'When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel.' We have these things for our use when here, but we carry nothing with us when we go hence. They who did occasionally pass through their neighbour's vineyard, might take for their necessity, but they must carry none home; and therefore as to these things all our acts must be non-acts: 1 Cor. 7:30, 31, 'Rejoice as if we rejoiced not,' desire as if



we desired not. Affections here need a great deal of guiding, and a great deal of curbing, lest we sin in these less noble things; but in spiritual, heavenly things we can never do enough.

[2.] Common and ordinary affection will not become God, or any thing that cometh from God, or concerneth our enjoyment of him, or our communion with him. Surely 'we are to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and with all our might, and with all our souls,' Deut. 6:5. And as we are to love God, so in proportion his word, which is the means to enjoy him; therefore here we should stretch our desire to the utmost.

[3.] An earnest bent will only do us good, and make us hold out in the pursuit of heavenly wisdom. It doth us good for the present, as it fits us to improve the word, as an appetite to our food. To eat with a stomach maketh way for digestion: 1 Peter 2:2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.' And it is zeal will only bear us out. Besides the difficulties and oppositions from without, our hearts are full of contrary qualities and desires, 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit;' so that nothing but a strong affection is for our turn. The greatest vehemency is but enough to bear us up in the prosecution of what is good; a weak desire will be soon chilled. Herod had some good desire; so have many, but not strong desires. He that affects grace, should affect nothing so much as grace. A carnal man may be affected with what is good, but there is something that he affects more, vanities, profits, pleasures. Well, then, spiritual desires should be drawn out to the utmost, because the object is more noble. These desires cannot degenerate, nor this affection be corrupted, and a common and ordinary affection doth not become these things. Nothing else will serve the turn.

[4.] Wherever these desires bear sway it will be sensibly discovered by the effects, both to ourselves and others. A man may have a little joy, or a little grief, or a little anger, and nobody see it; but none of these affections can be in any strength and vigour but we shall feel it and others will observe it; for strong affections cannot be hid. Can a man carry fire in his bosom and hide it? So there will be some expression of what thy heart affects. Can a man be under terrors, and not show it in his face? A concealed affection is no affection. Men may hide their hatred, but cannot hide their love: Prov. 27:5, 'Open rebuke is better than secret love.' These things tie body and soul together, move the spirits. So desire will show itself, yea, spiritual desire. What desire doth in other things, it will do in this. If there be longing, there will be fainting, gaping, breathing; for strong desires are hasty and impatient of satisfaction. Ahab's eager desire of Naboth's vineyard cast him upon his bed. The spouse was sick of love: Cant. 5:8, 'I charge ye, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him that I am sick of love.' What! desire, and nobody see it? What! desire, and you never feel such a strong urging affection? Surely there will be secret, deep, and frequent sighs, there will be a striving with God in prayer, and constant attendance upon God. Such an active affection cannot be hid. Most men desire so little, it cannot be known whether it be desire or no.

[5.] God's children have these desires, because they see more in the word than others do or can do. Spiritual discerning is a help to spiritual affections. They whose eyes are anointed with spiritual eye-salve see wonders in the law, and so are wondrously affected with them. But why should God's children see more?

(1.) They look through the spectacles of faith, they believe the commands to be the commands of the great God, the promises to be the promises of God, and therefore as good as performance; and so

what to others seem fancies and fine dreams, to them are the chiefest realities: Heb. 11:13, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.' Who would, having the promises, be so strangely transported, but they that are strongly persuaded? Faith, that looketh upon the things promised as sure and near, maketh them more active and lively. They that have not faith, or do not exercise faith, have but cold affections; but they who believe these wonderful felicities which the word of God speaketh of, long to enjoy what they are sure is true.

(2.) They look into it with an eye of love, and love sets a price on things: they see more of the loveliness of spiritual things than others do. Men's affections are according to the constitution of their souls, or the end they propound to themselves. They that are carnally disposed know all things after the flesh, and value them by the interests of the flesh, as that is gratified; and they that are spiritually disposed are affected accordingly as men's genius lieth. And that is the reason why eminent grace hath strong affections, which carnal men are not competent judges of. It seemeth improbable to them that a man should have such fervent desires of holiness, and be able to speak thus to God, 'I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments.' The constitution of their souls is quite otherwise, and their hearts hang world-ward; they have not such a sense of their duty, and do not make it their business to please God; and so, having no deep sense and conscience of their duty, they do not see such a need of the word as their guide and help. They have no love to these things, therefore no passionate desire; for this is the order—the will chooseth, love desireth the union, desire presseth to endeavours after it. But now a godly man, that maketh it his business to please God, the principal desire and choice of his will is to be what

God would have him to be, and to do what God would have him to do.

(3.) Because they have experience. Two things quicken our affection to anything that is good, viz., the knowledge of the worth and use of things, and our want of them. And the children of God know both of these by experience, in the course of that life wherein they are engaged; and nothing is known so intimately and pressingly as what is known by experience. By experience they see the want of the word of God, and its comforts and helps; not only when God first touched their hearts with care of saving their souls, and they were humble, and parched with a sense of sin and wrath; all things were then unsavoury, as the white of an egg; then they longed, they panted for one comfortable word from God, one passage of scripture to give them ease; and the word becometh as necessary as meat to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty, and cool air to the weary: Mat. 11:28, 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and ye shall find rest to your souls.' But still they are sensible of their spiritual necessities, so as they cannot breathe without it, nor thrive without it, they find such a necessity of it. It is the food of their souls, the seed and principle of their being, the rule of their lives, the means of their growth, the charter of their hopes, their defence and strength in temptations and assaults. Christ himself guarded himself with the word when he was assaulted. Now, being practically convinced of this, they must needs have vehement longings after it; and after a more full understanding of it, they find by experience that the soul is apt to faint as well as the body: Heb. 12:3, 'Lest ye be weary, and faint in your minds;' and that in all these things nothing relieveth them but the comfort and direction God giveth them in his word.

[6.] The more godly any are, the more they feel these strong affections. All that have life, their pulses do not beat alike strongly;

some are weak, others more robust. So it is in grace; some have larger souls than others, and so, as they are more in action for God, they must have more supplies, and a greater measure of spirit and grace; these long and pant. In others there is a greater sluggishness and narrowness of mind, and they rest satisfied with what they have, their spiritual affections are not so raised; and therefore every one that is godly is not acquainted with this panting and breathing and longing; they have so much appetite as is necessary to maintain the new creature, but not these enlarged desires. I confess you are to judge by your willingness rather than the passionate stirrings of your affections. It is the heart which God requireth, and if he hath the will he hath the heart. But yet affectionate workings of the soul towards spiritual and heavenly things are very sweet, and such as all Christians should strive for, but not the best marks by which to judge of our estate. There may be a solid and sincere intention and choice, when there is little stirring perceived in the affections. If the will be fixedly set for God, the man is upright. Yet you are to endeavour to raise your affections to that height which is suitable to the excellency of the object; especially when it is movingly represented to us, our desires should be upon the wing. It is a duty; as far as we can reach it, we should. The more the soul is refined from the dregs of carnal longings and worldly lusts, the more are they enlarged towards God; and as their passionate desires of earthly things are abated, so their spiritual desires are enlarged. David saith, Ps. 119:36, 'Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.' And the apostle, Col. 3:2, 'Set your affections on things above, and not on things on earth.' The more the heart is given to the one, the more it is taken off from the other. Riches, honours, and pleasures, as these are loved, they hinder this noble working of the soul, this breaking, longing, panting for better things. Worldly things have a great advantage over our affections, because they are sensible and near us, and our knowledge of them is clear, and by the senses obtrude and

thrust themselves upon the soul. Therefore use them with a guard and restraint.

[7.] Though this desire should always continue in some degree, yet there are some seasons when it is more vehement, and more notably stirred and raised. In some degree it should always continue, for our necessities and work are ever the same; and if it be only a qualm or fit, it is not right: Ps. 119:20, 'My soul breaketh for the longing it hath unto thy judgments at all times.' Appetite followeth life; but at special times it is more notably raised, as when we are to meet with God in solemn duties; it is whetted when disappointed, and stirred upon some restraint or delay, when we meet not with what we expected, that light and comfort and strength that we looked for, but are kept off from satisfaction. When some deep distress makes spiritual comforts more seasonable, or in some great affair or temptation, we need more than ordinary strength, or in some doubt we need light and direction; in all these cases, spiritual desire is more stirring, and a strong affection is kindled in us. David panted as an hart: Ps. 42:1, 'As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.' It was when he was in some distress. So Ps. 63:1, 'O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.' Oh! the sighs and groans that are sent up at such a time! Troubles will sharpen our appetite and rouse us out of security. We cannot always subsist under strong affections; they are very mutable, yet something of them should continue.

Use 1. For reproof.

1. Many are acquainted with the passionateness of sin, but know little of the passionateness of spiritual desire: 1 Thes. 4:5, *μὴ ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας*, 'not in the lust of concupiscence.' Some think it should

rather be rendered thus, Not in the passion of lust. Many times lust groweth to violence, men neigh like fed horses after their neighbours' wives; they feel an ardency and a burning heat in their evil passions and lusts, but none of this gasping and panting for spiritual refreshings and the comforts of the soul. They are acquainted with passionate wrath and fury, passionate envy and spitefulness, passionate lust and filthy desires, passionate covetousness, as Ahab after Naboth's vineyard; the boilings of sin they know, but were never acquainted with these gaspings after grace, as Amnon lusted for Tamar: Rom. 1:27, 'They burned in lust one towards another.' When any sin groweth so headstrong as to admit of no restraint, but men are wedded to their own inclination, that is the passionateness of sin.

2. Some that have affectionate desires for worldly things, and their souls are pained and grieved, and are sick within them if they have them not. These differ from the former, for there the object was sinful, but here the object is lawful, but the desire is irregular; they are sick of pleasures, their hearts run on them, and they cannot refrain: 'As the fool's heart is in the house of mirth,' Eccles. 7:4. All their longings are for balls and dancings and plays and merry meetings; these are suitable entertainments to the hearts of fools, vain and sottish epicures, that know no higher delights than the tickling of the senses; their love runneth that way, and their hearts are wholly estranged from God. So some sick of riches and wealth, they gape and gasp for them with an impatient longing: 1 Tim. 6:9, 'They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, that drown men in destruction and perdition.' The more they have, the more they covet, as the laying on of more fuel increaseth the flame; they are impatient, making haste to be rich, run themselves, yea, their consciences, out of breath, to overtake the prey. The world is their element, out of which they

cannot live, but spend their time, wit, strength of their souls upon it. They are sick for honour, credit, esteem; as Mordecai's stiff knee cast Haman upon his bed: Esther 3:5, 'And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not the knee, nor gave him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath;' chap. 6:12, 'Mordecai came again to the king's gate, but Haman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered. How do men tire their spirits, waste their strength, to compass honour and esteem in the world! and if they find it not, how are they troubled! Ambition is a restless thing; how doth Absalom court the people, sick for rule and government!

3. It reproveth them that have only a cold approbation, but no earnest affection to the things of God. Oh, how this instance should shame us that we have no more affection! David speaketh of longing and panting; we thirst not, we pant not; their fervency reproveth our lukewarmness, we are indifferent whether we have this light, comfort, and grace, yea or no. God's children thirst for it as dry ground for rain. We have some loose and straggling thoughts about holy things, or weak and ineffectual glances of desire, some lukewarm motions; but for these strong affections, admire them we may, feel them we do not. Wicked men may have slight apprehensions of spiritual things, which may produce some slight desires and wishes, which yet are so feeble and weak that every carnal desire overcometh them.

Use 2. Information why the people of God press through so many difficulties to enjoy his word. They are urged and pricked on by a strong desire; they would fain enjoy more of God, and therefore press after the means, where it is most clearly and powerfully revealed: John 11:12, 'From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by



force.' Where the gates of heaven stand open they will break through hindrances to get in.

Use 3. It should quicken our dulness, and exhort us to get this affection. If the heart were as it should be, a little bidding would serve the turn.

1. These good desires discover a good frame, for a man is as his desires are. Such motions, when they are in their strength and liveliness, are signs of heroical grace, when your hearts are sick of love; yea, in a more temperate degree, where there are strong and prevailing desires, they show truth of grace, where there is such an affection as is industrious and unwearied, and keepeth us hard at work: Acts 26:7, 'Unto which promise the twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come.' Such an affection as is troubled when we are interrupted in our main design of bringing the heart into complete subjection to God, or being capable of the fruition of him: Prov. 13:12, 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh it is a tree of life.' If you come for grace, and are troubled and grieved when you are interrupted, if you are refreshed when you have tasted anything of God's graciousness, any increase of light and grace is as welcome to you as bodily refreshment to a weary, panting traveller, or water to one that is in a great thirst; this is that the heart mindeth most, studieth most, remembereth most, that you never have enough of it, and are longing for more; if there be such an affection, it is a good sign, for sensitive stirring is not so great an evidence as a settled constitution of spirit.

2. These holy desires, as they have something of burthen, so something of pleasure in them. Though the absence of the thing desired be a trouble, yet the exercise of holy desire is a pleasure to us, because it is an act of love; the more our hearts are enlarged in them,

the greater it is, even before satisfaction. While we are hungering and thirsting we are blessed. It is a blessed thing to be a desirer: Mat. 5:6, 'Blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.'

3. This is a desire which God will satisfy: Ps. 81:10, 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it;' Isa. 44:3, 'I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground.' This insatiate thirst of grace and comfort shall be satisfied: John 7:37, 38, 'In the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture saith, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.' The soul is prepared by it for fruition: Isa. 55:1, 'Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.'

If we would get it—(1.) We must get a new heart, which is the soul of these desires, and is God's promised gift in the covenant: Ezek. 36:26, 'A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.' (2.) Mortify and moderate your affections to the world and worldly things, and meddle sparingly with the comforts thereof; otherwise your hearts will be apt immoderately to leak out after them, to the interruption of the spiritual life.

## **SERMON CXLV**

**Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.—VER. 132**

THE prophet having praised the word, and expressed his affection to it, presents his petition to God for a favourable look from him, upon the account of his grace and mercy, according to the manner and law of his dispensations towards others of his people. They that love the word may with the like confidence expect the grace of God. Observe in the words—

1. The petition or favour asked, look thou upon me.
2. The ground of asking, or the cause of that favour, and be merciful unto me.
3. The terms according to which it is dispensed, as thou usest to do, *secundum judicium*, according to the law, or according to thy custom towards those that love thy name.
4. The description of God's people; they love his name.

These are the especial objects of grace and favour. I shall explain the words as I go over the several branches.

First, I begin with the petition, 'Look thou upon me.' The Septuagint reads it, ἐπιβλεπε ἐπὶ ἐμέ. Other translations, aspice me, or respice me. Ainsworth, Turn thy face unto me: Ps. 25:16, 'Turn thou unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted.' God seemeth now and then to turn away from his people in their distresses, to turn the back upon them, and not the face; as it is, Jer. 18:17, 'I will scatter them as with an east-wind before the enemy; I will show them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.' They had dealt so first with God: Jer. 2:17, 'Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God when he led thee by the way?' So David, God might have seemed to have turned the back upon him. Our translation cometh to the

same effect, 'Look upon me.' God's looking implieth two things, viz., his favour and his providence.

1. His favour; as Isa. 66:2, 'To this man will I look, that is of a contrite heart;' that is, I will be gracious unto him, smile upon him, give him evidences of my love.

2. His providence. The providence of God is usually set forth by his eye: Prov. 12:3, 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.' Now God hath a double eye—an avenging eye and a gracious eye. The avenging eye: Amos 9:4, 'I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good.' The other: 2 Chron. 16:9, 'The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him.' Accordingly this act of looking is either—

[1.] With a revengeful eye. So upon their enemies: 1 Chron. 12:17, 'The God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it;' 2 Chron. 24:22, 'The Lord look thereon, and requite it,' said Zachary the son of Jehoiadah the priest. This is the look of anger. But—

[2.] There is the look of love and benign aspect, as astrologers speak. So Exod. 3:7, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows;' and Lam. 3:50, 'Till the Lord look down and behold from heaven.' So doth he beg here that God would look upon him with a gracious eye. In this gracious aspect two things are notable, viz., his observation and his compassion.

(1.) His observation. He taketh notice of their condition and oppressed innocency: Neh. 1:6, 'Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now day and night.' What have eyes to do

with hearing? To behold their pitiful and desolate condition. So 2 Sam. 16:12, 'It may be that the Lord will look upon mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.'

(2.) His compassion. God doth take to heart the distresses of his people, and hath a tender pity and compassion over them: Ps. 25:18, 'Look upon mine affliction, and my pain.' He doth not only take notice of, but take to heart their sorrows, as appeareth by some gracious effect and deliverance wrought for them. So looking implieth both his affection and actual providence for them.

Doct. The children of God apprehend it as a great favour if he will but look upon them.

So saith David, 'Look thou upon me.' Which request expresseth his modesty; one short glimpse of God's favour, a look of kindness, would be a great matter to him in this vale of tears. A look is welcome to a broken and contrite heart; they are thankfully affected with the least discoveries and manifestations of God's love to the soul. If they could have but the least glimpse of his love, it would be very reviving: Ps. 86:17, 'Show me a token for good.' The returning prodigal could go no higher than, 'Make me as one of thy hired servants,' Luke 15:19, any place in the family, so he might be no more absent from his father. God's people would have a nail in his holy place. This shows—

1. His necessity. God seemed to look from him, no sign of his favour appeared. Thus it is often with God's children here in the world; the sense of his love is gone and lost, we sometimes have not so much as a look from him: Isa. 59:2, 'Your sins have hid his face from you.' In heaven our communion is more full, and it is uninterrupted: 1 Cor. 13:12, 'For now we see through a glass darkly, then face to face.' Here God often hideth his face, and we 'walk in darkness, and see no light;'

Ps. 104:29, 'Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.'

2. His value and esteem of God's favour: Ps. 4:6, 7, 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.' Esteem of spiritual privileges is a great means to continue them to us. We feel no more of God's love, because we are not thankful for the enjoyment of it. It must be a practical esteem, such as moveth us to seek it earnestly, as David professeth here it would satisfy him if God would look upon him. We count ourselves most miserable in the want of it; but if we have it, it allayeth all worldly discontents, abateth our desires of worldly comforts.

3. His confidence. One look from God is enough, it is all he beggeth; as the saints in like cases, if their God would but look upon them: Deut. 26:15, 'Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel.' So Isa. 63:15, 'Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory.' Without any labour, only by this look thou canst help all our evils; and will not God cast a look upon us, especially when we call him by his name?

Reason 1. Because in our distresses the main thing we should look on is not so much the removal of God's anger, and the removal of the evil, as the renewed sense of his love, to be reconciled to them: 2 Chron. 7:14, 'If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wickedness, then will I hear from heaven, and forgive their sins, and will heal their land.' It is a part of the prescribed remedy to seek the face of God, or a favourable look from him; that is put in among the

conditions, otherwise we are not affected with our true misery, and the cause of all our trouble, though we may seriously enough desire to be rid of the trouble, or the effects and the strokes of God's anger. The brute creatures can feel pain as well as we, and howl when they find anything inconvenient to that nature which they have, as well as we cry to God: Hosea 7:14, 'And they have not cried unto me with their hearts, when they howled upon their beds.' God accounts it as howling when we do not seek God's favour and grace, as well as the supply of our outward necessities. It is an easy matter to be sensible of the evil of trouble; nature will teach us that.

2. Because that bringeth other things along with it. If God look upon us he will help us; his love and power are set a-work for us, for his eye affecteth his heart. When his heart is affected, he will 'stir up his strength, and come and save us.' So that, go to the fountainhead of all mercies, when you beg a favour, look for it from God, for God's favour is the fountain of all blessings, and without it all your other comforts will do you no good: Ps. 80:19, 'Turn us again, O Lord of hosts; cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.' When God once showeth the evidences of his favour and reconciliation to them, other mercies come of their own accord. Oh! then, be assured of the favour of God.

3. If we continue in our misery, a look from God will sweeten all: 'We glory in tribulation also, because of the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, by his Spirit given to us,' Rom. 5:3–5. To be in favour with God is enough, and sweetens the bitterest of all our troubles. The comfort of the creature may be supplied with this greater comfort, that if affliction be not removed, it is made light to us.

Use 1. Beg earnestly for God's look. It is an ill sign to be careless and regardless of it. Surely the heart is too much carried to earthly

comforts, if you care not how God standeth affected to you. God deliver us from such a sottish spirit, that we should neither care for God's frowns nor smiles, nor be sensible of his coming and going. David said, 'Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord,' Ps. 25:15, to observe him and his postures; but most men, their eyes are ever towards temporal accidents, how the times smile or frown upon them; or if they think of God, they judge of his respect to them by outward things, but have not any regard to his favour, whether God be reconciled to them or angry with them.

2. Improve it to hope: Ps. 80:14, 'Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts, look down from heaven, and behold and visit this vine.' Will God love his people, and take notice of their sorrows, and not help them? God will manifest his respects and kindness to his people by some visible deliverance, when it shall be good for them. 3. Be such as God will regard, and have an eye unto. Such are—

[1.] The broken-hearted, that have a tender conscience, affected deeply with what the word speaketh concerning their everlasting condition: Isa. 66:2, 'To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.' The word of God passeth sentence upon men; most regard it not. Now whilst they look not after God, they have no promise God will look after them. Indeed by his preventing grace he is found of them that look not for him; but then before they have any smiles from God's countenance, they are first humbled and brought to trouble: Isa. 57:15–18, 'For thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirits of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made. For the iniquity of his covetousness I was



wroth, and smote him, I hid me and was wroth; he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him.' When the spirit is softened by a deep and serious remorse for sin, and a tender sense of their condition, with these will God dwell, to comfort, relieve, restore them.

[2.] The believer: Ps. 33:18, 'Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy.' They that look for God shall find him.

[3.] The sincere: Ps. 11:7, 'His countenance doth behold the upright.' He hath a singular care of them, to manifest his love to them, both inwardly and outwardly. A good conscience presents itself to God; none but such will say, Look upon me. Adam hid himself upon his transgression. Hypocrites cannot trust him.

[4.] Such as love his name. It is the description and mark of God's people in the text, they love God, and all that by which God is especially made known. To these God will look, that he may bless them, and comfort them with his love: Eph. 6:24, 'Grace be with them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.' God's grace and free favour is to them: they love the name of God that rejoice to see God honoured, known, and had in request in the world, to be owned to be such as he is by themselves and others: Isa. 26:8, 'The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee.' Their great desire is, that God may be exalted in their own hearts, and in the hearts of others. To these God will look, who take care to honour God, love Christ, and keep his commandments: John 14:21, 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of the Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.'

Secondly, The ground and cause of that favour he expects, 'Be merciful unto me.' David begs what he begs upon terms of grace.

Doct. God's mercy is the cause of all his favour to us, or gracious dealing with us.

All that we have or would have cometh only and wholly from his mercy, and mere mercy. If God cast but a look upon us, or visit us with one glimpse of kindness, we can ascribe it to no other cause. Only mercy, and never a word of merit should be in the mouth of a believer.

1. Because there was nothing in us to move him to be thus gracious to us: Gen. 32:10, 'I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant.' Let us ask the reason, and debate the cause with ourselves. Why doth or should God do this for me? What moveth him? Is he necessitated? Then he could do no otherwise, and should be kind to all. Would he be unjust if he did not? Whereby have I obliged him? 'Who hath given to God first, and it shall be recompensed to him again?' Rom 11:35. Could you enter your action and plea against him? Before what bar and tribunal? And with what arguments will you manage your cause? How will the beam plead against the sun, the stream against the fountain? Is it a debt to your kind and rank of being? How many of the same flesh and blood are equal in nature, but unequal in condition? nay, in the same vicinity and neighbourhood, not only Americans, but of your own nation and country? What did God see more in you than in them of the same calling and profession? 'Two grinding at a mill, one shall be taken and the other left,' Luke 17:35. Of the same parentage? 'Was not Jacob Esau's brother?' Indeed, what did God see to move him to give you the first grace? Rom. 9:16,

'So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.'

2. There is much to the contrary, a manifest unworthiness and contrary desert to what God bestoweth on us.

[1.] A general unworthiness in all the sons of Adam. Man was left as a condemned malefactor in the hands of the law, without all hope and possibility of recovery, under sin: Rom. 7:14, 'I am carnal, sold under sin.' Under a curse: Eph. 2:3, 'We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.' And that God should regard such!

[2.] A particular unworthiness, before conversion and after.

(1.) Before conversion: Titus 3:3, 'For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures,' &c. We deserve to be abhorred and cast out of God's presence, and might justly expect his vengeance rather than his bounty and goodness, his anger and frowns rather than the light of his countenance.

(2.) Since conversion: James 3:2, 'In many things we offend all;' Eccles. 7:20, 'There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.' There are mixtures of evil, imperfections of holy things. Well, then—

1. Let mercy be all your plea when you have any favour to seek from God. We cannot claim any good upon any other right and title. Justice will except against you, and conscience will take its part. What have you to say but on that: Dan. 9:18, 'We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies.' We have no other motive that will become God, nor bear weight in our own consciences, but only God hath set up a court

where grace taketh the throne, and giveth out pardons and blessings to sinners.

2. When you have once tasted one pledge of God's love vouchsafed to you, let this kindle coals in your bosoms, and warm your hearts with love to God. It is not only his condescension to take notice of you, but his mercy to show any favour and kindness to you: 2 Sam. 7:19, 'Is this the manner of men, O Lord God?' Is this the manner of men, to requite good for evil? Who am I?

3. Be contented with your measures. Where nothing is deserved, anything should be kindly taken. Grace communicateth itself to whom and in what measure it will: Mat. 20:15, 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?' If we are kept under, and in great extremities, he might have dealt worse with us: Lam. 3:22, 'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.' If we had a price in our hands to procure better, we might complain. Now all is free and undeserved, we should admire and submit.

## **SERMON CXLVI**

### **As thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.—VER. 132**

HERE you have—

Thirdly, The terms of the dispensation, 'As thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.' The word is—

1. According to the law and right.

2. According to the use and custom, according to the mercy promised, and usually bestowed upon those that love thee. Both senses not improper.

First, The first sense, according to the law and right. Prout est jus diligentium nomen tuum, so some. The vulgar, Secundum judicium. Amyraldus glosseth thus, Pro illa misericordia quam inter te et timentes nomen tuum constituisti. Others, Secundum jus, et fœdus illud. Take it thus, and it beareth a good sense; for there is the obligation of justice, and the obligation of grace; a judgment of righteousness, and a judgment of mercy. This merciful judgment the saints appeal unto. I cannot exclude this; for otherwise this verse would not have one of those ten words which express the word or law of God.

Doct. That there is a gracious way of right established between God and his people, according to which they may expect mercies.

This will be best understood by comparing the two covenants, their agreement and disagreement, not in all things, but such as are pertinent.

1. Let us see how the two covenants agree.

[1.] They agree in their author. God appointed both, and man is only to accept or take hold of what is offered. Man was not thinking of any such thing when God instituted the first: Gen. 2:17, 'But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die;' or revealed the second: Gen. 3:15, 'It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.' For God to enter into a covenant with the creature, either of works or grace, was an act of condescension; and who is he that could bid the Almighty humble himself, and prescribe conditions and laws of

commerce between God and us, but only God alone? Man did not give the conditions, or treat with God about the making of them, what they should be; but only was bound to submit to what God was pleased to prescribe. In the covenant of works God gave forth the conditions of life, and a law and a penalty; and in the covenant of grace, man is bound to submit to the conditions without disputing. They are not left free and indifferent for us to debate upon, and to modify, and bring them down to our own liking and humour; but to yield to them, and take hold upon them, not to appoint them: Isa. 56:4, 'Thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant;' Rom. 10:3, 'For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.'

[2.] They agree in the moving cause, which in both was the grace of God. The first covenant, it was grace for God to make it. It was the grace of God to accept of man's perfect obedience, so as to make him sure of eternal life on the performance of it. Though the last covenant hath the honour by way of eminency to be stiled the covenant of grace, yet the first was so, though the condition of it was perfect obedience, and the reward had respect to personal righteousness. It was of grace also that God would at all covenant and enter into bonds with man, who was not his equal, and give his word to any of the works of his hands. It was grace that endowed man with original righteousness, and fitted him, and enabled him to keep that covenant. His absolute sovereign owed him no more than the rest of the creatures which he had made. Grace engaged the reward, there was no more merit in Adam's obedience than in ours: Luke 17:10, 'So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done

that which was our duty to do.' Nor did his work bear proportion to the eternal reward.

[3.] They agree in the parties, God and man in both covenants, not any other creatures superior or inferior to man, rational or irrational; the principal contracting parties were public persons, Adam, Jesus: Rom. 5:18, 'Therefore as by the offence of one man judgment came upon all to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life;' 1 Cor. 15:47, 'The first man is of the earth earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven.' The first and second Adam, for them and all their heirs.

[4.] That God giveth sufficiency of strength in both these covenants to the parties with whom he made them to fulfil the conditions thereof. To Adam: Eccles. 7:29, 'Lo this only have I found, that God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.' To Adam natural, to us supernatural strength: Ezek. 36:27, 'And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them;' Heb. 8:10, 'This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts.'

[5.] In both God kept up his sovereignty, and by his condescension did not part with anything of his dominion over man. In the covenant of works he ruled by a law written on men's hearts: Rom. 2:15, 'Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.' So by grace the believer is not freed from the law of nature, which being almost obliterated and blotted out of the heart of man, and become very illegible, it pleased God to set it forth in a new edition, and to write it over again in the

heart of a renewed man: Heb. 8:10, 'I will put my law into their minds, and write it in their hearts;' Eph. 4:24, 'And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.' Though God admitted us to new conditions of favour, yet he still requireth subjection on our part, and that we own him as Lord and sovereign, requiring obedience and service at our hands, or else he taketh a liberty to visit our transgressions with rods: Ps. 89:31, 32, 'If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.'

[6.] In both covenants there is a mutual obligation on both parties; this ariseth from the very nature of a covenant. *Contractus est consensio ad constituendam obligationem, qua alter alteri fit obnoxius.* In every covenant there is a tie on both sides, and some reason of right. There is no obligation of debt between God and us, but an obligation of grace. *Deus non est debitor, saith Aquinas, quia non est ad alia ordinatus; reddit debita, nulla debet.* His covenant doth infer a debt of favour, not of justice. We may challenge him upon his promise: Ps. 119:49, 'Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.' But God doth it not with respect to our work, but his own promise. In covenants of justice between man and man, there is a proportion and correspondence between the conditions on the one part and the other. In the covenant between God and us is a deed of favour, containing large grants of privileges, and noble conditions, upon terms and restipulations, which had no proportion to the favours granted. As if some prince or person of honour should, out of pure love to a poor mean virgin that hath no portion, covenant to give her a rich dowry and jointure, suitable to his own degree; so doth God with us in the covenant of grace: Ezek. 16:8, 'Now when I passed by thee and looked on thee, behold thy time was a time of love, and I spread my



skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness, yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine;' Jer. 31:3, 'The Lord hath appeared of old unto thee, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.' Indeed, in the covenant of works, justice hath a greater predominant influence than grace; though in exact justice, God is not bound to remunerate us there neither.

[7.] The conditions in both covenants were suitable to the ends and scope appointed. In the first covenant God would show forth justice in rewarding man's works and his own obedience. Now what more suitable condition than works, without the least indulgence in case of failing? Gal. 3:10, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.' And what more suitable to show forth grace than the condition of faith required by the covenant of grace? Rom. 4:16, 'Therefore it was of faith, that it might be of grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.' So he would make it full of comfort to the creature, and honour to his justice.

## 2. The differences between these two covenants.

[1.] They differ in the ends, both as to man and God.

(1.) As to man. The end of the first covenant was to preserve and continue man in that happiness wherein it found him, and in which he was created; but the covenant of grace was for the reparation and restitution of mankind to that happiness which he had lost, and from which he had fallen. The law saith to man in his best, his pure and perfect estate, Continue in it. It speaketh to the innocent, that they may continue in their original happiness. The gospel saith, Be ye reconciled and renewed: 2 Cor. 5:20, 'Now then we are ambassadors

for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God;' for it speaketh to the fallen and miserable: it is a restitution of what was lost, and redeeming us from misery and sin. The one was made with man in statu instituto, as he came out of God's hand, in his primitive integrity, when he was a lively resemblance of God, and his abilities for obedience not yet broken. The other covenant was made with him in statu destituto, when at the worst, sinful and wretched, in his fallen estate, disabled for obedience to God: Rom. 8:3, 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh.' In the one there was perfect amity between the confederates, God and Adam, and this covenant was made for the continuance and standing thereof; but there was enmity and distance between the parties when the new covenant was set afoot; and this was to be taken away, and the breach made up; and therefore it is called a covenant of peace: Isa. 54:10, 'For the mountains shall depart, and the hills shall be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee.'

(2.) As to God. In the one, God is considered as a gracious and merciful redeemer, who being displeased with them for the breach of the first covenant, did enter into a new covenant to show the riches of his grace and mercy: Eph. 1:6, 'Unto the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.' Man fallen was not a suitable object of God's love, as man in innocency; he was then lovely, and an alluring object, because of the beauty God had put upon him; but now he was loathsome, like an infant in his blood and filthiness: Ezek. 16:6–8, 'When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood. I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live.'

I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxed great; and thou art come to excellent ornaments; thy breasts are fashioned, and thy hair is grown, whereas thou wert naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness; yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine, saith the Lord.' Therefore God had a different end as to himself. The glory of his creating bounty was the end in the old covenant, the glory of his redeeming grace and pardoning mercy was the end in the new covenant, showed in the recovery of lost sinners. In the one, he intended the advancement of those attributes that were known to man by the law and light of nature, as wisdom, power, goodness, bounty, and justice: Ps. 8:9, 'O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!' The end of the covenant of grace was to set forth redeeming mercy: Rom. 5:21, 'That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.' If the creature had never been in misery, mercy had never been known, and grace had not been so glorious, as in giving Christ. All the natural attributes of God receive a new lustre in Christ.

[2.] They differ in their nature. The covenant of works stood more by commands, and less by promises; but the covenant of grace standeth more by promises, and less by commands: therefore called the promise, Gal. 3:18, 'For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.' The commands and promises were not commensurate. There was not a promise in that covenant for every command of the law of nature, but in the gospel God promiseth what he requireth. In the covenant of works, justice is the rule of God's dealing; for though he entered into that covenant, and promised a reward out of grace; yet being entered into

it, justice holdeth the balance, and weigheth the works of men, and giveth to every man according to his works, what is due to him: Rom. 2:6–8, 'Who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for life, and glory, and immortality, eternal life. But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath,' &c. But the rule of God's dealing in the new covenant is grace. The covenant of works was more independent on God and grace without man, and more dependent on man and grace within himself. In it man was left to stand by his own strength, to be justified upon his own righteousness, God having furnished him with a stock at first, or a sufficiency of power to keep that covenant. But the covenant of grace findeth us without strength; therefore we are kept in dependence upon another: Ps. 89:19, 'I have laid help upon one that is mighty;' and Phil. 4:13, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.' Man was to keep the first covenant, but here in effect the covenant keepeth us: 1 Peter 1:5, 'Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation;' Jer. 32:40, 'And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.'

[3.] In the terms. Unsinning obedience is the condition of the covenant of works. The covenant of works is wholly made void, and the promise thereof of none effect, by any one sin, without any hope of cure or remedy. Once a sinner, and for ever miserable; as the angels for one sin were thrown down from heaven, and 'reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day,' Jude 6. It admitteth of no such thing as repentance, neither doth it offer any provision for such; it speaketh much to the whole, nothing to the sick; it maketh a promise to the righteous, but none to sinners. But the covenant of grace is otherwise: Mat. 9:13, 'I will have mercy, and

not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance: Acts 5:31, 'Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a prince and a saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.' Every failing doth not make void the covenant, no not every grosser fault: Ps. 89:33, 34, 'Nevertheless my loving-kindness I will not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail: my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.' The first covenant is an uncomfortable covenant to a sinner, and can be only comfortable to a perfect righteous person; for in case of the least failing it speaketh nothing but wrath and the curse. But the covenant of grace is comfortable to sinners, it offereth pardon to them. As to the first covenant, it is impossible to be fulfilled by man in the state of corruption: Rom. 8:3, 'What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh.' Since the day that Adam fell, never did nor could any man fulfil this covenant. Well, then, the demands of this covenant cannot be satisfied without a continuation in all things written therein, in height of exactness and perfection. But the gospel admits of a sincere, uniform obedience as perfect: 2 Cor. 8:12, 'But if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.' There is a merciful lenity as to acceptance, though the rule is as strict: Mal. 3:17, 'And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son, that serveth him.'

Use 1. Then enter into this covenant. You have no benefit by it till you personally enter into the bond of it. The covenant of works was made with man generally, universally considered, with Adam as a public person, representing all his posterity; but the covenant of grace is made with man particularly, and personally considered, and his consent is expressly required, or else it can convey no benefit to us. That was a law, and so did bind whether man did consent or no.

This is a privilege, Christ draweth to consent to him, doth not force us against our will: John 1:12, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.' Will you own him as the Son of God, and Redeemer of the world? Every man must consent for himself. The effects of the first covenant are uncomfortable for the present, the spirit of bondage: Heb. 2:15, 'And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.' But dreadful hereafter: James 2:13, 'He shall have judgment without mercy.' When none to mediate for them, they have to do with justice, strict justice. The least sin is enough to ruin you, it will pass by no transgression, remit no part of your punishment, it will have satisfaction to the utmost farthing, admits of no pardon, no advocate, regardeth no tears. What justice can give you, that you may look for. If justice speak no good, promise no good, you are to look for none; for justice doth all in the covenant, under which you stand: Ps. 130:3, 'If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?' What you may claim as a due debt, that you may look for; that covenant gives no gift. Oh! then, give the hand to the Lord: 2 Chron. 30:8, 'But be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the Lord, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever, and serve the Lord your God.' Receive God's condition: Acts 9:6, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' You have not leave to choose and refuse.

Use 2. Let us bless God, and admire his grace in bringing about this new covenant.

1. Man irreparably had broken the first covenant, fallen from his state of life; so that all the world is lost under guilt and a curse: Rom. 3:19, 'That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.'

2. Upon this fundamental breach, the Lord was acquitted and absolved from the promise of life, in this way of works; for man could never stand in that court: Rom. 8:3, 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,' &c. Then—

3. God taking occasion by this miserable estate, opened a door of hope by Christ: 2 Cor. 5:19, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.' God hath set up a new court of righteousness and life, where sinners may appear, where grace taketh the throne, and the judge is Christ, and the gospel the rule, and faith and sincere obedience accepted.

4. The Lord giveth notice to fallen man, and sendeth him word, that if he will come to this court, and put himself under the laws thereof, he shall be delivered from the curse: Luke 1:77–79, 'To give knowledge of salvation to his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercies of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide their feet into the way of peace.'

5. Because men are backward, he hunteth and pursueth them by the curse of the law, and the sense men have of it, to take sanctuary at his grace: Heb. 6:18, 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.'

6. When a poor creature cometh, he receiveth him graciously: Jer. 3:12, 13, 'Return thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever: only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God;' 1 John 1:9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' If he had not

set up another court of righteousness, no tears, no repentance could have helped us; there had been no help that way. Now he is willing to receive you, he standeth with his arms open. From first to last he dealeth with us upon terms of grace.

Secondly, Judgment is put for manner and custom or course: Gen. 40:13, 'Thou shalt deliver Pharaoh his cup after the former manner, טַפְּשֵׁהוּ. So Josh. 6:15, 'They compassed the city after the same manner.' The same word again: 1 Sam. 2:13, 'The priest's custom with the people was,' &c.; 1 Sam. 8:11, רָמַלְךָ טַפְּשֵׁהוּ, 'This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you;' 1 Sam. 27:11, 'So did David, and so will be his manner.' So in other places.

Doct. 1. That it is God's constant method to encourage all those that serve him, by showing to them all manner of expressions of favour and mercy.

The proposition is often expressed in scripture: Ps. 25:10, 'All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies;' Ps. 84:11, 'For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord God will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly;' Ps. 34:10, 'The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.' David presumeth it: Ps. 23:6, 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.' And many other places.

Object. But it seemeth to be contradicted by sense. They that love God most are most calamitous, and have many afflictions.

Ans. 1. These belong to God's covenant, and are expressions of his good-will and faithfulness: Ps. 119:75, 'I know, Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.'



God were not faithful nor merciful if he did not now and then take the rod in hand; our need, our good requireth it: Heb. 12:10, 'For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' Discipline is necessary for a child as food, winter as necessary as summer, rainy days as fair days, to curb the wantonness of the flesh, and to withdraw the fuel of our lusts.

2. He useth to show mercy to people in their afflictions, to cause light to rise to them in darkness: 2 Cor. 1:5, 'For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.' We are not capable of taking in spiritual comforts till we are separated from the dregs of worldly affections.

3. God will sanctify afflictions: Rom. 8:28, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' And he will finally deliver when the season calleth for it: 1 Cor. 10:13, 'There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.'

Object. But he dealeth more hardly with them than others; he doth not punish the gross iniquities of his adversaries, when the lesser failings of his people are severely chastised.

Ans. It is meet 'judgment should begin at the house of God,' 1 Peter 4:17, that it may be known God doth not favour any in their sins: Amos 3:2, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities.' Their sins, though small, have more aggravations, being committed against clearest light, dearest love: Ezra 9:13, 'And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, should we again break thy commandments?' Isa.

26:10, 'Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness.' God is jealous over his people, and careful to have them reclaimed from every evil course: 1 Cor. 11:32, 'But when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.' In the bitterness of the rod God discovereth the vileness of their sin; for he will reclaim them when he suffereth others to walk in their own way.

4. His enemies shall in time taste the dregs of the cup, whereof his own people taste a little: Ps. 75:8, 'For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup; the wine is red, it is full of mixture, he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out and drink them;' Jer. 25:29, 'For lo, I begin to bring evil on this city that is called by my name, and shall ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished, for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the Lord of hosts.' They shall have the bottom.

5. In the meantime God's people have his love, their sins are pardoned, they are admitted into communion with him; and God's mercy and favour to his people must not be judged by temporal accidents: Ps. 17:14, 15, 'From men which are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, whose bellies thou fillest with thy hid treasures; they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' Christ gave his purse to Judas, but his spirit to the other disciples.

Object. But God deserteth them; his people complain of it: Isa. 59:14, 'But Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath

forgotten me,' Yea, Christ himself, Mat. 27:46, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'

Ans. 1. There is a distinct consideration of Christ, for he was to bear our sorrows: Isa. 53:4, 'Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows;' to be forsaken for a while, that we might be received for ever.

2. God's people are mistaken; the saints complain without a cause. Sense maketh lies of God: Ps. 31:22, 'For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes; nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplication when I cried unto thee;' Ps. 77:9, 10, 'Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? And I said, This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.' The disciples had Christ near them when they knew it not: Luke 24:16, 'Their eyes were holden, that they could not know him.'

3. Though they are forsaken for a while, yet not for ever: Isa. 54:7, 8, 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercy will I gather thee. In a little wrath I have hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.'

Use. Do not say God is a hard master. When the compute is rightly made, and you trace his providence through all the passages of your lives, there is more good than evil. Jacob giveth an account of his life: Gen. 48:15, 16, 'God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads.' So may others say.

Doct. 2. God's accustomed goodness and gracious dispensations to his people throughout all ages should encourage us in waiting upon

him and praying to him.

This emboldeneth me, that all thy servants in all ages have found thee gracious and merciful unto them.

1. From God's unchangeableness. He will not leave his old wont; he is where he was at first: Isa. 59:1, 'Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that he cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear;' Mal. 3:6, 'For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' He is the same that ever he was.

2. All his people stand upon the same terms; therefore what he will do for one, he will do for another. God's love is the same; he is alike affected to all his children; his saints now are as dear to him as ever: Ps. 149:4, 'For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people; he will beautify the meek with salvation.' They have the same covenant, it is a common charter: Acts 2:39, 'For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.' The same Redeemer: 1 Cor. 1:2, 'To them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours;' Rom. 3:22, 'Even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference.' One hath not a more worthy Christ than another; faith is as acceptable as ever: 2 Peter 1:1, 'To them that have obtained like precious faith.' They are interested in the same privileges, promises, gifts, and rewards.

Use 1. Examples and instances of God's mercy should confirm us. It is not agreeable to God's nature and practice to forsake his people, or to be deaf to their prayers: Ps. 22:4, 5, 'Our fathers trusted in thee, they trusted in thee, and thou didst deliver them; they cried unto thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not

confounded.' None of his people ever sought him in vain. From the beginning of the world to this day, God hath been gracious: Ps. 9:10, 'For they that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.' No age can give an instance to the contrary; therefore mark the usual dealings of God with his children: What was said to them was for the establishment of our comfort and hope: Rom. 4:23, 24, 'Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him, but for us also to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;' compared with Gen. 15:6, 'And he believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness.' God's word is a book of precedents, as a painter's masterpiece is hung out to invite custom.

2. Let us be sure we be of this number. If there be conformity to them in affection, there will be in consolation; if in grace, then in privileges: Ps. 145:18–20, 'The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He shall fulfil the desire of them that fear him, he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The Lord preserveth all them that love him.'

Doct. 3. We should beg the favour of God's people.

Common things should not satisfy a child of God. He must have what is peculiar to the saints: Ps. 106:4, 5, 'Remember me, O Lord, with the favour thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.' Nothing will satisfy the people of God but his special love; they have a new nature that must be pleased, a great, noble, and divine end to be promoted, which is to enjoy God; the creatures serve not for that.

Common men are put off with common mercies; these they may have and perish.

Use. Let us be of this temper. Men commonly think that God looketh upon those whom he blesseth with a large increase of temporal things, that he is merciful to those that never see evil, nor feel pain or want. David was not of this mind; he would have God deal with him as with his friends and favourites; he leaveth it to God how to express his mercy, who only knoweth what is best for us; only he beggeth the fruits of his special love. The heart is earthly and worldly when spiritual things are not valued above all the glory and plenty of the world. Our condition is under a curse without these; in these Christ showed his love: Acts 3:26, 'Unto you first God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.' He died not to make us rich, honourable, great, but for remission of sin. This is a solid ground of rejoicing; this abideth for ever.

Doct. 4. We must not affect singularity of dispensations, but be content to be dealt with as others of God's children have been dealt with before us.

We must not expect to go to heaven without difficulties: 1 Peter 5:9, 'Knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.' We are not alone; our lot is no harder than others of God's holy ones. All have gone to heaven this way. God will so manifest himself to us, that still there may be room for faith and patience.

## SERMON CXLVII

### **Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.— VER. 133**

IN the former verse the prophet had begged for a comfortable look from God, and some renewed taste of his mercy; he now amplifies his request, and as he there prayed for pardoning mercy, so now for sanctifying grace. Many that seek mercy to deliver them from the guilt of sin, do not desire grace to deliver them from the power of it; and yet the one is as necessary as the other, that we may not offend God, as well as that sin may not hurt us. To pray only for pardoning mercy would seem to be a praying only for our own interest, and not for God's. God's interest lies in our subjection, our interest lies in impunity and freedom from the curse of the law and the flames of hell; and let me tell you that our interest is not sufficiently provided for till the heart be sanctified as well as sin pardoned; for an unholy creature can never be happy, that is clear against the course of all the Lord's wise proceedings. He hath settled everything, and put it into its proper place, and a sinful creature can never enjoy impunity; therefore, as we need to pray, Lord, be merciful to us, so, Lord, 'order my steps in thy word,' &c.

In this prayer there are two branches:—

1. A petition for grace for the regulation of his life, order my steps according to thy word.
2. A deprecation of the contrary evil, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

The first part of his prayer is by way of prevention, the second is by way of reserve; and the connection of both doth in effect speak thus, Lord, if thou dost not order my goings, surely iniquity will have dominion over me. Therefore he first prays that God will not permit him to err; or if the Lord should by his righteous providence permit him to fall, that he might return again to his duty, that sin may not wholly and clearly carry it in his heart, and have a full power over him: Lord, 'order my steps according to thy word;' but if I should fail, 'Let not any iniquity have dominion over me.' The same method is used Ps. 19:13, 'Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins.' He doth desire absolutely to be kept from presumptuous sins; but then he adds by way of supposition and reserve, that if he could not by reason of his naughty heart be kept from them, yet that they might not have full power and dominion over him. Rabbi David Kimchi indeed refers the former branch to the affirmative precept, 'order my steps according to thy word;' and the latter branch to the negative precept: and so he makes the meaning to be this, Let me neither break thy laws by omitting any duty or committing any sin. You may take that division of the words if you will.

In the former branch observe the act of grace, order; the subject, my steps; the rule, thy word.

In the latter branch observe the evil deprecated, the dominion of sin, the universality or degree of the deprecation, let not any iniquity, neither great nor small sins, take the throne by turns.

To explain these circumstances, the act of grace, 'order.' The Septuagint, κατευθυνον, direct or set straight my steps. Junius hath it, institute, frame or appoint; and Ainsworth hath it, firmly direct; for indeed the word signifies to instruct, order, and establish. We are ignorant and apt to err, therefore God must instruct us; we are



various and uncertain in our motions, therefore God must order us in a way of obedience, and reduce us into a settled course and method, that all may be done in a subordination to our great end; for order respects that. And we are soon discouraged, therefore God must support and establish us: so firmly direct, that thou mayest establish our steps according to thy word.

The subject is, 'my steps.' Because the affections are the seat of the soul, by which it walks out after the object represented, the understanding represents and the will chooseth; therefore some would limit these steps to the affections. I think it compriseth all the actions of the reasonable creature, that no thoughts, no deeds, no counsels, no enterprises of his might transgress the limits of God's word.

For the rule, 'In thy word.' The Septuagint, κατὰ τὸ λόγιόν σου, according to thy oracle. However the phrase is to be noted, 'In thy word;' not only according to this rule, but in this path. The sum is this: Lord, thou hast invited me to walk in thy word; now direct me, strengthen me to walk in it, and let all my motions and my actions keep within the compass of it.

For the other part, 'Let not any iniquity have dominion over me.' Because the Septuagint reads, μὴ κατακυριεύσάτω μου πᾶσα ἀνομία; and out of them the vulgar, 'Let not all iniquity tyrannise over me,' some have conceived the sense to be, let me not be trampled upon, not oppressed by all kind of wrong and all kind of injustice; as if he pleaded here to be kept from the tyranny of his enemies. But this is not probable, and other scriptures that are parallel to this, where the like expression is used, will not permit such a sense; and therefore he saith, Let not any or every iniquity have dominion over me. Why? Because sins take the throne by turns. Sometimes a man finds this

sin and sometimes that sin in the throne, and sometimes strange sins that we little think of may get a great power over the heart, even those that we fear least many times may steal into the throne.

From the first branch observe—

Doct. 1. That there is a constant daily necessity of grace to direct and order our motions and actions according to the word of God.

Now, that there is a daily and hourly necessity of grace, is a point that frequently offereth itself in this psalm. I shall briefly dispatch it, therefore, in these propositions:—

1. It appears from the strictness of Christianity. He that would please God had need of a tender conscience, that he may wholly frame himself to do the will of God; and not only take care to be right for the main of his course, but that every particular action should be orderly and regular: for the man of God does not beg grace here to choose a right path, but that his steps may be ordered. This is the strictness of Christianity, that a man should make conscience of every step, that every action should be under the power of grace, and fall within the rules of the word. It needs to be so. Why? Because the word of God is not only a general rule to show us our path, but a particular direction to order our steps: Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path;' to my feet as well as my path. Every action or step of ours is morally considered in its own tendency, either a step to heaven or hell; if good, a step to heaven; if evil, a step to hell: therefore we had need make conscience of our steps. Besides, if we do not make conscience of our steps, we shall not make conscience of our way; for he that is not faithful in a little, will not be faithful in much. Every wry step is so far out of the way, and the more we persist in it the more we wander. Therefore see what is required of Christians: 1 Peter 1:15, 'Be holy,' ἐν πάση

ἀναστροφῆ, in every creek and turning of your lives, 'In all manner of conversation.' A man that would approve himself to God, must be good in all conditions, in all his businesses, affairs, all ages of his life, young or old, in actions civil, sacred; if his condition be prosperous or adverse; when in adversity or prosperity, he must carry himself as a Christian; he ought still to approve himself to be a hater of sin, and a lover of what God loves. In all his affairs, not only in his religious actions, but in his civil and common actions. Godliness is not a holiday suit, but an apparel that is of constant wearing; and therefore a Christian is to show himself a Christian in all things, though especially in those things which are solemn and most weighty; a Christian in his prayers, a Christian in his business, in his recreation, in his meals, a Christian in the disposal of himself and condition, a Christian in all his converses. I lay this for a foundation. Certainly here are steps spoken of. The holy man would have them ordered, and that by the strictness of Christianity; so that no one particular action must allowedly be sinful. You see what need there is of direction. Careless and slight spirits, that only look upon Christianity in the lump, they think that truths are few and easy, and that the art of holy living, is soon learned, and they do not see a need of this ordering our ways, and to be willing to please God in all things. But those that count the least sin to be a very heavy burthen, a greater evil than the greatest temporal loss, that make it their business to approve themselves to God in all things they put their hands unto, will be earnest and importunate with him for his grace.

2. The necessity of the word of God. Whoever will please God in all things, and will purge his own soul and his life from sin, must take the word of God for his rule and direction. Our lives are not to be framed according to our own fancies, but God's word, where the genuine holiness is recommended to us, and which is the only proper means to work the heart to it. I shall prove that the word of God is

the great rule both to warn us of our dangers and to instruct us in our duties; and so it is the great means to sanctify the heart. I say it is the great rule to warn us of our dangers: Ps. 19:11, 'Moreover, by them is thy servant warned.' This discovers temptations, inconveniences, snares, which otherwise we should never discern. There are many dangers that wait for us on every side. So Ps. 17:4, 'Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.' It is the only proper means to keep us from the paths of the destroyer. Alas! otherwise if we do not strictly consult with his statute and rule, we shall cry up a confederacy with those that cry up a confederacy against God; we shall embrace the temptation which opportunity offers, if he follow the guidance of his deceived and deceiving heart. And the word of God doth only discover our duties to us: Prov. 6:23, 'For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.' Mark, whatever condition we are in, whether in the night, or whether in the day, whether in this or that condition, here we have a lamp and light; here is that which will show us what God requires of us in every state and condition. Now, as this is the only rule, so it is the only appointed means with which God will associate the operation of his grace for the converting and curing of the souls of men; for when God had stated a rule for the creature, it is fit the knowledge of that might be a means of sanctification; so the word is commended to us: John 17:17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth;' if the Holy Ghost will sanctify, if he will beget not an apocryphal and bastardly holiness (that may be by the institutions of men, and rules men prescribe), but a genuine, true holiness, which is acceptable to God; put them into a capacity to serve, love, and enjoy God: Ps. 119:9, 'Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.' A young man, that is in the heat of his lusts, and in the ruff of his sin, is impetuously carried away. How shall he do to break this boisterous violence, and bring

his heart into some competent way of obedience to God? Why, the word of God is the only means; the Lord interposeth by his word, and blesseth his word. Let a man read Seneca, Plato, Plutarch, all the philosophers, he will have but cold and faint respects to holiness and to better things, until he come to be exercised in the word of God. Man is not a vessel that comes newly out of the potter's shop, but he hath a smatch of the old infusion of sin; and he cannot have this taste and tang put out but by the word of God sanctifying his heart and breaking the power of his lusts: Ps. 19:7, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.' We are out of joint, unfit to please and serve God. Now, how shall a man do to get his soul set in joint again, that he may be in a capacity to serve and enjoy God? Why, this restores the soul to a capacity; the Lord blesseth this institution and this means; for it is not bare truth, but instituted truth, with which God will associate the operation of his Spirit. By this word of his, that was indited by the Spirit, and penned by holy men that were moved by the Holy Ghost, he doth join his virtue and power and efficacy of his Spirit to sanctify the souls of men.

3. They that make it their scope and business to please God in all things, and take his word for their rule, their souls will soon see a need for divine direction, and the establishment of his grace. This reason is taken from the temper of the persons that are to walk in this strict way, according to his strict rule; they are such as are naturally blind, and naturally opposite to God: now certainly such need to go to God for direction. I gather that from these words, 'Order my steps.' Every man is a poor blind creature, and hath a heart opposite to the ways of God; he need beg this grace of God, Lord, incline my heart. Every man is a blind creature, partly because our own spirits are blind, crooked, and unstable, that we shall neither consult our rule nor understand our duty, nor like it when it is represented to us, until the Lord doth enlighten us. A man's heart

is naturally blind: 2 Peter 1:9, 'He cannot see afar off,' he hath no skill in spiritual things, 1 Cor. 2:14. The heart is naturally full of darkness, and then this darkness grows upon us, partly by prejudice or custom, and many evil habits: 2 Cor. 4:4, 'The god of this world hath blinded men's eyes.' There are many inordinate affections that increase upon us. So it is then that a man is blind by nature, more blind by custom and inordinate affection, is exceedingly blinded; which have a great influence upon our judgments in all practical cases. Though we should know general rules, yet to bring them down to every particular action is very grievous, and hard to bring the heart to. But you will say, When we have received the Spirit, God hath put his law into our minds, this blindness is cured; therefore why should such as David pray, 'Lord, order my steps,' &c.? Yes, we are cured, but in part, non totaliter. Grace doth heal us but in part, much of the matter that clouded the mind before is yet upon us; and when lusts are awakened by temptations, we strangely forget ourselves, our own reason, our senses, and examples of others; we are misled, so that we know not what to do, unless the Lord order our steps. Well, as we are blind, so we are opposite too. When we know our way, what we should do, yet we are apt to stumble at every stone. Naturally the wisdom of the flesh is opposite: Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God.' And so much as the wisdom of the flesh still remains, we are apt to be discouraged from walking with God according to his strict rule, and in the way that he hath given us, and we are extremely slack, that unless we be quickened by the lively and strengthening light of the Spirit, alas! how soon shall we miscarry! Therefore this ordering is a strengthening against the reluctances of the flesh: Ps. 17:5, 'Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.' Alas! when a man finds a good way, he is either apt to lie down out of laziness, or to stumble and fall, and we cannot keep our footing against temptations. Every man of

experience seeth the need of this. Therefore, Lord, direct me, 'Order my steps.'

4. The reason is taken from the value of the blessing here asked. It is one of the chiefest blessings of his grace and favour to have his illuminating. After he had said, 'Lord, be merciful unto me,' presently follows, 'Lord, order my steps.' To prove this must needs be a great blessing and favour. It will appear out of the words of the text; partly from the word 'order;' it makes our lives orderly and regular. Alas! what a confused, disproportionable thing is a man that is half in and half out with the ways of God! His conversation is not all of a piece, sometimes right and sometimes wrong; there is not that beauty, that harmony, that holiness to be found in them. Solomon tells us, Prov. 26:7, 'The legs of the lame are not equal; so is a parable in the mouth of fools.' Baines on the place saith thus, The man hath knowledge to speak well, but he lives ill; so his conversation is halting, like the legs of the lame. Sometimes his speculative light will incline him to do easy things, but his practical endeavours will carry him another way; there is no even and uniform strain of godliness. Then is a man's conversation ordered, when all is carried on with a fair respect to his last end; for it is the last end that fixeth a man's mind, and cuts off impertinences and inconsistencies, and makes a man's conversation beautiful; otherwise the man is tossed up and down in a various uncertain motion, distracted by a multiplicity of ends and objects that his will is in no composed and settled frame. I remember David prays: Ps. 86:11, 'Unite my heart to fear thy name.' It is a blessed thing when a man is united, when his conversation is all of a piece; and James 1:8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' A divided mind will beget an uncertain life. I say, the last end of our lives doth unite all the parts of it, and there is a regularity and harmony between them. But others, their life is a mere lottery; the fancies by which they are governed are jumbled together by chance,

and they live at peradventure and haphazard, and there is not a comely, entire, uniform order to a blessed end. Again, partly, too, from the reason here, 'Order my steps according to thy word; and let no iniquity have dominion over me.' This will prevent the dominion of sin. Perverse affections are apt to sway us, but when the Lord supplies fresh directions, the tyranny and dominion of sin is prevented and crushed in the egg. Sin usually steals into the throne by insensible degrees; temptations and occasions reduce us to some evil practice. Well, and that produceth another, then do multiplied acts get strength, then they ensnare us; and when once the soul is ensnared then this bondage daily increaseth, and is hard to be broken; for by multiplied acts custom creeps upon us, and that is another nature, and that which was but indifferent at first grows more difficult. As diseases looked to at first are easily cured, otherwise they grow desperate; so sins when they come to a slavish tyranny and custom, they cannot help it. All this is prevented by the seasonable warnings of the Holy Spirit. Partly, too, because this is only vouchsafed to God's special people. God, as he loves any, so he manifests himself to them. This appears out of the text; for in the verse before the text the words run thus, 'Look upon me, and be merciful unto me; as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name;' and what then? 'Order my steps in thy word.' Oh! this is to do good to us, as he useth to do good to them that fear his name. Mark, some have only providence and natural conscience; there are others that have the word, and have an enlightened conscience, that plead God's interest in them; but there are others are honoured so far that they are his people, that have not only his word, but Spirit, to enforce his word upon their hearts. How did Christ declare his love to his people? John 15:15, 'I call you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.' There is God's love declared, when he shows us his whole will, when he doth guide us in all his ways; this is the favour of his people: Ps. 25:14, 'The secret of



the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant.' There is the great privilege that God vouchsafes to his peculiar people; they know the mind of God more than others do, and in all doubtful debates and uncertain controversies they are not left in the dark: Mark 4:11, 'Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God.' David surely found such direction to be a very special blessing. Again, another argument from the text that this must needs be a very great blessing, partly because it helpeth us in our way to true happiness. I gather that from the word 'steps;' for all motion hath a term to which it tends, and every journey hath its period. Now, whither doth the path of the word lead us, but to God, and to the everlasting enjoyment of him? Oh! here they have an infallible direction that they cannot miscarry in so great an affair as this is, as the getting home to God. Surely that is a great blessing. I remember David saith, Ps. 73:24, 'Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterwards receive me unto glory.' They that wait upon God's direction are sure to be received into his heavenly glory; their steps are directed for the present, and they may be confident that at length they shall get home to God; for God will accept of what he hath ordered. You are sure God will take pleasure in you when you walk according to his direction. So you see the need from the value of this blessing.

5. Consideration, that the children of God are sensible of their need of it, that they cannot choose but pray for it. I take this from the very form of the words: 'Lord, order my steps.' It is a prayer from the man of God. They seek it humbly and earnestly, therefore they shall find it. They that make their bosom their oracle, and wit their counsellor, God is disengaged from being their guide; they need him not, but the snares they run into will soon show how much they need him. But the children of God need him, therefore they shall find it: Prov. 3:6, 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' You

should ever go to God for the direction of your way, then God will not disappoint you, nor defeat your expectations: Ps. 85:13, 'Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps.' Sometimes we wander, turn aside, and walk out of the right way; at other times we fall and stumble in the right way; but the Lord will set us in the paths of his steps.

Use. To press us to seek this great privilege of God, beg of the Lord continually to order your steps according to his word. Alas! evil may surprise you before you are aware. Little did David think danger was so near him when he walked upon his terrace; he gave leave to his eye to wander, and his eye fired his heart. Every morning be with God about this business: Ps. 5:3, 'O Lord, in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.' You need not only protection against dangers, but direction against evils and snares. As we seek for protection in the night, so in the morning, prayer is for the direction of the day. Nay, we need not go to God in the morning, but all the day long: Ps. 25:5, 'On thee do I wait all the day.' Beg of him that you may not miscarry, but carry yourselves humbly and prudently, and may do nothing that is contrary to the will of God and his grace, but that the Lord would support and guide you continually. There is one argument that may mightily encourage you in praying. Consider your covenant interest in God doth establish this blessing, as the saints always plead the relation: Ps. 25:5, 'Lead me in thy truth, and teach me; for thou art the God of my salvation;' Ps. 143:10, 'Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God;' Ps. 48:14, 'For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.' To be a God to any is to be a guide; for to a people in covenant, God makes over his whole self. Now in God there are considerable these three great attributes—his wisdom, power, and goodness. Look, as God by virtue of his power is all-sufficient against all dangers, and by virtue of his goodness is a fountain of everlasting

happiness, so also by his wisdom is a fountain of all goodness to guide and direct us. Now as God hath engaged all his goodness to make us as happy as heart can wish, and his power to defend and maintain us, so all his wisdom to guide and direct us.

## **SERMON CXLVIII**

### **And let not any iniquity have dominion over me.—VER. 133**

FOR the second branch of the prayer I observe—

Doct. 2. That the dominion of sin is a great evil, and ought earnestly to be deprecated, even by the children of God.

1. What is the dominion of sin.
2. that it is a great evil.
3. Why the saints should deprecate this evil.

First, What is the dominion of sin? It may be known by some distinctions.

1. There is a dominion of sin that is gross and sensible, and a dominion of sin that is more secret and close.

[1.] More gross and sensible. For though sin do reign in every one by nature, yet this dominion more sensibly appears in some than others, who are given up to be visibly under the dominion of sin, as the just fruit of their voluntary living under that yoke; and usually these are set forth as a warning to the rest of the world; God hangs them up in

chains of darkness in the sight of men, as an instance of this woful slavery, that every man that seeth them, and is acquainted with their course of life, may say without breach of charity, There goes one that declares himself to be a servant of sin. This is either to sin in general, or to some particular sin.

(1.) To sin in general. He, whosoever he be, that, instead of trembling at God's word, scoffeth at it, and maketh more account of this world than of the will of God, of the fashions of men than of God's word, and thinketh the scorn of a base worm that would deride him for godliness a greater terror than the wrath of God, and the love of his carnal company a greater happiness than communion with Christ, and instead of working out his salvation with fear and trembling, runneth into all excess of riot, and carelessly neglecteth his precious soul, while he pampereth his frail body, and doth voluntarily and ordinarily leave the boat to the stream, give up himself to serve his corruption without resistance or crying to Christ for help, this man is without dispute, and in the eye of the world a slave to sin: Rom. 6:16, 'Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?' It is an apparent case. A man that giveth up himself to go on in the ways of his own heart, restraining himself in nothing which it affects, he is one of sin's slaves. So saith our Lord Christ: John 8:34, 'Verily, verily I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.' He needeth no further doubt nor debate about the matter. He that goeth on in a trade of sin, and maketh that his work and business in the world, without serious looking after the saving of his soul, is one in whom sin reigneth.

(2.) So some particular sins. As we have instances of carnal wretches in general, so of some poor captive souls that remain under the full power and tyranny of this or that lust, and are so remarkable for

their slavery and bondage under it that the world will point at them and say, There goeth a glutton, a drunkard, an adulterer, or covetous worldling, a proud envious person. Their sin is broken out into some filthy sore or scab that is visible to every eye, either their covetousness or gluttony or ambitious affectation of worldly greatness, one whose god is his belly, who is a slave to appetite: 2 Peter 2:19, 'For of whom a man is overcome, of the same he is brought in bondage.' They grow proverbial for giving up themselves wholly to such a conquering and prevailing lust. As in the natural man several men have their distinct excellences, some are famous for a strong sight, some for a quick ear, some for a nimble tongue, some for agility of body; so these for notable excesses in some corruption. Or as the saints of God are eminent for some special graces, as Abraham for faith, Moses for meekness, Job for patience, and Joseph for chastity, and Paul for zeal, Timothy for temperance; so these have their notorious and contrary blemishes.

[2.] There is a more secret and close dominion of sin, that is varnished over with a fair appearance. Men have many good qualities and no notorious blemishes; but yet some sensitive, good, and created thing sitteth nearest the heart, and occupieth the room and place of God, that is loved, respected, served instead of God, or more than God. That which is our chiefest good and last end is our god, or occupieth the room of God. So our Lord telleth us; Mat. 6:24, 'No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or will hold to the one and despise the other: ye cannot serve God and mammon;' and John 5:44, 'How can ye believe, that seek honour one from another, and not the honour that cometh from God only?' and Luke 14:26, 'If a man come to me, and hate not father and mother,' &c. We must be dead not only to carnal pleasure but to credit, estate, yea, life and all. It must not sit nearest the heart, nor bring it under its command and power: 1 Cor. 6:12, 'All things are

lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.' We are besotted and bewitched with some created thing, that we cannot part with it, or leave it for God's sake, or notwithstanding all the mischief it is to the interest of his soul. Though a man serveth it cunningly, closely, and by a cleanly conveyance, yet all his religion is but either to hide or feed his lust.

2. Distinction. There is a predominancy of one sin over another, and a predominancy of sin over grace. In the first sense, renewed men may be said to have some reigning corruption or predominant sin, namely, in comparison of other sins. That such predominant sins they have appeareth by the great sway and power they bear in commanding other evils to be either committed or forborne, accordingly as they contribute to their advancement; as a wen or a strain draweth all the noxious humours to itself. So it appeareth by the violent and frequent relapses of the saints into them, or their unwillingness to admit of admonition and reproof for them, or their falling into them out of an inward propensity, when outward temptations are none, or weak, or very few; some sins that are less mortified than others, or unto which they are carried by a natural inclination, constitution, or education. Thus David had his iniquity, Ps. 18:23, whether it were hastiness or distrust of the promise, or an inclination to revenge himself. Some sins that men favour most, and are most urgent and importunate upon them, and steal away their hearts most from God; the great pond into which other rivulets or streams of iniquity do empty themselves; that sin that outgroweth all the rest, as the tall tree taketh away the nourishment from the under shrubs; that which is loved and delighted in above other sins; and when other sins will not prevail, the devil sets this a-work; as the disciples looked upon the disciple whom Jesus loved; when Christ told them that one of them should betray him, Simon Peter beckoned to him that he should ask who it was of whom he spake, John 13:23,

24. Well, then, in regard of other sins, one may reign and sit in the throne of the heart, be beloved more than another, but not in regard of predominancy over grace; for that is contrary to the new nature, that sin should have the upper hand constantly and universally in the soul: for any one thing, though never so lawful in itself, habitually loved more than God, will not stand with sincerity, Luke 14:26. If not our natural comforts, certainly not our carnal lusts. To love anything apart from Christ, or against Christ, or above Christ, is a dispossessing Christ, or casting him out of the throne.

3. Distinction. There is a twofold prevalency and dominion of sin—actual or habitual; actual is only for the time, habitual for a constancy. Though a regenerate man be not one that lets sin reign over him habitually, yet too often doth sin reign over him actually as to some particular act of sin.

[1.] The habitual reign of sin may be known by the general frame and state of the heart and life, where it is constantly yielded unto, or not opposed, but breaketh out without control, and beareth sway with delight. Men give the bridle to sin, and let it lead them where they will. That is *peccatum regnans, cui homo nec vult, nec potest resistere*, so Coppen. The sinner neither can nor will resist, *non potest*, because usually after many lapses God giveth up men unto penal or judicial hardness of heart. But he is willingly taking these bonds and chains upon himself. Such are said, 2 Peter 3:3, 'To walk after their own lusts;' to 'live in sin,' Rom. 6:2; to be 'dead in trespasses and sins,' Eph. 2:1; to 'serve divers lusts and pleasures,' Titus 3:3; to 'draw on iniquity with cart ropes,' Isa. 5:18. Such as addict and give over themselves to a trade of sin with delight and full consent.

[2.] Actually, when we do that which is evil against our consciences, or yield *pro hic et nunc* to obey sin in the lusts thereof; when it gaineth our consent for the time, but the general frame and state of the heart is against it. In short, when sin is perfected into some evil action, or (in the apostle's speech) when lust hath conceived and brought forth sin, James 2:15; that is, some heinous and enormous offence. At that time, no question it hath the upper hand, and carrieth it from grace, and the flesh doth show itself in them more than the spirit. A man may please a lesser friend before a greater in an act or two. Every presumptuous act doth for that time put the sceptre into sin's hand. Note, that both predominants spoken of in the former distinction, and the actual reign of sin in this, do much prejudice a Christian, waste his conscience, hinder his joy of faith; and if not guarded, and we do not take up in time, or if often, cannot be excused from habitual reign. They are rare by the violence of a great temptation, unlikely acts, as for a hen to bring forth the egg of a crow.

4. The next distinction is of sins reigning with a full and plenary consent, and with reluctancy and contradiction; as Herod reigned over the Jews for many years by mere force, they opposing him and contradicting him, but afterwards willingly consented to his government: so sin reigneth in some, who readily, willingly obey the lusts thereof, and take its bonds and chains upon them. And on the godly it doth sometimes prevail, yet not quietly and without blows: 'The evil which I hate that do I,' Rom. 7:15. They are in combat and conflict with it. The virgin that cried out was innocent; it was a ravishment, not a consent, *peccatum patitur, non facit*, as Bernard. The seed of God is disliking and opposing, 1 John 3:9. They are sometimes foiled, but they keep up their resistance. Sin gets the mastery in some acts, but as a tyrant, not a lawful possessor. They groan under that oppression, ever strive for liberty and freedom, and



in time recover it. Chrysostom hath an expression on that of Rom. 6:12, 'Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies,' &c., οὐκ εἶπε μὴ τυραννεῖτο, ἀλλὰ μὴ βασιλευέτω. Sin will play the tyrant in the best heart, but let it not have a quiet reign. It will take advantage of present distempers and difficulties; it may encroach upon us, but it hath not our hearts: whereas it is otherwise if a man be not in arms against it, but liveth in peace and good contentment under the vigour and life of his lusts; there is no opposition unless it be some checks of a natural conscience, or a few thoughts of fear and shame, or some temporal mischief and inconvenience; no opposition of a renewed heart, no hatred of it and opposition as it is an offence to God; then your condition is evil.

Secondly, That it is a great evil, &c. It must needs be so—

1. Because it is a renouncing of the government of Christ. We transfer the kingdom from him to Satan, and take the sceptre out of his hands, when we give way to the reign of sin. What though we do not formally intend this, yet virtually we do so, and so God will account it. It is *finis operis*, though not *operantis*. Look, as the setting up of a usurper is the rejection of the lawful king, so the setting up of sin is the setting up of Satan, John 8:44, and by consequence a laying aside of Christ; for every degree of service done to him includeth a like degree or portion of treason and infidelity to Christ. For a man cannot serve two masters, Mat. 6:24, cannot have two chief goods at the same time; therefore he that cleaveth to the one refuseth the other. If you cleave to sin, you renounce Christ; and though we profess Christ to be our Lord, that will not help the matter, Mat. 6:21; we are, for all that, as true bondmen to Satan as the heathen that offered sacrifice to him. A drunken or wanton Christian giveth the devil as much interest in him as those that sacrificed to Bacchus or Priapus or Venus; for he doth as absolutely dispose and command

your affections as he did theirs: you are his by possession and occupation; the bond of your servitude to Satan is altogether as firm and strong as their rites of worship. Now we that know Christ's right both by purchase and covenant, cannot but know what a great sin this is. By purchase we are his: 1 Cor. 6:19, 20, 'Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price.' The buyer hath a power over what he hath bought. We were lost and sold; we sold ourselves against all right and justice, and Christ was pleased to redeem us, and that with no slight thing, but with his own blood, 1 Peter 1:18, 19. How can you look your Redeemer in the face at the last day? If you have any sense and belief of Christian mysteries, you should be afraid to rob Christ of his purchase: 1 Cor. 6:15, 'Shall I take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.' He hath bought you to this very end, that you may be no longer under the slavery of sin, but under his blessed government and the sceptre of his Spirit: Titus 2:14, 'He hath redeemed us from all iniquity.' This was his end, to set us at liberty, and to free us from our sins; therefore, for us to despise the benefit, and to count our bondage a delight, yea, to build up that which he came to destroy; this is as great an affront to Christ as can be. But we are not only his by purchase, but his by covenant: Ezek. 16:8, 'I entered into a covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine.' This was ratified in baptism, where we dedicated ourselves to the Lord's use and service; and shall we rescind our baptismal vows, and give the sovereignty to another, after we have resigned ourselves to Christ, and the hands of consecration have passed upon us? When Ananias had dedicated that which was in his power, and kept back part for private use, God struck him dead in the place, Acts 5:5. And if we alienate ourselves, who were Christ's before the consecration, of how much sorer vengeance shall we be guilty? God's complaint was just: Ezek. 16:20, 'Thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast born unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured.' And if Satan hath a full interest in you by doing his

lusts, as he had in them by that rite of worship, is not the wrong done to God the same?

2. It is a sure note of a carnal heart; for it is not only incongruous that a renewed man should let sin reign, but impossible. De jure it ought not, de facto it shall not be. The exhortation and promise: Rom. 6:12, with 14:12, 'Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies.' There is the exhortation; while you have these mortal bodies, sin will dwell in you, but let it not reign over you. God suffereth it to dwell in us for our exercise, not our ruin. Then the promise, ver. 14, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.' Let not, shall not. It is true sin remaineth in the godly, but it reigneth not there. It is *dejectum quodammodo, non ejectum tamen*. Cast down in regard of regency, not cast out in regard of inherency. Like the beasts in Daniel, chap. 7:12, 'They had their dominion taken away, though their lives prolonged for a season;' some degree of life, but their reign broken. The Israelites could not wholly expel the Canaanites, yet they kept them under. There will be pride, earthliness, unbelief, and sensuality dwelling, moving, working in them; but it hath not its wonted power over them. Christ will not reckon men slaves to sin by their having sin in them, nor yet by their daily failings and infirmities, or by their falling now and then into foul faults by the violence of a temptation, unless they make a constant trade of sin, and be under the dominion of it without control, and set up no course of mortification against it.

3. The reign of sin is so mischievous. Sin, when it once gets the throne, groweth outrageous, and involveth us in many inconveniences ere we can get out again. Therefore they that know the service of sin, as we all do by sad experience, should use all caution that it never bring them into bondage again. The work and wages of sin are very different from God's work and wages. The

apostle compareth them when he dissuadeth them from the reign of sin: Rom. 6:21, 22, 'For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had you then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit to holiness, and the end everlasting life.' You have had full experience of the fruits of sin, of Satan's work; what fruit then? Before you had tasted better things, before you had a contrary principle set up in your hearts; you are ashamed now to think of that course, now you know better things. But what fruit then? Satan's work is drudgery, and his reward death. The devil hath one bad property, which no other master, how cruel soever, hath—to plague and torment them most which have done him most continual and faithful service. Those that have sinned most have most horror, and every degree of service hath a proportionable degree of shame and punishment. He is an unreasonable tyrant in exacting service without rest and intermission. The most cruel oppressors, Turks and infidels, give some rest to their captives; but sin is unsatisfiable. Men spend all their means and all their time and all their strength in pursuit of it; yet all is little enough. And what is the reward of all but death and destruction? Now judge you to whom should we yield obedience, and who hath most right to be sovereign? He who made us and redeemed us, and preserveth us every day, none but he can claim title to us; he to whom we are debtors by so many vows, so many obligations; or else Satan, our worst enemy, who is posting us on to our own destruction?

4. It is so uncomely, and misbecoming the new estate, wherein we have so many helps and encouragements to resist sin.

[1.] For helps, you have an opposite principle to give check to it, the seed of God, or new nature. Since Christ hath put grace into your

hearts to resist sin, it is your duty not to suffer it to be idle and unfruitful: Rom. 6:11, 12, 'Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.' You want no ability to encourage; you have an observing witness to give check to it, the Spirit of God, who will help you in this work, Rom. 8:13. He will be your second; neither we without the Spirit, nor the Spirit without us. There is a life and power goeth along with every gospel truth. Laziness pretendeth want of power; but what is too hard for the Spirit? Then—

[2.] For encouragement. In every war are two notable encouragements—goodness of the quarrel, and hopes of victory; as David, 1 Sam. 17:36. We have these in our conflict and combat with sin. (1.) Our quarrel and Our cause is good; it is the quarrel of the Lord of hosts which you fight. We stand with Christ our redeemer, who came, ἵνα λύσῃ, that he might destroy the works of the devil. He hath begun the battle; we do but labour to keep under that enemy which Christ hath begun to slay and destroy. Sin is not only an enemy to us, but to him. It is against him, and hindereth his glory in the world, and the subjection of his creatures and servants. Were it not for sin, what a glorious potentate would Christ be, even in the judgment of the world? (2.) Hope of the victory. Our strife will end, and it will end well. Those that are really, earnestly striving against sin, are sure to conquer: Rom. 6:14, 'Let not sin reign,' &c. And it shall not; if there be but a likelihood of victory, we are encouraged to fight. Here a Christian may triumph before the victory. Non, œque gloriatur accinctus, ac discinctus. 1 Kings 20:11, 'Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.' There will come a good and happy issue in the end, even a conquest of sin. For the present we overcome it in part; it shall not finally and totally overcome us in this world; and shortly all strife will be over: Rom.

16:20, 'The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.' It is but a little while, and we shall receive the crown, and triumph over all our enemies.

Thirdly, Why the saints should deprecate this evil.

1. Because there is sin still in us all. It is a bosom enemy, that is born and bred with us; and therefore it will soon get the advantage of grace, if it be not watched and resisted; as nettles and weeds that are kindly to the soil, will soon choke flowers and better herbs that are planted by care, and grow not of their own accord, when they are neglected, and continually rooted out. We cannot get rid of this cursed inmate till this outer tabernacle be dissolved, and this house of clay crumbled into dust. Our old nature is so inclinable to this slavery, that if God subtract his grace, what shall we do?

2. It is not only in us, but always working and striving for the mastery; it is not as other things, which, as they grow in age, are more quiet and tame; but, Rom. 7:8, 'Sin wrought in me all manner of concupiscence; the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy.' It is not a sleepy, but a working, stirring principle. If it were a dull and inactive habit, the danger were not so great; but it is always exercising and putting forth itself, and seeking to gain an interest in our affections, and a command over all our actions; and therefore, unless we do our part to keep it under, we shall soon revert to our old slavery. Sin must be kept under as a slave, or else it will be above as a tyrant, and domineer.

Once more, the more it acts, the more strength it gets; as all habits are increased by action: for when we have once yielded, we are ready to yield again. Therefore any one sin let alone, yea, that which we least suspect, may bring us into subjection and captivity to the law of

sin, Rom. 7:23. It doth not only make us flexible and yielding to temptations, but it doth urge and impel us thereunto.

Again, this bondage is daily increasing, and more hard to be broken; for by multiplied acts a custom creepeth upon us, which is another nature; and that which might be remedied at first groweth more difficult. Diseases looked to at first are more easy to be cured, whereas otherwise they grow desperate; so sins before hardened into a custom, before they bring us under the power of any creature or comfort which we affect, 2 Cor. 6:12; for then afterwards it cometh to a complete dominion and slavery, so that if a man would, he cannot help it. It behoveth, then, every child of God to do his part, that sin may not reign; for where care is not taken, it certainly will reign.

Use 1. To reprove the security and carelessness of many. David suspected himself, else he would never have made this prayer to God: Lord keep me; 'Let not any iniquity have dominion over me.' And we should all do so that would be safe: Prov. 28:14, 'Happy is the man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.' A constant watchfulness and holy jealousy and self-suspicion will be no burden to you, but a blessing. Sin deceiveth us into hardness of heart for want of taking heed. Many that are secure do not consider their danger, and therefore they are not so careful to watch over themselves, nor so humble as to implore the divine assistance, because they do not consider how soon they may be transported by a naughty heart, and brought under the power and reign of sin. Surely were we as sensible of the danger of the inward man as we are of the outward, we would resist the first motions, and not nourish and foster a temptation as we do. The saints do not tarry till the dead blow cometh, but resist the first strokes of sin; they do not tarry till it pines to death, but resist the first inclinations. An evil inclination, if it be cherished and gratified, gets ground; the longer

we let it alone, the harder will our conflict be, for sin secureth its interest by degrees.

2. It showeth the fearful estate of them that lie under the dominion of sin. But who will own it?

[1.] It is certain that all men in their natural estate are in this condition. Sin doth reign where there is no principle of grace set up against it. The throne is always filled; man's heart cannot lie empty and void. If grace doth not reign, sin reigneth. Natural men are under the power of darkness, Acts 28:18, and Col. 1:13; living in a peaceable subjection to sin; till Christ come to trouble it, all is quiet; wind and tide go together.

[2.] It appeareth by your course. Many will say, 'There is not a just man on earth, that doeth good and sinneth not;' you are sinners as well as we. Ans. There is a difference; though there be not a good man upon earth, that sinneth not, Eccles. 7:20, yet there is a difference. Some have not the spot of God's children, Deut. 32:5. There is a difference between sins: Lev. 13:24–26. God gave the priest under the law direction how to put a difference between leprous persons. So still there is a great deal of difference between numbness and death, and between dimness of sight and blindness, want of sense and want of life, between stumbling into a ditch and throwing ourselves headlong into an ocean. And so there is a difference between infirmities and iniquities, a failing out of ignorance and weakness, or some powerful temptation, and a running headlong into all ungodliness. God's children have their failings, but a burning desire to be freed from them, though others wallow in their sin without any care of a remedy. In one there is a failing in point of duty, in the other a rebellion. Take Judas and Peter; both sinned against their Master; the one denied, the other



betrayed him; the one denied him out of fear, the other betrayed him out of covetousness and greediness of gain; the one plotted his death, the other was surprised on a sudden. There is a great deal of difference between purpose and a surprise; the one wept bitterly, the other is given up to a raging despair. David did not make a trade of adultery, and bathe himself in filthy lusts. Noah was drunk, but not knowing the power of the juice of the grape. They dare not lie in this estate, but seek to get out by repentance.

[3.] Some things may beget caution, and move you to suspect yourselves; that is, when your souls readily comply with the temptation, you are at sin's beck. If it saith, Go, you go; if it saith, Come, you come. It is of great concernment to know what goes to the determining a man's condition, to know at whose beck he is, whether he is at the flesh's or spirit's beck. Ps. 103:20, the godly are described that they hearken unto the voice of his word; so the wicked are those that hearken to the voice of sin. If sin but make a motion, it is a match presently. If ambition bid Absalom rise up against his father, then he will trouble the whole kingdom, it will hurry him to run his father down; if envy bid Cain kill his brother Abel, he will not stick at it; if covetousness bid Achan take a bribe of that which was devoted to the flames, and must be offered as a burnt-offering to God, yet Achan obeys his covetousness; if adultery bids Joseph's mistress tempt her servant, presently she yields. So when a sinner yields, and is led away like a fool to the correction of the stocks. Meadow ground may in a great flood be drowned, but marsh ground is overflowed by every return of the tide; so they cannot cease to sin, every temptation carries them away. When men are impatient of reproof, when they have a privy sore they cannot endure should be touched, if a man speak to them anything to help them on to interpret their condition. Herod must not have his Herodias touched, though he heard John the Baptist gladly in many things. Or when men set up a toleration

and court of faculties in their hearts, and they will have a dispensation: if God will be contented with obedience in some things, they will dispense with other things, pardon for some sins, but not break them off; have an indulgence that they may continue in them, or in vain practices. This shows the reign of sin.

## SERMON CXLIX

### **Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.—VER. 134**

IN the former verse, the man of God had begged grace with respect to internal enemies, to the bosom enemy the flesh, that no sin might have dominion over him; now he beggeth deliverance from external enemies. The saints are not only exercised with their own corruptions, but the malice of wicked men. We have to do both with sin and sinners, with temptations and persecutions; and therefore he desireth first to be kept from sin, and after that from danger and trouble; first from the dominion of sin, and then from the oppression of sinners. Both are a trouble to us; they were a trouble to David; and God can and will in time give us deliverance from both, deliver me from the oppression of man, &c.

In the text we have—

1. A prayer for mercy.
2. A resolution, vow, and promise of duty. The one is inferred out of the other, so will I keep thy precepts.

First, A prayer for mercy, 'Deliver me from the oppression of man.' In the Hebrew it is, from the oppression of Adam, the name of the

first father, for the posterity. This term is put either by way of distinction, aggravation, or diminution.

1. Man by way of distinction. There is the oppression and tyranny of the devil and sin; but the Psalmist doth not mean that now. *Hominum non dæmonum*, saith Hugo.

2. Man by way of aggravation. *Homo homini lupus*; no creatures so ravenous and destructive to one another as man. It is a shame that one man should oppress another. Beasts do not usually devour those of the same kind, but usually a man's enemies are those of his own household, Mat. 10:36. The nearer we are in bonds of alliance, the greater the hatred. We are of the same stock, and reason should tell every one of us that we should do as we would be done to. Nay, we are of the same religion. *Eodem sanguine Christi glutinati*. We are cemented together by the blood of Christ, which obliges to more brotherly kindness; and if we differ in a few things, to be sure we have cords of alliance and relations enough to love one another more than we do. But for all this there is the oppression of man.

3. Man by way of diminution. And to lessen the fear of this evil, this term 'Adam' is given them, to show their weakness in comparison of God. Thou art God, but they that are so ready and forward to oppress and injure us are but men; thou canst easily overrule their power and break the yoke. I think this consideration chiefest, because of other places: Ps. 10:18, 'Thou wilt judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress.' The oppressors are but men of the earth, a piece of red clay, earth in his composition, earth in his dissolution, frail men, that must within a while be laid in the dust. But it is more emphatically expressed, Isa. 51:12, 13, 'Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord

thy maker, which hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is now the rage of the oppressor?' When thou hast the immortal and almighty God to be thy protector and saviour, shouldest thou be afraid of a weak mortal man, that is but Adam, a little enlivened dust? Within a little while he and all his fury is over and gone.

Secondly, The promise of duty, 'I will keep thy precepts.' Which is a constant observation of all God's commandments, if God would interpose for his rescue. But did David do well to suspend his obedience upon so uncertain a condition? I answer—No; we must not understand it so as if he did indent with God upon those terms and no otherwise; or as if before he had not kept them; and would then begin. No; he would keep them, however, and had kept them; only this would be a new engagement to press him to keep them more constantly, more accurately. Look throughout this psalm, and you shall find David still at his duty whatever his condition be: ver. 51, 'The proud have had me greatly in derision; yet have I not declined from thy law.' There he is scorned, but not discouraged. Ver. 61, 'The hands of the wicked have robbed me; yet have I not forgotten thy law.' There plundered, wasted, stripped of all, yet not discouraged. Ver. 69, 'The proud have forged a lie against me; but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.' There falsely accused, but not discouraged. Ver. 83, 'I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.' There dried up and shrunk into nothing, yet not discouraged. Ver. 87, 'They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.' Ver. 141, 'I am small and despised; yet I do not forget thy precepts.' So that his meaning was, not that he would serve God no longer unless he would deliver him; but the meaning is, he should have a new obligation and

encouragement: this will engage me afresh. He doth aforehand interpose a promise that he would walk with God more closely. From the words thus opened, we have three points:—

1. Deliverance from oppression is a blessing to be sought from the hands of God in prayer.
2. When God delivereth us from the oppression of man, we should be quickened and encouraged in his service.
3. When we are praying for deliverance, we may interpose a promise of obedience.

First, For the first point, that deliverance from oppression is a blessing to be sought from the hands of God in prayer. I shall show it first by answering the question why, and then show you how.

1. Why? The point may be strengthened by these reasons:—

[1.] We have liberty to ask temporal things. Many think it too carnal to pray for health, food and raiment, long life, temporal deliverance. What God hath promised we may lawfully pray for; for a prayer is but a promise put in suit. Now these blessings are adopted into the covenant, as being useful to us in our passage; and therefore we may ask them. What Christ has taught us to pray for, that we may pray for; for he said, 'After this manner pray ye,' Mat. 6:9; and one request is, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' Protection and maintenance we ask, as well as pardon and grace. It conduceth to the honour of God that we should ask these things of him, that we may testify our dependence, and acknowledge his inspection and government over the affairs of the world: Ps. 9:7, 'He hath prepared his throne for judgment.' Courts of justice among men are not always open to hear the plaintiff, but the Lord holdeth court continually; we may come to

the Lord every day. No man's petition and complaint is delayed for an hour. He hath prepared his throne for this end and purpose, to hear the complaints of his people when they are oppressed; therefore we may pray for temporal things.

[2.] Our spiritual welfare is concerned in such temporal deliverances, that we may serve God without impediment, and without distraction. (1.) The oppression of man is an impediment; it taketh us off from many opportunities of service and bringing honour to God; and though God will dispense with us at such a time, yet it is uncomfortable; as God dispensed with David when he was hunted up and down the wilderness: Ps. 63, 84, 42. As Christ biddeth them pray, Mat. 24:20, 'Pray that your flight be not in the winter, or on the sabbath-day.' Though it was lawful, it was grievous; as grievous to the body to have their flight in winter, and grievous to the soul to have it on a sabbath-day, that might call to mind their pleasant opportunities of conversing with God by prayer. When God denieth liberty and opportunity of enjoying and performing the exercises of religion, we are excused from positive duties. But yet it is a great mercy to have our liberty restored, to serve God in peace without distraction, to have a little breathing-time: Acts 19:31, 'Then had the churches rest.' The oppressions and persecutions of men are among the temptations, and may weaken obedience to God; and if not altogether drive us from his service, yet clog our spirits and hinder our cheerfulness and readiness in it: Eccles. 7:7, 'Oppression will make a wise man mad.' It will strangely shake and discompose our spirits, especially as it may be circumstantiated; that is, when we have base indignities put upon us, as when exposed to all manner of insolency and contempt: Ps. 123:4, 'Have mercy upon us, for we are filled with contempt.' Our friends afraid to pity us, Eccles. 4:1. Take it at best, it is no small discouragement and trial to a godly man. Therefore it being so that oppression is ever reckoned among the

temptations, we may pray not to enter into temptation; as Theophylact observeth well on the place, the rather because one way by which God helpeth his people is by taking away the temptation, as well as ministering a supply of grace: Ps. 125:4, 'The rod of the wicked shall not always rest upon the lot of the righteous;' 1 Cor. 10:13, 'But will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.'

[3.] The glory of God is concerned. His people will honour him more if one, especially an eminent one, be delivered from the oppression of man: Ps. 142:7, 'Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about, for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.' They will be flocking about him, and inquiring what experiences of God and his goodness he hath found: 2 Cor. 1:11, 'Helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us, by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf.' Much more when the whole church is delivered: Ps. 51:18, 19, 'Do good in thy good pleasure to Zion; build thou the walls of Jerusalem: thou shalt be pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness,' &c. Every heart will be thinking of honour and praise to God. And besides the honour done to God by his people, God will more discover himself to the world, his justice will be more evidenced: Ps. 9:16, 'The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth.' The world is led by sense; he will not be taken to be a friend to persecutors and oppressors. In short, it is not for the honour of God that his people should be left under oppression, as if he sought not, and cared not for their welfare. You shall see the afflicted condition of the church is called 'the reproach of the heathen,' Ezek. 36:30; and Ezek. 34:29, 'Thou shalt not bear the reproach of the heathen any more.' The heathen would cast this in their teeth, as if their God had no respect to them, or were not able to help them.

[4.] Prayer engageth us to constancy. God's deliverance will be better for us than our own; that is, than those sinful shifts and ways of escape that we can find out. What we ask of God must be had in God's way. It bindeth us to seek no other way of escape than we can commend to God's blessing in prayer. It is said of the saints, Heb. 11:35, 'That they were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might receive a better resurrection.' Would any refuse deliverance when it is tendered to them? Yes, upon such spiteful conditions: they were commanded to do something contrary to the laws of God; therefore they would have God's deliverance, not their own. Every one of them was offered release in the midst of their torments and tortures, if they would yield to the eating of swine's flesh, or that which was forbidden by God.

[5.] Seeking deliverance at the hands of God doth ease the heart of a great deal of trouble, and deliver it from those inordinate affections and afflicting and tormenting passions which otherwise the oppression of man might raise in us; as fear, grief, sorrow, anger, envy, and despair; fear and dread to suffer more, grief and sorrow for what we suffer already, anger and envy against those oppressors by whom we suffer, and despair and impatience because of the continuance of our molestations and sufferings. All these are mischiefs to the soul, and all these are cured by prayer.

(1.) Fear, because of the mightiness of them that oppress, or threaten to oppress. The fear of man we are told is a snare: Prov. 29:25, 'The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.' We are full of distracting and perplexing thoughts, and if we cherish them they will weaken our trust in God and dependence upon his promises; for fear of man and trust in God are there opposed. Nay, the mischief will not stop there; for they that trust not God can never be true to him: it will destroy our trust in God, and



then we shall run to carnal shifts, and so fear men more than God, do things displeasing to God for fear of being oppressed by men; so that you may be soon sensible of the mischief of carnal fear. But how shall we ease our hearts of this burden by prayer? Partly because then we use our fear aright when it only driveth us to seek his protection; that is the commendable use of fear: 2 Chron. 20:3, 'Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord.' When Jacob feared Esau, he set himself to wrestle with God, Gen. 32. And partly because prayer discovereth a higher object of fear: Eccles. 5:8, 'There is a higher than the highest regardeth, and there be higher than they.' And so the fear of God driveth out the fear of man, as a great nail driveth out the less. In God's strength we may defy enemies: Ps. 27:1, 'The Lord is my light and salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?' We can set God against the creature, and this will quell our fears of them. When we set ourselves against them, our interest against theirs, we may see cause to fear; but set God against them and engage him, and you have no cause to fear. Then—

(2.) For grief and sorrow. It cloggeth the heart, and stayeth the wheels, so that we drive on heavily in the spiritual life. Worldly sorrow worketh death, 2 Cor. 7:10. It brings on deadness and hardness of heart, and quenched all our vigour: Prov. 15:13, 'By sorrow of heart the spirit is broken.' A dead and heavy heart doth little to the purpose for God. Now how shall we get rid of this? The cure is by prayer; for vent giveth ease to all our passions: Phil. 4:6, 'Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.' As when wind is gotten into the caverns of the earth, it causeth terrible convulsions and earthquakes till it get a vent; so the mind is eased when we can pour out our care into the bosom of God, and wait till deliverance cometh from above. Prayer showeth there is some life in

our affairs, that our right for the present is not dead, but sleeps; there is a God in heaven, that heareth our groans, and is sensible of our sorrows, and then we may say, Ps. 42:5, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him,' &c. Prayer is the old refuge of the saints, and the blessed means to pluck up their spirits. Whilst there is a God in heaven, we are not at an utter loss. So ver. 9, 'I will say unto God, my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppressor?' David first reasoned with himself, yet the distemper continued; but when he comes to reason the case with God in prayer, then he gets ease.

(3.) The violent passions of anger, envy, and revenge against oppressors, these are all naught, and do a world of mischief. Anger discomposeth us, and transports the soul into uncomely motions against God and men, makes us fret and malcontent; it tempts us to atheism, Ps. 73, maketh us weary of well-doing, Ps. 37, tempts us to imitation of their wicked course. The devil worketh much upon spleen and stomach and discontent, and we are apt to run into these disorders. Now how shall we do to get rid of these distempers? By prayer, in which we get a sight and prospect of the other world, and then these things will seem nothing to us; acquaint ourselves with God, and the process of his providence, and so we shall see an end of things, Ps. 73:17; then all is quiet. And as for revenge, too, that is an effect of the former; when we plead before God, we see the justice of what is unjust, and hard dealing from men to be justly inflicted by God; and so the heart is calmed: 'The Lord bid him curse,' 2 Sam. 16:11. There is reason enough for this dispensation in the upper tribunal, whereunto when we appeal we should render no man evil for evil, Rom. 12:17. We ought not, we need not, it is God's work: Deut. 32:35, 'Vengeance and recompense are mine.' Nay, our very praying is a committing ourselves to him that judgeth righteously, 1

Peter 2:23. In prayer we vent our zeal, and that hindereth us from venting our carnal passions. It is a resignation of our person and cause to him under unjust sufferings, not out of malice, desiring judgment and vengeance on persecutors; that is to make God the executioner of our lusts, to establish that which we would prevent in prayer. But saints in prayer labour only to show their faith and meekness, and to leave things to the righteous judge, to do what is for his own glory, and their good.

(4.) For the other evil, impatience and despair, it is a very great evil, and contrary to faith and hope and dependence, which the Christian religion doth mainly establish; and maketh way for the worst evils, either total apostasy from God, or atheism, or self-destruction. Now this is very incident to us when oppressions lie long upon us: 2 Kings 6:33, 'This evil is from the Lord: why should I wait on the Lord any longer?' So Jer. 2:25, 'But thou saidst, There is no hope.' Desperately! 'No; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go;' I will take my own course; there is no hope; it is in vain to wait upon the Lord any longer. And if things do not grow to that height, yet the children of God grow weary and faint in their minds, Heb. 12:3. Now we keep afoot some hope while we have a heart to call upon God. The suit is still depending in the court of heaven when it seems to be over on earth; and we see there is cause to wait for God's answer. He that shall come, will come, Hab. 2:3. God may tarry long, but will never come too late. Thus why.

2. But how is this to be asked?

[1.] This is not to be asked in the first place, as our main blessing: Mat. 6:33, 'First seek the kingdom of God.' If we seek our ease and temporal felicity only, that prayer is like a brutish cry: Hosea 7:14, 'They howled upon their beds for corn and wine.' A dog will howl

when he feels anything inconvenient. You will never be freed from murmuring and quarrelling at God's dispensations, and questioning his love, if this be the first thing that you seek, and so your prayers will become your snare. Besides the great dishonour to God, it argues the great disorder of your affections, that you can be content to have anything apart from God: Ps. 105:4, 'Seek ye the Lord and his strength; seek his face evermore.' In all conditions that must be our great request, that we may have the favour of God.

[2.] It must be asked with submission. It is not absolutely promised, nor intrinsically and indispensably necessary to our happiness, but if the Lord see it fit for his own glory and our good. We cannot take it ill if a friend refuse to lend us a sum of money which he knoweth we will lay out to our loss and detriment. God seeth it fit sometimes, for his own glory and our good, to continue us under oppression, rather than take us out of it. There are two acts of providence—relieving and comforting the oppressed, and punishing the oppressors. Sometimes God doth the one without the other, sometimes both together. Sometimes God will only comfort the oppressed; we cry to him in our afflictions, and God will not break the yoke, but give us a supply of strength to bear it: Ps. 138:3, 'In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and hast strengthened me with strength in my soul.' He giveth you strength to bear the burden, if you continue in your integrity. Sometimes God doth punish the oppressor, yet that is no relief and reparation to you; you must bear it, for you are to stand to God's will, and to wait his leisure to free you from it.

[3.] Your end must be that God may be glorified, and that you may serve him more cheerfully. So it is in the text, 'Deliver me from the oppression of man,' then shall 'I keep thy precepts;' Ps. 9:13, 14, 'Have mercy upon me, O Lord; consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death;

that I may show forth all thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Sion: and I will rejoice in thy salvation.' So David beggeth salvation in order to praise. Temporal mercy should not be loved for itself, nor sought for itself; but as we may glorify God by it; that is to be our end. Lord, I seek not my own interest, but thine. If you have a carnal end, you miss: James 4:3, 'Because you ask to consume it upon your lusts,' that we may please the flesh as sweetly and quietly as we did before, live in the height of pomp and splendour, gratify our lusts without disturbance, or see our revenge; or if a mere natural end, the mere conveniency of the outward man, we bespeak our own denial.

[4.] We must pray in faith that God can and is ready to deliver from the oppression of man, and will do so in due time, when it is good for us.

(1.) God can deliver us. Though our oppressors be never so mighty and strong, God can break their power, or change their hearts, or determine their interests, because the omniscieny of God is a great deep. It is a great relief to the soul to consider the several ways that God hath to right us, either by changing the hearts of the persecutors and oppressors: Acts 9:31, 'Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and the comforts of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.' They had nothing to do but to build up one another. When was that? When Paul was converted. He was an active instrument against the church, and God turned his heart; then had the churches rest. Or else the Lord may do it by determining their interests that they shall show favour to his people though their hearts be not changed: Prov. 16:7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh his enemies to be at peace with him.' Enemies, while enemies, may be at peace with us. Please men, and you cannot say God is your friend; but please God, and he maketh your enemies at peace with you. There is much

in the secret chain of providence: Dan. 1:9, 'Now the Lord brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.' What was that favour? To wink at him for doing that which was contrary to the law of their religion. Or else he can break the yoke by some apparent ruining judgments, by which he will defeat all their advantages, either by power or law, rescuing his people out of their hands: Isa. 49:24, 25, 'Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? But thus saith the Lord, The captains of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: he will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and will save thy children.' Whether they plead might or right, when God goeth that way to work, nothing shall let, no power shall be able to detain what God will have delivered and restored. Or it may be by some secret ways God will bring on some judgment: Job 20:26, 'A fire not blown shall consume him;' that is, the oppressor; a curse not invented by those he hath wronged, or any man else, but sent immediately by God. It shall come nobody knoweth how. Therefore we should not be discouraged with unlikelihoods when we go to God, who hath many ways which poor short-sighted creatures cannot foresee.

(2.) He is ready. The love which the Lord hath for his afflicted people will not suffer his justice to be long at quiet. That God is ready to help and deliver, three things will evidence:—

(1st.) It is his nature to pity and show mercy to the oppressed, and to revenge the oppressor. He pitieth the afflictions of them that suffer most justly, and far beneath their desert, from his own hand: Judges 10:16, 'And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord, and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel;' and 2 Kings 14:26, 'For the Lord saw the exceeding bitter affliction of Israel.' How much more will he pity them that are unworthily

oppressed! Isa. 63:9, 'In all their afflictions he was afflicted;' Acts 7:34, 'I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and have heard their groaning,' &c. And the Lord's pitiful nature doth incline him to deliver his people: 'And when the oppressed cry, I will hear them; for I am gracious,' Exod. 22:21–27.

(2dly.) It is his usual practice and custom: Ps. 103:6, 'The Lord executeth judgment and righteousness for all that are oppressed.' If for all, surely for his people. He sits in heaven on purpose to rectify the disorders of men. So Ps. 34:19, 'Many are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all.' God hath a plaister for every wound; God's people plunge themselves into trouble, and his mercy delivereth them out of it.

(3dly.) It is his office as judge of the world: Ps. 94:2, 'Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth; render a reward to the proud: shall not the judge of the earth do right?' Look upon him only in that notion, according to our natural conceptions, as the supreme cause and judge of all things. Again, his office as protector of his people; he is in covenant with them, he is their sun and shield, he is the refuge of the oppressed, his people's refuge in time of trouble, Ps. 9:9; when they have none else to fly to, he will be their refuge.

(3.) He will do it when it is good and necessary; for God hath made promises and repeated promises of deliverance, and surely these are not in vain. If God had spoken but once, we had no reason to doubt; but he telleth us over and over again we should cast our care upon him, and refer all things to him without despondency and distraction of mind: Ps. 9:18, 'For the needy shall not always be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever.'

Use. Instruction to teach us what to do when we are oppressed.

1. Patience. It is the lot of God's children to be often troubled by the world, and hardly used. Satan is the ruler of the darkness of this world, the blind, carnal, malicious, superstitious part of the world; and they cannot away with those that would overturn Satan's kingdom. The good are fewest, and therefore we must look to be oppressed; if there be any breathing-time it is a mercy: 2 Tim. 3:12, 'Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;' Gal. 4:29, 'For as he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even so it is now,' and will be so; we should want our way-mark without it.

2. Let us be prepared to commend our cause to God: Ps. 10:17, 18, 'Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear; to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress.' God prepares the hearts of the humble. How so? The trouble continueth till we are sensible of the misery of the sin, of the cause: Hosea 5:15, 'I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offences, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early.' It is a long time before men can be sensible of the hand of God upon them. Slight spirits are not grieved, but lull themselves asleep, Jer. 5:3. If they have a natural sense of the judgment, they have no sense of sin as the cause; then they fly to human help to be eased of the trouble: Jer. 4:14, 'Wash thy heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved; how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?' When past human help, then seek the favour of God to take up the controversy, 2 Chron. 7:14; when driven to an earnest attendance upon God, and all probabilities spent; we have no help but what heaven and a promise can afford, and upon these terms continue our importunity, Luke 18:7–18. It is a long time ere men will lay it to heart, to see his hand and seek to him for relief.



3. When you have prayed, then wait. It is a good sign when we are enlarged in prayer, and encouraged to wait. Enlarged to pray; for when God hath a mind to work, he sets the Spirit of prayer a-work. God will not pour out his Spirit in vain; the Spirit knoweth the deep things of God: Ps. 50:15, 'Call upon me in a time of trouble, and I will deliver thee.' So when we are encouraged to wait. How can our prayers be heard when we regard them not ourselves, and expect no issue? How should God hear when we pray out of course, and do not think our prayers worth the regarding? Ps. 85:8, 'I will hearken what God the Lord will speak,' &c.; Ps. 40:1, 'I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined unto me and heard my cry;' Hab. 2:1, 'I will watch to see what he will say.' Look for an answer. God doth not usually disappoint a waiting people.

Secondly, When God delivereth us from the oppression of man, we should be quickened and encouraged in his service.

1. Because every mercy inferreth an answerable duty: 2 Chron. 32:25, 'But Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefit done unto him.' There must be rendering according to receiving.

2. This is the fittest return, partly because it is real, not verbal. The Lord cares not for words; he knows the secret springs of the heart, Isa. 38:9; and see Ps. 50:23. It is good to be speaking good of God's name. This is one way of glorifying, but ordering the conversation aright is that which is most pleasing to him. And partly too because our clogs of fear and sorrow and other impediments are taken away: Ps. 119:32, 'I will run the ways of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart.' This was God's end, to deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, that we may serve him without fear, Luke 1:74, 75. Those wretches that said, Jer. 7:10, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations,' to return to the practices of their vile courses

afresh, did pervert God's end in their deliverance. What use shall we make of such a point in our deep sorrows?

Ans. 1. We are not altogether without this benefit: 2 Chron. 7:12, 'The Lord said, I have heard thy prayer.' Many times God maketh his love conspicuous to his people in a low condition; they are oppressed sore, but not grinded to powder; it is a blessing we are not quite destroyed. Exod. 1:12, The Israelites, the more they were afflicted, the more they multiplied; and the Egyptians were grieved for the children of Israel, that they were not extinguished. God dealeth with us as then he did with them, 2 Sam. 12:7. But I will grant them some deliverance.

2. We are now under the sad effects of our former unthankfulness, and by remembering our duty we may see our sin, Hosea 4:3, 4. Ingratitude and walking unanswerably to received mercy is the great and crying sin of God's people; therefore we should humble ourselves that we did so little good in former times of liberty, that God had so little glory and service from us. Now God by his present providence showeth us the difference: Deut. 28:47, 48, 'Because thou servest not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; therefore thou shalt serve thine enemies,' &c.; 2 Chron. 12:8, 'Nevertheless they shall be his servants, that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.' First we must be humbled for the abuse of former mercies before we seek new.

3. That we may know what to have in our eye, when we are asking for mercies. The end is first in intention, though last in execution. Do not pray to serve thy lusts more freely, nor think how to execute revenge, be quits with those that hate us, nor how we shall be provided for; but what glory and service we may bring to God: Ps.

75:12, 'When I shall receive the congregation, I will judge uprightly.' These mercies must not be abused to licentiousness, or to nourish ourselves in sin or stupid security; but in duty and service.

4. It teacheth us how to make our promises, and oblige ourselves to God. When you come to promise duty and obedience to God, be sure to be sincere and holy; make due provision that it may be so by mortifying the roots of such distempers as will betray us. When a people in a low condition have a real inclination to praise and glorify God by their mercies as soon as they shall receive them, it is an argument God will hear and grant.

Thirdly, But when we are praying for deliverance, we should interpose promises of obedience, as David doth here, 'Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.' (1.) To show there is the ratio dati et accepti, to show the law of giving and receiving is natural to us; it is an ingrafted principle in men's minds. When we think of God's giving, we should think of returning something. An intercourse between God and us is maintained by mercies and duties: not that God needeth, or that we can oblige him, but this qualifieth us. Intercourse is lost when we would receive all and return nothing. (2.) A solemn promise is necessary to excite and quicken our dulness, or a bond upon us, or a bridle to our inconstancy. We cannot unbind ourselves again from our strict obligation to obedience.

Use. Well, then, let us make good the vows of our distress; they must be paid, or else God is mocked: Eccles. 5:4, 'When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed;' Job 22:27, 'Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee; and thou shalt pay thy vows.'

# **SERMON CL**

## **Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes.—VER. 135**

THIS verse is wholly precatory. Most of the verses of this psalm have a prayer with an argument, but here both the branches are petitory. Observe in the words—

1. The blessings prayed for.
2. The order of these petitions.
3. The connection that is between them.

1. The blessings he prayeth for are two—(1.) For God's favour; (2.) For his direction in God's ways; spiritual consolation and increase of sanctification. David could not live out of God's favour nor without his direction; therefore he prays heartily for both.

2. The order of these petitions—first, 'Make thy face to shine;' and then, 'Teach me thy statutes.' God's favour is the fountain of all goodness to his children and servants; and until we have that we can have nothing: there we must begin. They that have not the favour of God are left to their own sway, and their own hearts and counsels; but those whom he loves know his secrets and are guided by his Spirit.

3. The connection. He prays not for one, but for both; for God giveth both together, consolation and direction, and we must seek both together; for we cannot expect God should favour us while we walk in a wrong way and contrary to his will.

Let me speak of the first petition. Where I might observe—

1. The matter of the petition, make thy face to shine.
2. The person, upon me.
3. The character by which he describeth himself, thy servant.

1. As to the matter, 'Make thy face to shine.' It is a metaphor taken from the sun. When the sun shines, and sheds abroad his light and heat and influence, then the creatures are cheered and revived; but when that is obscured, they droop and languish. What the sun is to the outward world, that is God to the saints. Or else here is a metaphor taken from men, that look pleasantly upon those in whom they delight; and so the Lord gives a smile of his gracious countenance upon his people: indeed it alludeth to both; for the allusion to the light and influence of the sun is clear in the word 'shine;' and the allusion to the pleasant countenance of a man upon his child is included in the word 'face.' The phrase may be understood by what is said, Prov. 14:15, 'In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain.' That place will illustrate this we have in hand. Look, what the smiling and pleasing aspect of the king is to those that value and stand in need of his favour, that is the favour of God to the saints. The same form of speech is used in other places; as in the form of the priest's blessing: Num. 6:25, 'The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;' and in that prayer, Ps. 67:1, 'God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us. Selah.' Well, then, the thing begged is a sense of God's love.

2. For whom doth David beg this? For himself, 'Cause thy face to shine upon me;' David, a man after God's own heart. But did he need to put up such a request to God? (1.) Possibly God might seem to neglect him, or to look upon him with an angry countenance, because of sin; and therefore he begs some demonstration of his favour and

good-will. David had his times of darkness and discomfort as well as others, therefore earnestly beggeth for one smile of God's face. (2.) If you look not upon him as under desertion at this time, the words then must be thus interpreted: he begs the continuance and increase of his comfort and sense of God's love. God's manifestations of himself to his people in this world are given out in a different degree, and with great diversity. Our assurance or sense of his love consists not in puncto, an indivisible point; it hath a latitude, it may be more and it may be less, and God's children think they can never have enough of it; therefore David saith, 'Lord, cause thy face to shine.' If it did shine already, the petition intimates the continuance and increase of it.

3. He characteriseth himself by the notion of God's servant; as Ps. 31:16, 'Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; save me, for thy mercies' sake.' We must study to approve ourselves to be the Lord's servants by our obedience. If we would have his face shine Upon us, we must be careful to yield obedience unto him.

The points are four:—

1. The sense of God's favour may be withdrawn for a time from his choicest servants.

2. The children of God, that are sensible of this, cannot be satisfied with this estate, but they will be praying for some beams of love to be darted out upon their souls.

3. They that are sensible of the want or loss of God's favour have liberty with hope and encouragement to sue out this blessing, as David did: 'Lord, make thy face to shine upon thy servant.'

4. God's children, when they beg comfort, they also beg grace to serve him acceptably.

First, The sense of God's favour may be withdrawn for a time from his choicest servants. David puts up this petition in point of comfort. There is a twofold desertion—in appearance and in reality.

1. In appearance only, through the misgivings of our own hearts. We may think God is gone, and hides his face, when there is no such matter, as through inadvertency we may seek what we have in our hands. Thus a child of God thinks he is cast out of the presence of God when all the while he hath a full right and place in his heart. Thus David, Ps. 31:22. We think God hath forgotten us, neglects us, casts us off, hath no respect for us, when in the meantime the Lord is framing an answer of grace for us. One chief cause is misinterpreting God's providence, and our manifold afflictions. The Lord sometimes frowns upon his children, as Joseph upon his brethren, when his affections were very strong; so the Lord covers himself with frowns and anger, the visible appearance of it speaks no otherwise.

2. It may be really when he is angry for sin: Isa. 57:17, 'For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth and smote him; I hid me and was wroth.' As the fathers of our flesh show their anger by whipping and scourging the bodies of their children, so the Father of our spirits by lashing the soul and spirits, by causing them to feel the effects of his angry indignation. Or else withdrawing the spirit of comfort, suspending all the acts and fruits of his love, so that they have not that joyful sense of communion with God as they were wont to have. Now the reasons why God's people may want the light of his countenance are these:—

[1.] God out of sovereignty will exercise us with changes here in the world, even in the inward man; there we have our ebbs and flows,



that we may know earth is not heaven. He hath an eternity wherein to reveal his love, and to communicate himself to his people; therefore he will take a liberty as to temporal dispensations: Isa. 54:8, 'In a little wrath I hid my face from thee, for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.' He hath an everlasting love and kindness for us, therefore here in the world he will exercise us with some uncertainties; as David concealed his love towards his son Absalom, when yet his bowels yearned towards him. Here he takes liberty to do it, because he will make it up in heaven. All your changes shall then be recompensed by an uninterrupted comfort.

[2.] To conform us to Jesus Christ. We should not know the bitter agonies our Redeemer sustained for us unless we had some experience of it ourselves. He tasted of this cup, Mat. 27:46. And though it be a bitter cup, yet it must go round; we must all pledge him in it. Conceit will not inform us so much as experience.

[3.] His justice requires it, when we surfeit of our comforts, and play the wantons with them, that he should withdraw them. We ourselves breed the mist and clouds which hide from us the shining of God's favour. We raise up those mountains of transgression that are as a wall of separation between us and God; whence that expression, Isa. 59:2, 'Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you.' As the sun dissolves and dispels mists and clouds by his bright beams, so God of his free grace dissolveth these clouds: Isa. 44:22, 'I have blotted out thy iniquities as a cloud, and thy transgressions as a thick cloud.' Now there are two sins especially which cause God to hide himself—(1.) Too free a liberty in carnal pleasures and delights; (2.) Spiritual laziness.

(1.) Too free a liberty in carnal pleasures and delights. When we live according to the flesh, we smart for it, these mar our taste; and when our affections run out to other comforts, we forfeit those which are better, Ps. 30:6, 7; when we begin to sleep upon a carnal pillow, to compose ourselves to rest, and lie down and dream golden dreams of earthly felicity. Carnal confidence and carnal complacency make God a stranger to us. This carnal complacency hinders a sense of God's love two ways—meritorie et effective. Not only meritoriously, as it provokes God to withdraw when we set up an idol in our hearts, but also effectively; as carnal delights bring on a brawn and deadness upon the heart, so that we cannot have a sense of God's love, for that requires a pure, delicate spirit. Our taste must be purged, refined, sensible of spiritual good and evil. Now this will never be except the soul be purged from carnal complacency; for while there is so strong a relish of the flesh-pots of Egypt, we are not fit to taste the hidden manna; but always the more dead the heart is to worldly things, the more lively to spiritual sense ever: Jude 19, 'Sensual, not having the spirit,' i.e., spiritual joys, feelings, operations. When Solomon withheld not his heart from any joy, God left him. When he was trying the pleasures of the creature, and went a-whoring from God, God left him.

(2.) Spiritual laziness is another cause why God hides his face from his people, Cant. 5:6, compared with ver. 2, 3. The spouse neglected to open to Christ upon light and frivolous pretences, and then her beloved had withdrawn himself. If we lie down on the bed of security, and grow lazy and negligent, then Christ withdraws.

[4.] It is necessary and useful for us sometimes that God should hide his face. Cloudy and rainy days conduce to the fruitfulness of the earth, as well as those that are fair and shining; and the winter hath its use as well as the summer. We are apt to have cheap thoughts of

spiritual comforts, Job 15:11, apt to run riot, and to grow neglectful of God and be proud, 2 Cor. 12:7. Paul had his buffetings to keep down his pride. We have changes even in our inward man to keep us in the better frame, the more watchful, diligent, and waiting upon God.

Use. Well, if it be so, all the use I shall make is to put this question—Is this your case, yea or no? There is nothing that conduceth to the safety and comfort of the spiritual life so much as observing God's comings and goings, that we may suit our carriage accordingly. Our Lord saith, Mat. 9:15, 'Can the children of the bridechamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?' Is God present, or is he gone? When God is gone, not to lay it to heart argues great stupidity. You are worse than that idolater, Judges 18:24. He thought he had reason enough for his laments and moans when they had taken away his images, his gods. So if God be gone, shall we digest and put up with such a loss, and never mind to lay it to heart? Job complains of this, chap. 29:3, that the candle of the Lord did not shine upon his head as it did of old. Surely they that have any respect to God, any tenderness left in their hearts, will be sensible of God's going. On the other side, if we get anything of God, his grace and favour to our hearts, it should be matter of joy and consolation to us: Rom. 5:11, 'We joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.' Jesus Christ hath made the atonement, but we have received the atonement when we get anything of the blood of Christ upon our own consciences, when we have any sense of reconciliation. A little sunshine enliveneth the poor creatures, the birds fall a singing that were melancholy and sad before in cloudy weather, they are cheered and comforted when the sun shines. How should we observe the least glimpse of God's favour if he but show himself through the lattice! Cant. 2. There is nothing keeps grace lively, and freeth us from a dead and stupid formality, so much as this. But when men are careless, and do not observe God's

accesses and recesses, hardness of heart increaseth upon us presently, and loseth that worship and reverence and invocation and praise that is due from us to him. Therefore our eye should still wait upon the Lord, and as the eyes of servants are on their mistresses, Ps. 123:3, so should our eye be still on God's hands, and observe what he gives out in every duty, or what of God we observe in this or that ordinance.

Secondly, The children of God, that are sensible of this, cannot be satisfied with this estate; but will be praying and always seeking the evidences of his favour and reconciliation: Ps. 80:3, 7, 19, three times it is repeated, 'Turn us again, O Lord of hosts; cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.' Their great happiness is to be in favour with God. They can dispense with other comforts, and can want them with a quiet mind; let God do his pleasure there, but they cannot dispense with this, with the want of his favour and manifested good-will to them. This is the life of their lives, the fountain of their comforts; this is the heaven they have upon earth, without which they cannot joy in themselves: 'Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.' What are the reasons of this?

1. Because of the value of this privilege; the favour of God is the greatest blessing. It may appear in sundry respects. Take but that consideration: Ps. 63:3 'Thy loving-kindness is better than life.' The favour of God is the life of our souls, and his displeasure is our death. A child of God values his happiness by God's friendship, not by his worldly prosperity; and is miserable by God's absence, and by the causes thereof, his sin and offence done to God. Nay, his loving-kindness is not only life, but better than life. A man may be weary of life itself, but never of the love of God. Many have complained of life as a burden, and wished for the day of death, but none have complained of the love of God as a burden. All the world without this

cannot make a man happy. What will it profit us if the whole world smile upon us, and God frown and be angry with us? All the candles in the world cannot make it day; nay, all the stars shining together cannot dispel the darkness of the night nor make it day, unless the sun shines; so whatever comforts we have of a higher or lower nature, they cannot make it day with a gracious heart, unless God's face shine upon us; for he can blast all in an instant. A prisoner is never the more secure, though his fellows and companions applaud him, and tell him his cause is good, and that he shall escape, when he that is judge condemns him. Though we have the good word of all the world, yet if the Lord speak not peace to our souls, and shine not upon our consciences, what will the good word of the world do? 2 Cor. 10:18, 'He is approved whom the Lord commendeth.' A sense of God's love in Christ is the sweetest thing that ever we felt, and is able to sweeten the bitterest cup that ever believer drank of: Rom. 5:3, 'We glory in tribulation.' It will be a blessed thing when we cannot only bear tribulations, but rejoice in them; but how come we to rejoice in them? Why, because 'the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us;' so he goes on. If we would know the value of things, the best way is to know what is our greatest comfort and our greatest trouble in distress; for when we are drunk with worldly prosperity and happiness, we are incompetent judges of the worth of things; but when God rebukes a man for sin, what is our greatest trouble then? that we may take heed of providing sorrow to ourselves another time; then we find sin and transgression the greatest burden when any notable affliction is upon us, Job 36:9; and what will be your greatest comfort then? for then your comforts are put to the proof. One evidence of an interest in Christ, a little sense of the love of God, how precious is it! Ps. 94:19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.' His thoughts were entangled and interwoven one with another, as branches of a crooked tree; for so the word signifies there. When his

thoughts were thus intricate and perplexed, then 'thy comforts delight my soul.' Oh! then, what should we labour for, but to be most clear in this, that God loves us. This will be our greatest comfort and rejoicing in all conditions. It is good for us in prosperity, then our comforts are sweet; and in adversity and deep affliction, to see God is not angry with us. Though we feel some smart of his afflicting hand, yet his heart is with us.

2. They deal with God as worldly men do with sensible things; for as others live by sense, so they by faith. Now worldly men are cheered with the good-will of men, and troubled with the displeasure of men upon whom they depend. The down-look of Ahasuerus confounded Haman, and put him to great trouble: 'He was afraid,' Esther 7:8. Absalom professes it were better for him to be banished than to live in Jerusalem and not see the king's face, 2 Sam. 14:32. Surely it is death to God's children to want his face and favour upon whom they depend. Their business lies mainly with God, and their dependence and hope and comfort is in God; they live by faith. Poor worldlings walk by sense, therefore their souls run out upon other comforts, in the smiling face of some great potentate, or some friend of the world: this is their life, peace, and joy. But they that live by faith see him that is invisible, and value their happiness by his favour, and misery by his displeasure.

3. The children of God have tasted the sweetness of it, therefore they know it by experience. The best demonstration of anything is from sense. Description cannot give me such a demonstration as when I taste and feel it myself: 1 Peter 2:3, 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' They have an experimental feeling of that which others know only by guess and hearsay. Carnal men know no other good but that of the creature. The spouse did so languish after her beloved, being sick of love; when her desires were disappointed, it

made her faint, Cant. 5:6. They that have not seen and known him, know not what to make of those spiritual and lively affections that carry us out after the favour of God with such earnestness and importunity; but they that have tasted and know what their beloved is, their hearts are more excited and stirred up towards him: John 4:10, 'If thou knewest the gift of God,' &c. You would more admire the favour of God if you knew it, especially by experience; you would find it is a better good than ever you have yet tasted.

Use. Is this our temper and frame of our hearts? Can we live contentedly and satisfiedly without the light of his countenance? A child of God may be without the light of his countenance, but cannot live contentedly without it. Are we troubled about it, ever seeking after it? Surely this is the disposition of the children of God, they are ever seeking after the favour of God. I shall press to this by this argument.

1. God bespeaks it from you: Ps. 27:8, 'Thou saidst, Seek ye my face.' There is a dialogue between God and a gracious heart. The Lord saith, 'Seek;' he saith it in his word, and speaks by the injection of holy thoughts, by the inspiration of his grace; and the renewed heart, like a quick echo, takes hold of this, 'Lord, thy face will I seek,' Ps. 106:4. You should ever be seeking after God in his ordinances, seek his favour and face.

2. The new nature inclines and carries the soul to God; it came from God, and carries the soul to God again. The spirit of the world doth wholly incline us to the world: they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; and the Spirit of God doth incline us to God, and therefore the people of God will value his favour above all things else. David speaks in his own name, and in the name of all that were like-minded with himself; he speaks of all the children of God in

opposition to the many, the brutish ones, that were for sensual satisfaction: Ps. 4:6, 'Many say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.' He doth not say, upon me, but upon us, as the common language of all the saints. The favour of God is so dear and precious to the saints, that they can compare with the affections of carnal men, take them at the greatest advantage. He doth not consider their worldly things in their decrease, but he considers them when they are increased; and he considers them in the very time when they are increased, in the vintage and harvest time. The shouting of vintage and joy of harvest are proverbial; and the comforts of this life, when new and fresh, most invite delight. They that place their happiness in these things cannot have so much joy as they that have a sense of their interest in God. Now, shall we be wholly strangers to this temper and disposition of soul.

3. If we be backward to seek after the favour of God, the Lord whips his people to it by his providence; for sometimes their spiritual disposition may be marred: Hosea 5:15, 'I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face. In their affliction they will seek me early.' The Lord withdraws his gracious presence for this reason, not that we may seek ease or freedom from trouble, but that we may seek his face, and the applying of his grace to our consciences.

4. God is not wholly gone, neither is the desertion total, when there is such a disposition in the heart. He hath left something behind him which draws you after him. The estimation of God's favour keeps his place warm till he come again; it keeps room in the soul: Ps. 88:13, 14, 'Unto thee have I cried; in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee: Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?' But when they can digest such a loss with patience, it is an



indifferent thing whether they have any sense of God's love, yea or no.

5. We find it to be a sad thing to lose any worldly comfort, and shall we lose the favour of God too, and never lay it to heart, and live contentedly without it? It is a sign we despise that which the saints value, and which is the principal blessing; you will not have cheap thoughts of the consolation of God, Job 15:11.

6. Unless we seek God's favour, all our labour is lost in other duties: 2 Chron. 7:14, 'If my people, that are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven,' &c. This is put in among other conditions, and without this the promise is not made good to us. Many seek to the Lord in their distresses, but it is only for redress of temporal evils, or obtaining necessary temporal supplies; but do not seek his face: then their prayers are but like howlings, but like the moans of beasts, Hosea 7:14. They do not seek reconciliation and communion with God, but only ease and riddance of present trouble. Those are not holy prayers.

7. It is the distinguishing point that will separate the precious from the vile, to have a tender sense of God's favour: Ps. 24:6, 'This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob.' There are many thoughts of interpreters about that place, I find; though they differ in it, yet they all agree in this sense, that they are the true Israelites, the true Jacob's posterity, that cannot brook God's absence, that seek his face, that will not let him go, but strive with him till they get the blessing. These are not Israel in the letter, but Israel in the spirit. Jacob said, 'I will not let thee go unless thou bless me,' Gen. 32:26. Such diligent seekers of God should we be, never to give over till we find him. Or, as Moses said, 'Lord, if thy presence go

not with us, carry us not up hence;' we will not stir a foot without thy favour and presence.

Thirdly, They that are sensible of the want or loss of the favour of God have liberty to sue for it with hope and encouragement to find it. For so doth David, 'Make thy face to shine.' Whence comes this liberty?

1. Because of God's promise, because of the mercy of God pawned to us in his promises. He hath told us, none shall seek his face in vain, Isa. 48:19; Prov. 8:17; Ps. 22:11, 20. One that seriously and diligently is seeking after God, before he hath done his search, he shall have some opportunity to bless and praise the Lord; some experience of grace shall be given to him, if he conscionably, diligently, and seriously seek it.

2. Because of the mediation of Jesus Christ, you may come in his name and seek the favour of God: Ps. 36:7, 'How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.' Interpreters upon that place conceive the shadow of God's wings does not allude to an ordinary similitude of a hen that, when vultures and kites are abroad, covers her little ones, gathers her chickens under her wings: no; but they think the allusion to be to the outstretched wings of the cherubims; and this is the ground of our trust and dependence upon God. Let the sons of men put their trust under the shadow of his wings, there to find God reconciled in Christ; for the throne of grace was a figure of that propitiation. He is called the propitiation, God propitiated and reconciled in Christ is the throne of grace interpreted. However that be, it is clear, Ps. 80:1, 'Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.' When they would have God hear, they give him the title of one that sits upon the mercy-seat, reconciled by Christ. Though

the cloud of sin doth hide God's favour from thee, he can make it shine again; and here is our ground, the merciful invitation of God's promise, and then God propitiated in Christ.

Use. Oh! then, let us turn unto the Lord in prayer, and in the use of all other means, humbling ourselves and seeking his favour.

1. Waiting for it with all heedfulness: Ps. 130:6, 'My soul doth wait for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning;' and he repeats it again, 'I say, more than they that watch for the morning.' Look, as the weary sentinel that is wet and stiff with cold and the dews of the night, or as the porters that watched in the temple, the Levites, were waiting for the daylight, so more than they that watch for the morning was he waiting for some glimpse of God's favour. Though he do not presently ease us of our smart or gratify our desires, yet we are to wait upon God. In time we shall have a good answer. God's delays are not denials. Day will come at length, though the weary sentinel or watchman counts it first long; so God will come at length; he will not be at our beck. We have deserved nothing, but must wait for him in the diligent use of the means; as Benhadad's servants watched for the word 'brother,' or anything of kindness to drop from the king of Israel.

2. Work for it: for I press you not to a devout sloth. All good things are hard to come by; it is worth all the labour we lay out upon it. There is no having peace with God, any sense of his love, without diligent attendance in the use of all appointed means: 2 Peter 3:14, 'Be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless;' and 2 Peter 1:10, 'Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure.' That comfort is to be suspected that costs nothing, but, like Jonah's gourd, grows up in a night, that comes upon us we know not how.

Fourthly, God's children, when they beg comfort, also beg grace to serve him acceptably; for 'teaching God's statutes' is not meant barely a giving us a speculative knowledge of God's will: for so David here, 'Make thy face to shine,' and, 'Teach me thy statutes.' And why do they so?

1. Out of gratitude. They are ingenuous, and would return all duty and thankfulness to God, as well as receive mercy from him: therefore they are always mingling resolutions of duty with expectations of mercy; and when they carry away comforts from him are thinking of suitable returns. And while they take Christ for righteousness, they devote and give up themselves to his use and service. The nature of man is so disposed, that when we ask anything, we promise, especially if a superior: Hosea 14:2, 'Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips.' The children of God resolve upon duty and service when they ask favour. So Ps. 9:13, 14, 'Have mercy upon me, O Lord; consider my trouble; that I may show forth all thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion.' We are thinking of honouring and praising God at that time when we seek his favour.

2. The children of God do know that this is the cause of God's aversion from them, that his statutes are not observed; and therefore, when they beg a greater experience of God's special favour, they also beg direction to keep his statutes. They cannot maintain and keep up a sense of the love of God unless they be punctual in their duty. He knows nothing of religion that knows not that the comfort of a Christian depends upon sanctification as well as justification; and the greater sense of obedience the fuller sense of the love of God; and the degrees of manifesting his favour are according to the degrees of our profiting in obedience, for these go along still. Jesus Christ is king of righteousness and king of peace. He

is Melchisedec, king of Salem; he pours out the oil of grace that he may pour out the oil of gladness, Heb. 7:2. But especially see one place, John 14:21, 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.' Christ was then most sweetly comforting his people, but it was not his mind that they should be emboldened thereby to cast off duty. No; he says, the only way to assure them that they were not delusions, and to clear their right to these comforts, was this, 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.' That is the way to get confirmation and evidence of the love of God.

3. This is a notable effect and evidence of God's favour, to guide you in his ways; therefore it is a branch of the former, for whom the Lord loveth he teacheth and guides: Rom. 8:14, 'As many as are the children of God, they are led by the Spirit.' Others are left to their own heart's counsels. And Ps. 25:14, 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant.' The communication of secrets is a note of friendship. Now the secret of the Lord, the knowledge of his covenant, and what belongs thereto, it is to those that fear God. There is the qualification.

4. He showeth that he does not desire a greater proof of God's love. He would chiefly experience the good-will of God to him in being taught the mind of God. The most slight that which David prizeth. But if our hearts were as they should be, we would prefer this before all other good things, sanctification, to be taught of God. For—

[1.] It is a better evidence of God's favour than worldly comforts. Pardon freeth us from punishment, sanctification from sin and

pollution; sin is worse than misery, and holiness is to be preferred before impunity. Christ in the work of redemption considered the Father's interest and honour as well as your salvation. The taking away of worldly comforts doth not infringe our blessedness; yea, when it is accompanied with this benefit, it maketh way for the increase of it: Ps. 94:12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law.' All the comforts of the world are not worth one dram of grace. The loss of them may be supplied with grace, and man be happy, comfortable, and blessed for all that; but the loss of grace cannot be supplied with temporal things. We cannot say, Blessed is the man that hath lost grace for the world's sake. Again, all the riches and honours heaped upon a man cannot make him better, they may easily make him worse; but grace can never make us worse, but always better, more amiable in the eyes of God, and fitter for communion with him. These may be given to those whom God hateth, Ps. 17:14; but this is the favour of his people. Grace is never given but to those whom he entirely loveth. These may be given in wrath, but sanctifying grace never in wrath. The more we have of these things, the more wanton and vain, Deut. 32:15. They are often used as an occasion to the flesh, Gal. 5:13, prove fuel to our lusts, increase our snares, temptations, difficulties in heaven's way, Luke 18:25. Our table becometh a snare, Ps. 69:22. But the saving graces of the Spirit make all easy, and help us towards our own happiness.

[2.] Profiting in obedience or sanctification is a greater effect of God's favour. Sanctification is a greater privilege than justification. Perfect and complete holiness and conformity to God is the great thing which God designed, as the glory of God is holiness, Exod. 15:11. Moral perfections exceed natural; and of all moral perfections holiness is the greatest. It is better to be wise than strong, to be holy than wise. Beasts have strength, man hath reason, but holy angels, a

holy God. Sanctification is a real perfection, but justification is but a relative. It rendereth us amiable in the eyes of God. God hateth sin more than misery. Sin is against God's very nature. God can inflict punishment, but he cannot infuse sin. God's interest and honour is to be preferred before our comfort and personal benefit. In sanctification, besides our personal benefit, which is the perfection of our natures, God's honour and interest is concerned in our subjection to him. Justification is a pledge, but sanctification is not only a pledge but a beginning; it is *removens prohibens*. We love him for pardoning, but he delighteth in holiness: he delighteth in us rather as sanctified than pardoned. We love much because much is forgiven, Luke 7:47. But God delighteth in the pure and upright: Prov. 11:20, 'Such as are upright in their way are his delight.'

Use 1. For reproof of three sorts:—

1. Of those that would have ease and comfort, but care not for duty; would have the love of God to pacify their consciences, but never mind this, to have their hearts directed in God's ways: Hosea 10:11, 'Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught, that would tread out the corn but not break the clods.' It yielded food, Deut. 25:4. They would be feasted with privileges, yet abhor service, when they prize comfort. To these we may argue not only *ab incongruo*—how disingenuous it is to separate duty and comfort; to be so ready to expect all from God, and so unwilling to do anything for him. It is contrary to the disposition of God's children, Titus 2:11, 12, and Rom. 12:1;—but *ab impossibili*. Will God ever delight in you till you be conformed to his image? Christ came not to make a change in God, but in us; not to make God less holy, but us more holy. It is not agreeable to the reasonable nature to conceive that God should be indifferent to good and bad, or a friend to those that break his laws. Would you think well of that magistrate that should let men rob and steal and beat

their fellow-subjects, and not only connive at them but receive them into his bosom? You that have but a drop of the divine nature cannot delight in the company of sinners, 2 Peter 2:8.

2. Those that would have the favour of God, but expect it should be showed to them in temporal things. Alas! these things are promiscuously dispensed to all; can be no evidence of his special love. God is behindhand with none of his creatures, Eccles. 9:1, 2; sometimes evil things to good men, and good things to evil men. Josiah died in wars as well as Ahab. Is Abraham rich? so is Nabal. Is Joseph honoured by Pharaoh? so is Doeg by Saul. Hath Demetrius a good report of all men? 3 John 12, so have false teachers, Luke 6:26. Hath Caleb health and strength? Josh. 14:11, so have wicked ones: 'No bands in their death;' Ps. 73:4, 'Their strength is firm. Was Moses beautiful? Acts 7:20, so was Absalom, 2 Sam. 14:25. Did God give learning and wisdom to Moses and Daniel? &c., Dan. 1:17, so to the Egyptians, Acts 7:22. Long life to Ishmael, Gen. 25:17, as well as to Isaac, Gen. 35:20.

3. The children of God that murmur and repine at their sufferings when others, ignorant of the mind of God and the strictness of his ways, fare better, Ps. 17:14. It is often seen that 'he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow,' Eccles. 1:18. Drones and sots have their ampler revenues, but we should not be thereby discouraged. It is their portion: Prov. 3:31, 32, 'Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward are an abomination unto the Lord, and his secret is with the righteous.' They are hateful to God while they flourish. It is a greater evidence of God's favour and friendship to understand his counsel in the word, and to be acquainted with the mysteries of godliness, than to enjoy all the power and greatness in the world; the knowledge of a despised, hated



truth, than to flourish in opposition against the ways of God, through ignorance, obstinacy, and prejudice.

Use 2. Is direction to us:—

1. For strict walking. If we would have a comfortable sense of God's love, we must resolve upon a strict course of holy walking: Gal. 6:16, 'And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy upon the Israel of God;' and Ps. 85:8, and Eph. 4:30.

2. If we would walk strictly, we must go to God for continual direction: Ps. 86:11, 'Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name;' Ps. 143:10, 'Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God; thy spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness.' Especially when blinded with interest, or apt to be carried away with temptations.

3. God's teaching is not only directive, but persuasive; it prevents sin, Ps. 119:133; quickens to duty, Ps. 119:33–35. Teach and keep, and make me to go; for that is the difference between literal instruction, which we have from man, and spiritual instruction, which we have from God. God's teaching is drawing, John 6:44, 45.

## **SERMON CLI**

**Rivers of water run down mine eyes,  
because they keep not thy law.—VER. 136**

MOST of the sentences of this psalm are independent, and do not easily fall under the rules of method; so that we need not take pains in clearing up the context; the verse needs it not, the time permits it not: only you may observe this, that often in this psalm David had expressed his great joy, and now he maketh mention of his exceeding grief. There is a time to rejoice and a time to mourn; as times vary, so do duties; we have affections for every condition. Indeed, in this valley of tears mourning is seldom out of season, either with respect to sin or misery, for ourselves or others. David, that did sometimes mourn for his own sins, and watered his couch with tears, Ps. 6:6, he took also his time to mourn and bewail other men's sins: 'Rivers of tears run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.'

In the words observe David's grief is set out by—

1. Constancy and greatness of it, rivers of tears run down mine eyes.
2. The goodness of the cause or reason of it, because they keep not thy law.

'Rivers of tears.' He compares his tears to a stream and river always running. The same expression is used Lam. 2:18, 'Let tears run down like a river day and night; let not the apples of thine eyes cease.' When affections are vehemently exercised, the scripture is wont to use such kind of expressions. The will of a godly man is above his performance; it is wont to do much more than the body can furnish him with abilities to express. He had such a large affection that he could weep rivers. 'Because they.' Some refer it to eyes, the immediate antecedent; they are usually the inlets of sin; we are first taken by the eye, and then by the heart: 'She saw the fruit that it was good, and then did eat of it.' But I rather suppose it is to be referred to men. The Hebrews many times do not express a general antecedent. More particularly his enemies, Saul and his courtiers; for

so he saith, ver. 139, 'My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy word;' and again, ver. 158, David saith, 'I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved because they keep not thy word.' I have brought these places, because parallel with the text; and principally that you may not think David was troubled because of any injuries done to himself, but because of offences done to God. 'Keep not thy law.' Keeping of the law is to observe it diligently; not only to maintain it, but to retain it in our eye and practice. It might be matter of grief to David that they of whom he specially speaketh, being persons of power and place, did not maintain the law, and keep it from encroachment and violation, but suffered abuses to pass unpunished; but he speaketh here of retaining the law in their hearts and practice. For it is an expression equivalent with that which is used in ver. 139, 'Because they have forgotten thy word.' The point which I shall observe is this—

Doct. That it is the duty and property of a godly man to mourn bitterly, even for other men's sins.

Here we have David's instance; and it may be suited with the practice of all the saints. Jeremiah: see Jer. 13:17, 'But if ye will not hear, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, and mine eyes shall weep sore, and run down with tears.' There you have described the right temper of a good prophet, first to entreat earnestly for them, and in case of refusal to weep bitterly for their obstinacy. Mark, it was not an ordinary sorrow he speaks of there, but a bitter weeping, 'Mine eyes shall weep sore and run down with tears.' Not a slight, vanishing sigh, not a counterfeited sorrow; soul and eyes were both engaged; and this in secret places, where the privacy contributeth much to the measure and sincerity of it. Now this is a fit instance of a minister of the gospel. We cannot always prevail when we plead with you, and shall not be responsible for it. God never required it at the

hands of any minister to work grace and to save souls, but to do their endeavours. But, alas! we do not learn of Jeremiah to go and mourn over their ignorance, carelessness, and obstinacy of those committed to our charge. The next example that I shall produce is that of Lot in Sodom, 2 Peter 2:7, 8, 'Who vexed himself, and was vexed from day to day, in seeing and hearing their unlawful deeds.' Not with Sodom's injuries, but with Sodom's sins. It was matter of constant grief to his soul; the commonness did not take away the odiousness. My next instance shall be our Lord himself; we read very much of his compassion: I shall produce but two instances of it. One is in Mark 3:5, 'Christ looked upon them with anger, and was grieved for the hardness of their hearts.' They gave him cause of offence, but it doth not only exercise his anger but grief. In our Saviour's anger there was more of compassion than passion. He was grieved to see men harden themselves to their own destruction. So when he came near to Jerusalem, a city not very friendly to him, yet it is said, Luke 19:41, 'When he came near and beheld the city, he wept over it, and said, If thou hadst known, even thou at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes.' Our Lord Jesus was made up of compassion; he weepeth not only for his friends but his enemies. As a righteous God he inflicted the judgment, but as man he wept for the offences. First he shed his tears, and then his blood. O foolish, careless city, that will not regard terms and offers of peace in this her day! He bewailed them that knew not why they should be bewailed; they rejoiced, and he mourned: Christ's eyes are the wetter because theirs were so dry. And now he is in heaven, how doth his free grace go a mourning after sinners in the entreaties of the gospel! But that I may vindicate this point more fully, I shall give—

1. Some observations concerning mourning for the sins of others.

## 2. Give you the reasons of it.

The observations are these five:—

1. That it is an absolute duty to preach this doctrine, not only some high and raised effect of grace. When we produce these instances and examples of the word, David, Lot, Jeremiah, and Christ, many think these are rare and extraordinary instances, elevated beyond the ordinary line and pitch of Christian practice and perfection. No; it is a matter of duty lying upon all Christians. When God goes to mark out his people for preservation, who are those that are marked? The mourners: Ezek. 9:4, 'Go through the midst of the city, and set a mark upon the foreheads of them that sigh and cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof.' None are marked out for mercy but the mourners. The great difference between men and men in the world is the mourners in Zion and the sinners in Zion; so that it lieth upon all, if we would have God's mark upon us. And the apostle reproveth the Corinthians for the want of this mourning: 1 Cor. 5:7, 'Ye are puffed up, when ye should rather have mourned.' Possibly many of the converted Corinthians disliked the foulness of the fact, but they did not mourn and solemnly lay it to heart; therefore the apostle layeth a charge upon them. In all the examples that have been produced, that of Jesus Christ only is extraordinary; and yet we are bound to have the same mind in us that was in Jesus. We must have the same mind, though we cannot have the same measure of affection. Christ had the spirit without measure, but we must have our proportion. If David can speak of floods, certainly we should at least be able to speak of drops. Somewhat of David's and Christ's spirit. Nay, the example of Christ in this very thing is propounded by the apostle: Rom. 15:3, 'For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.' The apostle speaketh there of bearing one another's burdens. Christ

would bear the burden of all the world. He was moved with a zeal for the dishonour done to God, and compassion to men; and so undertook the burden upon him, not to please himself, or seek the ease and safety of the natural life. Well, then, it is not some raised effect of grace, but a necessary duty which concerns all; a frame of heart which all the children of God have. If you love God, and love your neighbour, if you believe heaven and hell, and have any sense of the truth of the promises or threatenings, you will be thus affected in some measure to mourn and grieve for the sins of others.

2. This duty doth chiefly concern public persons, though it lies upon all Christians, magistrates and ministers and officers of the church, because of their public and universal influence. Public persons must have public affections as well as public relations. You shall see in that type the church of the Jews is represented in their officers, Zech. 3:1. When the people were corrupted, and in a calamitous condition, Joshua the high priest is brought in standing before the Lord in filthy garments, the priest is accused by Satan. Certainly public persons are more responsible to God than others, and more concerned than others in the sins committed in the land, or places where they have a charge. Among private persons, a householder is more responsible than a private member of the family, if one under his charge fall into a notorious sin. You are responsible for your children and servants, and so are we for your souls. Under the law, Exod. 22:10, God said if a man did deliver unto his neighbour an ox, or an ass, or a sheep, or any beast to keep, and it did die, or was hurt, or was driven away, no man seeing it, or it did miscarry through his negligence, he was to make it good, because it was delivered into his hand. So I may say here, in quoting this law, Hath God a care of oxen? God hath committed souls to us, he hath put them into the hands of magistrates and ministers to keep them. Now because we do not discharge our duty, he will require their blood at our hands, Ezek.

33:7–9. Because of our trust and charge, we are bound to have more public affections: Joel 2:17, 'Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar.' Ministers should be exemplar for spiritual feeling and tenderness and humiliation. Under the law the measures of the sanctuary were double to other measures. I apply it to this very thing. Our portion must be greater, because of the burden that lies upon us. Paul speaketh as one sensible of the weightiness of his charge, in 2 Cor. 11:29, 'Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?' Paul trembled to see a weak Christian in the hands of Satan; and when they had taken offence, and begun to stumble, this was his trouble and grief. Mourning and burning is put for the violence of any affection. So Jeremiah the prophet, 'My soul shall weep in secret places for your pride.'

3. That tears are not absolutely necessary for the expression of this grief and tenderness. David saith, 'Rivers of tears.' Why? For grief doth not always keep the road and highway; and many times when water goes out, wind comes in. Many are puffed up with sensitive trouble, and put more upon tears than they do upon the frame of the heart which should engage us to this. All constitutions are not alike moist; a tender heart may be matched with a dry brain. When men are careful to get things reformed, and are affected with the calamity of the church more than their own private loss, this is that which God requires. However, let me tell you, if we find tears for other things, we should find tears for these duties, when we come to remember our own sins, and the sins of others. God did not make the affections in vain. A man that hath a thorough sanctified soul will have affections exercised in some measure proportionable; and therefore, if we can shed tears abundantly upon other occasions, we should remember this water should be reserved for sanctuary uses. David when he is spoken of, is represented as one having a moist eye upon all occasions; yet Lot had a tender heart, being offended with public

disorders. It is said, 2 Peter 2:8, 'His righteous soul was vexed.' Great devotionists are usually very tender. Good men are much given to tears, and these sensitive stirrings of affection are a great help to religion; and therefore should not wholly be neglected. But if there be a serious displacency against sin, a deep laying to heart God's dishonour, though they cannot command tears, the duty is discharged. Humiliation lieth more in heart grief and trouble, than the sensitive and passionate expression of it. And yet upon religious occasions we should express ourselves as passionately as we can, and not content ourselves with a few cold words and dull thoughts; but our liveliest affections should be exercised about the weightiest things: James 4:9, 'Be afflicted and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to heaviness.' When we are deprecating the wrath of God, humbling ourselves under the offences done to his infinite majesty by ourselves or others, there should be more tenderness, and we should do it in the most lively affectionate manner that possibly we can.

4. The greatest sinners, when they are once converted to God, have the greatest compassion afterwards towards other sinners. Why? They know the heart of a sinning man, they have had most experience of the power and prejudice of corruption, and also sensibly tasted of the love of God, and his goodness in Christ Jesus; and so their hearts are entended thereby to pity others, and they more earnestly desire others should partake with them of the same grace. As Israel were pressed to pity strangers, because they themselves were once strangers in Egypt, they knew what it was to be neglected and despised in a strange land; so they that are acquainted with the temptations of Satan, with the bitter fruits of sin, with the prejudices that men lie under before they come to take to the ways of God, they have greater compassion towards the souls of others than others have. This is observed to be fulfilled in the apostle Paul, whose



zeal lay otherwise more in the active than in the contemplative way; for in his writings we find him mostly doctrinal and rational, yet when he speaketh of sinners, he doth it always with grief and bowels: Phil. 3:18, 'I tell you weeping.' And still he presseth Christians to a greater tenderness, to be more in grief for than censure of their brother's faults: Gal. 6:1, 'If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted;' and Titus 2:3, when he presseth to gentleness to all men, 'For we ourselves,' saith he, 'were sometimes foolish and disobedient, deceived and deceiving, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another; but after the love and kindness of God appeared,' &c. This melted his heart, to consider what he was, and what God had made him by grace. Whereas sullen men, of a severe temper, of a constant, rigid innocency, are wont to be more harsh and carried out with greater indignation than sorrow. Sin and they have not been so much acquainted. Others, that know how cunning this strumpet is to insinuate and entice the soul, pity those that are deceived with its enticing blandishments. Certainly men that profess religion, and do not observe their own hearts, or else have lived in a more equitable course of honesty, without any sensible change, are not touched with such tenderness. But they that once come to remember how obstinate they were in prejudices against the ways of God, how securely they walked in a way of sin, without any sense of God's displeasure, or serious thoughts of the bitter fruit of it, now God hath plucked them as brands out of the burning, they would fain save others also that are heirs of the same promise. The high priests under the law were taken from among men, Heb. 5:2, that they might have more compassion; so the Lord multiplies these instances of grace, that they might have more compassion towards others. They that have felt the terrors of the Lord, and know the wounds and bruises of

a troubled conscience, are more affective in persuading, more compassionate in mourning for others, 2 Cor. 5:7.

5. There must be not only a constant disposition to mourn over the sins of others, but upon some more than ordinary occasions it must with much seriousness be exercised and set a-work. It is said of Lot, 2 Peter 2:8, 'He vexed his righteous soul' in seeing their filthiness with his eyes and hearing their blasphemies with his ears, these were continual torments to him; he could go nowhere but he heard or saw something that was matter of grief to him. That is a sad prognostic of an approaching judgment when a country is so bad that it is made, as it were, a prison to a godly man. Daily a Christian hath his occasions of sorrow. How can we walk the streets with dry eyes when we here shall see a reeling drunkard, there hear a profane swearer rending and tearing the sacred name of God in pieces, a filthy speaker, theatres and the devil's temples crowded with such a multitude of people, that men may learn more how to please the flesh and hate godliness, and feast their ears with filthy talk? To see people so mad against God, and ready to cast off the yoke of Christ everywhere, this occasions matter of grief and mourning before the Lord. But besides this, there must be solemn exercises, when our eyes must gush out with tears, and we must open the flood-gates. We must wish, as Jer. 9:1, 'Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!' There are certain times when this is necessary, as times of great sin, and of judgment felt or feared.

[1.] Of great sin, for then things begin to draw to a judgment. As for instance—

(1.) When outward gross sins are frequently committed, such as are against the light of nature: Hosea 4:1, 2, 'The Lord hath a controversy

with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, no mercy, no knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood,' &c. God's severity is last mentioned wherein men bewray their high presumption in profaning the name of God and violating his commands without any the least appearance of profit and advantage—lying and falsehood, a sin inconsistent with human society. God, who is the God of truth and the patron of it, cannot endure it. So the lives, goods, chastity of men to be abused, this God cannot bear with: 'Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.' God doth not contend usually for lesser faults or ordinary infirmities, but gross sins, by way of omission or commission.

(2.) These sins are the more odious, and do provoke God when universal: Isa. 1:5, 6, 'The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint; from the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in it,' &c. Though there be a few secret mourners, yet when the contagion becometh general, and riseth to a head, the Lord will take no notice of them as to the keeping off a common judgment: Ezek. 9:4, 5, 'And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in my hearing, Go ye after them through the city, and smite; let not your eyes spare, neither have ye pity;' and Ezek. 14:14, 'Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God;' and Jer. 15:1, 'Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth.' Yet the sentence against Sodom was revocable if but ten righteous persons could be found in it, Gen. 18:32. Nay, a larger offer concerning Jerusalem, larger than

that which God made to Sodom; if but a man: Jer. 5:1, 'Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it.' Though Jerusalem were a city larger and more populous than Sodom and other cities. When the whole body of a people grows monstrous in sin. If a ruling party be sound, though the body be corrupt and vicious, that iniquity be not established by a law, or countenanced by them; or if the ruling party be corrupt and vicious, yet if the body of the people, or a considerable number, be serious and holy, and mourn in secret for the sins of the times, God may spare a land. But when all flesh have corrupted their ways, then the flood comes.

(3.) When resolute and incorrigible. Resolute; we have, and we will: Jer. 44:16, 17, 'As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee; but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers.' And incorrigible: Jer. 5:3, 'They have refused to receive correction, they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return.'

(4.) When bold in sinning: Isa. 3:9, 'The show of their countenance doth witness against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not.' When men commit sin without shame or fear, break over all banks of love, moderation, or civility.

[2.] In respect of judgments felt or feared. When the day of the Lord is near, or already begun, when the smoke foreshoweth the fire is a-coming, and the decree ready to break forth, these are mourning times.

Secondly, The reasons why this is the duty and property of God's children; they do it out of obedience, it is their duty; and they do it out of an innate disposition, it is their property.

1. It is their duty because God hath commanded it. Now all God's commands are equal, and full of reason; and there is a great deal of reason why God should lay this kind of duty upon the creature.

[1.] That it may be an allay to zeal. That is an excellent and well-tempered zeal when grief is mixed with anger: as it is said of Christ, he looked about with anger, and was grieved at the hardness of their hearts; when we are angry at the sin, and mourn for the person, and mourn over him. Zeal against the sin, that shows our love to God; and our commiseration of the person, that shows our love to man. Samuel spared not Saul in his sin, yet mourned for him. And all the prophets of God you shall find, when they were threatening the people for their sins, were grieved lest their threatenings should be accomplished. False zeal hath malice and mischief; it mourns not for the person, because it coveteth his shame and destruction. Now it is the great wisdom of God he would have this temper mixed. There must be anger for the offence done to God, and a grief that our brother hath offended. The world is apt to cry out upon the children of God, as persons peevish and rancorous; but this is a rare vindication, when they see you as apt to mourn as to chide, that all your expostulations with them come rather from conscience than interest; it is an excellent allay and praise to public zeal.

[2.] God would have us mourn for the sins of others, to engage us to seek redress and reformation. We should soon neglect the duty that we owe to the age and place where and when we live, were it not for this, that the want of it would be burdensome to us, and the abounding of iniquity will cost us bitter tears upon God's command,

and upon zealous endeavours to get a public reformation. Ezra first mourns bitterly, then reforms zealously: Ezra 9:6, 7, 'I plucked off the hair of my head, and rent my garment, and said, O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, O God; for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens,' &c. Zealous actions, which few practise in their own case; yet sins of others, you see, work an afflictive grief and shame in those that fear God. These were the actions of Ezra when he was bewailing the sins of others, and this made him so resolute and active in the reformation that is described in the next chapter. Their love begets sorrow, and their sorrow care. Who would not seek to redress the evil which is burdensome to him? Many times the world is angry, because we are so clamorous for reformation and repentance. You have liberty enough, say they, and may serve God in your own way, and go to heaven quietly; why should you trouble yourself about others? But can a man that grieveth for the abominations of the times be silent till they be redressed? A Christian is troubled about the salvation of others, to see so many thousands of souls carried to hell by droves, and hurried to their own destruction. Can pity and remorse behold this, without care and endeavours with God and man to get it remedied? Certainly, the children of God are not impertinently active and pragmatical. Public reformation is not only a relief to their souls, but to their bowels. They are troubled, therefore thirst and long to see it redressed: 2 Cor. 7:11, 'Godly sorrow,' saith Paul, 'what carefulness it wrought in you!' He speaketh of their public church sorrow. Till they mourned, they neglected the discipline of the church, and let incest go without censure. O my brethren! until we mourn for public disorders, we shall not mourn over one another. We think it is enough to keep ourselves free, and to make a little conscience of our own ways. Always private sorrow will beget public care. If thou hast wept sore

in secret places, thou wilt be earnest with God and man to remove the occasion of thy grief.

[3.] The Lord requireth this to keep our hearts the more tender and upright; it is an act God useth to make us more careful of our own souls, to be troubled at the sins of others, at sin in a third person. It keepeth us at a great distance from a temptation. This is like quenching of fire in a neighbour's house; before it comes near us, thou runnest with thy bucket. There is no way to keep us free from the infection, so much as mourning. The soul will never agree to do that which grieved itself to see another do. And as it keepeth us upright, so also humble, fearful of divine judgment, tender lest we ourselves offend, and draw down the wrath of God. He that shruggeth when he seeth a snake creeping upon another, will much more be afraid when he cometh near to himself. In our own sins we have advantage of conscience scourging the soul with remorse and shame. In bewailing the sins of others, we have only the reasons of duty and obedience. They that fight abroad out of love to valour and exploits, will certainly fight out of love to their own safety at home. So God would have us more abroad, more against the sins of others, that our hearts may be more set against those sins with which we ourselves are apt to be foiled.

2. This is their disposition as well as their duty; it must be so, and it cannot be otherwise with the children of God, for several reasons.

[1.] From the tenderness of God's glory, which is more dear to them than all their own interests. A Christian hath a great affection to the glory of God, is very tender of that; he cannot endure it should be violated, for his heart will even break within him. Can a man see an injury done to a person whom he loves, and not be troubled? Jesus wept for Lazarus, because he loved him, and they say, 'Behold how

he loved him,' John 11:36. They that love God can they hear his great name rent with so many blasphemies? so many affronts put upon his grace, the laws of God trampled under foot, and not lay it to heart? God's glory is more dear to them than their own lives. They had neither had any standing in nature nor grace had it not been for the glory of God. God made all things for himself; therefore when the name of God is violated, his authority despised, his laws broken and set at nought, and no more regarded or esteemed than a ballad or a song, they cannot but express their tenderness and great affection to God by mourning for this. Carnal men are hot in their own cause, cold in God's. God's children are quite otherwise, cold in their own cause, and hot in God's. Therefore they are deeply sensible when God's honour is weakened. Moses was the meekest man upon earth, yet he brake the tables. How doth this agree? The injuries that were done to himself he could look upon with a meek, quiet spirit, easily put them up; but when he saw the people bring dishonour to the name of God, then he hath a high and deep affection. They cry out, Josh. 7:9, 'Lord, what wilt thou do for thy great name?' So Ps. 115:1, 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us; but unto thy name give glory.' They go to God, not to advance our faction and interest: 'We are brought very low; yet the wrath of man shall praise thee.' Thy name is dear and precious; they are sorry to see any profane it. God hath abundantly provided for their respect, he hath bid all men love them, when he bid us love one another. So that in effect all the respects of the world are devolved upon one person. And they would have all men love God and honour God.

[2.] It comes from their compassion and pity and love to men. Oh! it grieves them to see so many that do not grieve for themselves; and their eyes are wet because yours are always dry. 'I tell you weeping,' saith Paul, Phil. 3:18. Compassion over the miserable estate of such teachers, and those that are led by them; they and whole droves run



after fancies that endanger their souls. False teachers and their proselytes should not only fall under our indignation, but our pity. They are monsters in nature that want bowels, much more in grace. Religion doth not harden the heart, but mollifies it. Jesus Christ was made up of compassion, and all Christians partake of Christ's spirit: Phil. 1:8, 'God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.' Pray mark, Paul had got some of Christ's bowels, and let me tell you they were tender ones. Compassion towards others, and weeping over their sins, is somewhat like the love of Jesus Christ. He would take our burden upon himself when he was not interested. So the spirit of Christ worketh in all his members, he hath distributed his bowels among them; and therefore they cannot but long for the salvation of others; yea, their heart is broken and mollified with Christ's compassion to them, and therefore long for fellows in the same grace. Though they have received personal and private injuries, yet they pity their case, and mourn for them. It is matter of humiliation and lamentation: 2 Cor. 12:21, 'When I come again I fear my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, which they have committed.' It is matter of grief to see so many thousands perish, or in a perishing condition.

[3.] This disposition cometh from the antipathy and zealous displeasure that is in their hearts against sin. They know what sin is, the greatest enemy that God and Christ and their own souls have in the world. It was sin that made angels become devils; it was sin that blew up the sparks of hell-fire; it was sin that opposed God, that crucified Christ; it is sin that grieves the Spirit of God; and therefore they mourn when sin gets proselytes. A man cannot endure to see a toad or viper near him; your hearts rise when you see them creep upon another; so do the hearts of the children of God rise, that their

enemy and God's should find such respect and entertainment in the world. It is said of the church of Ephesus: Rev. 2:2, 'That she could not bear those which were wicked.' And David saith, Ps. 101:3, 'I hate the works of them that turn aside.' They know this will grieve the Spirit of God, that this will press him as a cart is pressed with sheaves; and shall God be pressed and burdened, and they not troubled? It cannot be. They that love the Lord will hate evil, Ps. 97:10, both in themselves and others.

[4.] This disposition comes out of a sagacity of faith, and serious foresight of the effects of sin. They know what sin will come to, and what is the danger of it; therefore, when they see sin increasing, 'Rivers of water run down their eyes.' Wicked men tremble only at the judgment of God, but good men tremble at his word; and therefore they mourn when others fall into danger of the threatening. When Ezra plucked his beard, and was in such a zealous indignation against the sins of the people, bewailing them before the Lord, Ezra 9:4, 'Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel.' At fasts others are slight and obdurate; they look on threatening as a little mock thunder; they are not sensible of the danger. I may set forth this by that allusion, 2 Kings 8:11, the prophet Elisha wept when he saw Hazael, that he looked wishly on his face till he blushed: 'The man of God wept, and Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil thou wilt do unto the children of Israel; their strongholds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child: and Hazael said, But what! is thy servant a dog?' &c. So when the children of God look upon sin, they know by the complexion of it what will be the dreadful effects. This will be bitterness in the issue, in time this will produce pestilences, famine, fire, sword, and all other mischiefs and judgments, and expressions of the angry

indignation of the Lord. They foresee a storm when the clouds are but a-gathering, therefore they tremble when they see them. This is the sagacity of faith. Now carnal men, on the other side, look upon the threatenings of scripture but as words of course, used as in way of policy, that God only would awe and scare them, but doth not purpose to condemn them. But faith is sagacious. Look, as to the promises, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' So as to the threatenings, the same evidence of things not seen. The apostle doth not only instance when he had given the general description of the objects of hope for the recompense of reward, but he instances in the threatenings, 'Noah, being moved with fear, prepared an ark,' &c. They know, however men slight the word of God, one day it will be found true; and therefore, when they see men add sin to sin, they are troubled. The word is as sure as execution, and works upon them accordingly. They have all things in a near view; the nearer the objects of our faith are in our view, the more they stir up our affections. Dangers and death, when in hand and in present expectation, work far otherwise than they do when they are considered at a distance. So when the effects of sin are looked upon as near at hand, when faith makes them present, then they stir up these affections in the soul.

[5.] A fifth clause is from their public spirit and tender respect to the common good. When they wisely foresee approaching dangers, they are moved with the love and care of their country, and this melteth them. They know sin is of a destroying nature, that 'one sinner destroyeth much good,' Eccles. 9:18. One sinner may do his country a great deal of mischief, an open bold-faced sinner—Achan troubled the whole camp, Josh. 7:11, 12—much more when a multitude of sinners are increased; therefore they sigh and mourn. Godly men are the truest friends to their native soil; they are the chariots and horsemen of Israel. Those that plead with God stand in the gap, keep

off judgments, and have the most public spirit; therefore the least they can do is to sigh for it and to plead with wicked men; as Tertullian, *Si non vis tibi parcere, parce Carthagini*—if thou wilt go on with thy soul-destroying course, and wilt not spare thyself, yet spare Carthage. This will be bitterness in the issue. The children of God are always of a public spirit. David fasted for his enemies, Ps. 35. Abraham prayed to God for Sodom, a neighbour country. The godly Israelites were good friends to Babylon in their captivity: Jer. 29:11, 'Seek the peace of the city, whither I have caused you to be carried captive, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof ye shall have peace:' if nothing but their interest and share in the common rest and quietness. Passengers are concerned in the welfare of the vessel wherein they are embarked. Babylon fared the better for the Jews' prayers. Now more especially are their hearts carried out with a respect to their native soil and dearest comforts; therefore this melteth them to see the land defiled with sins and ready for judgments.

## SERMON CLII

### **Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.—VER. 136**

USE 1. For reproof of two sorts of persons:—

1. Those that do not lay to heart their own sins. Usually men make their affections to prescribe to their judgment, and cavil at the fervorous exercises of religion, because unpleasant to flesh and blood; to humble ourselves before the Lord with a pressing sorrow, seriously and indeed to rend our hearts and not our garments. In this wanton and delicate age, men are apt to think I speak of a theme

obsolete and out of date, as calculated for former times, when men were more tenderhearted. If we could awaken some of the old godly professors out of their graves, as the prophet calleth up Rachel to weep in Ramah for her children, Jer. 31:15, then we might hope to prevail. Alas! to plead now for mourning over the sins of others, when men think it a crime to mourn for their own, this is like to be lost labour. Were this the humour only of ungodly wretches, it might be borne with silence and patience; but those that would be taken for Christians of the highest form are altogether prejudiced against such doctrines as this. Men would be honeyed and oiled with grace, and distaste the wholesome discipline of repentance as too severe. They cry out, We are legal. How may the poor ministers of the gospel go to God, and say, as Moses did, Exod. 6:12, 'The children of Israel have not hearkened unto me, how then shall Pharaoh hear me?' The professors of religion will not brook such doctrine, and how shall we hope to prevail with the poor, blind, carnal world? To scoff at doctrines of repentance and humiliation was once a badge of profaneness; many now adopt it into their religion. But be not deceived; the gospel doth not take away the conscience of sin. It may take away the fear of hell and damnation upon right terms. The heart of flesh is a promise, and the spirit of grace is a promise, or mourning apart is a promise. You that say that justified persons must no more mourn for sin, you may as well say they shall no longer have a heart of flesh or a spirit of grace and supplications, that they shall no longer have a tender conscience. Be not deceived; there must be some time to weep for your own sins, as Peter went out and wept bitterly. Sorrow must have its turn in the Christian life. I would press it upon you by this argument: You cannot be sorrowful for others' sins unless you be first sorrowful for your own sins. Grief must begin at home, there where you have the advantage of conscience and inward remorse. It is hypocrisy to pitch upon other men's sins and neglect your own; as some will zealously declaim against public

disorders, yet neglect their own hearts; as the crafty lapwing will go up and down fluttering and crying to draw the fowler from her own nest. We have a nest of sin of our own, and we are loath it should be rifled and exposed to public view.

2. It reproveth them that in times of public defection never take care to mourn over God's dishonour. We complain and murmur under our judgments, but do not weep over our sins, every person and family apart. Whether it be out of negligence and carnal security, or out of distaste and displeasure against the conduct of present affairs, we seem to have lost our public affections, and can only wonder at the children of God in former times, since they were so broken and tender. To many that would now go for professors, this doctrine seemeth a riddle, a mere strain of wit and fancy, like a precept wire-drawn, or elevated beyond its pitch and tenor. But in the fear of God consider what hath been spoken. There are many abuses in our reflections upon the sins of others. Wicked men are quite otherwise disposed: they do not only do evil themselves, but take pleasure in those that do so, Rom. 1:32; would be glad that sin were more common, that it might be less odious, and then there would be none to put them to the blush: Prov: 2:14, it is said 'they rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked.' So the prophet speaks of some corrupt men in the priesthood: 'They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity,' Hosea 4:8. God had appointed those that served at the altar should live of the altar, have a proportion of those offerings; now they flattered them in their sins, so they might have meat, and get a portion of the sacrifices. Many that would be accounted ministers care not for the sins of the people, but think the less serious men are in religion the better they can work them to their private advantages, and have more respect among them. Then there are some that scoff at the mourners in Zion; they count it melancholy and mopishness to be so often and seriously

humbling themselves before the Lord. The world deals perversely with the people of God; they provoke their sorrow, and then upbraid them with it. You should bear them company, mourn with them, pine in consort with those doves of the valleys. Better be a mourner than a mocker and scoffer. Others there are that yet can make a shift to hold out some profession of religion, yet can delight in the company of profane, carnal persons. Would a man willingly put himself upon occasions of grief? Are you like Lot, whose soul was vexed day by day? Do but consider how much your temper differs from theirs. David saith, Ps. 119:115, 'Depart from me, ye evil-doers.' Others there are that by censures and bitter invectives seek to make the sinner, rather than the sin, more odious. This is to exercise malice and pride, not Christian affection. We should not censure, but mourn. Tears flow from charity, censures from pride; and by this means you lose a duty for a sin, which is a sad exchange. Others again are apt to laugh at them, and to make sport with the sins of others, but do not mourn. This is a vile abuse, and yet we are many times guilty of it. Men laugh at drunkenness, and make the slips of others matter of boasting and vain talk. This should rather set our hearts a-bleeding and mourning. He were a monster, rather than a man, that could see a man take a fall, even to the breaking of his back or neck, and turn it into a jest; or a man wound himself, and he make a sport of it. And shall we be more kind to the bodies than to the souls of men? Oh! consider the danger of these practices. As much as in him lieth he hath put himself into hell, and wilt thou laugh at it?

Use 2. Trial. Are we so tenderly affected? I know every one is not of a like tender constitution, and cannot weep rivers of tears; but tell me—or rather, tell God—I cite thy conscience to make answer to God—when thou didst ever go aside into thy closet, or some secret place, to lay to heart the dishonour done to God, or the affronts put upon his grace? Do not tell me thou hast declaimed against the sin of the

times, that thou hast not cried up a confederacy with them that cry up a confederacy against God. There may be somewhat of faction and interest and obstinacy in those things; but when hast thou mourned, and wept sore in secret places? Do not tell me that thou hast joined in public fasts: hasty and transient sighs do not wound the heart. Hast thou ever done it in secret? or hast thou often done it? It may be thou hast resented injuries, and spread them before God; and so there is a spirit of self-love and revenge that breathes into thy prayers. Men will be hot in their own cause; but what hast thou done in this duty? It is a plain question, and therefore I hope it will have the more force upon the conscience. True zeal for injuries done to God would ease itself by tears rather than anger. True penitents will not satisfy themselves only with public humiliation, to which law, custom, and example may draw them; but will make conscience of this duty in their families, yea, in secret, where no eye seeth them but God's; mourn apart, Zech. 12:12–14, and bring home public provocations to their own doors, Jer. 11:17.

Use 3. To exhort you to get this practice, and to get this disposition of the saints.

There is a great deal of need to practise it now, whether we look upon the sins or dangers of the nation; the sins, such horrid blasphemies and reproaches cast upon God's servants, his ways, truths, doctrines according to godliness. I think, in the wisest judgment that a man can make, never was there such a dangerous κρισις and temper of any nation as of ours at this time. Never were sins boiled up to such a height and consistency as now, such snarling at reformation, that was hopefully begun. Now sin walketh in the streets with a bold face, drunkenness, swearing, and profaneness seem to triumph; and with the more pretence, because the stricter sort have so much dishonoured God and religion. Church affairs are much out of order.



And for our dangers, we hear again of wars and rumours of wars, and God knoweth what may be the issue and effect of them: Acts 13:41, 'Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man should tell you of it.' The danger of a nation doth not lie in outward probabilities so much as in the threatenings of the word. He alludeth to the horrible devastation of Judea by the Chaldeans, and applieth it to the despising of the gospel. Would any believe that the temple and city should be destroyed, and the people of God carried captive, that not one should remain? yet this came. In the time of Noah, when they abounded in all things, who would have thought of a flood? Many would say, as that nobleman, If the windows of heaven were opened, how could this be? Who would have believed the horrible dissolution by the Romans? or thirty years ago that which is now fallen out in Germany? Never think that our armies and forces are so strong as to withstand the threatenings of the gospel; for our horrible contempt, God may blow upon all these props in an instant. Therefore weep and mourn for the pride and rebellion of the daughter of your people. So for our private place. What sins are there among us! Some have withstood the ways of God; though they have had convictions, yet held out against them. Some are profane, many defects in all orders. Paul was mightily troubled because the church of Corinth was so much out of order; he bewailed it with many tears: 2 Cor. 2:4, 'Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears.' So may I speak, and you think of these things: It is time to mourn. By way of motive, consider—

1. This is the best way to enter our protestation and dissent against the iniquity of the times. When we cannot help a thing, it is good to retract it, and commit it by tears to God; for then it shall not be laid to our charge. When the Corinthians mourned for incest committed among them, and sorrowed with a godly sorrow, 2 Cor. 7:13, 'Ye are

verily clear in this matter,' many of them did not only not approve, but abhor that foul act before; but they were not clear till they mourned, and purged the church from the imputation. So you are not clear till you have done this duty.

2. God may take occasion to punish you from their sins. We are all fuel fit for the burning. God's dispensation is not unrighteous as to you, but that may be the occasion: Zech. 10:3, 'My anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the goats.' So Prov. 28:2, 'For the transgression of a people; many are the rulers thereof.' The people's sins may make great changes and alterations of government.

3. You are one body with them. Nations are one political body, churches one political body. In God's plea about Sodom with Abraham, ten righteous persons have an influence to save or ruin it. The sins of one generation may be the cause of another. It is said God turned not from the fierceness of his anger that was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. Manasseh was dead thirty or forty years before. Manasseh had repented, and Josiah was a great reformer, none like him. You see God may punish their sins many years after; nay, in the process of vengeance the whole lump is involved, as being one body. So all Israel were troubled for one Achan. Do not tax God's dispensation of severity and rigour, for it is the condescension and art of divine mercy by this means to prevent public ruin; and you are involved in their portion, that every man in his place may study the prevention of sin and ruin. So churches are one lesser body; one root of bitterness defileth many, Heb. 12:15; not only by the contagion of the sin, but also by imputation of guilt. So at Corinth: 1 Cor. 5:6, 'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.' So also in households and families, which are one lesser body.

4. Many of their sins may be thine. It is a good prayer, though it be a harsh expression, to desire God to be delivered from other men's sins: Ah alieno libera me Domine. They have sinned the more because thou hast been wanting as a magistrate, as a minister, as a neighbour, a fellow-member, as a private Christian. As a magistrate: a negligent prince all the sin is put upon him. Eli was a high priest, and was a judge in that case; and therefore, though he were innocent, God saith he would cut off his house for the iniquity of his sons: 1 Sam. 3:17, 'Because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.' When magistrates suffer all things to run at random in religion, instead of God's ministers, they prove the devil's agents; though they be holy for their persons, yet there is a great guilt lieth upon them. So for ministers: we are to watch as those that must give an account, Heb. 13:17; 'I will require him at thy hands,' &c. He may be a good man, yet not a good minister, when he is not so diligent in inspection, so faithful to his trust, as he should be; so frequent in exhortation, prayer, mourning, care of the flock: much hurt cometh by our connivance. So for private Christians, they are bound to watch over one another. It may be you do not look after them, Heb. 3:13. You suffer hardness to grow upon them, and would not warn them. Ye are witnesses from God to the people of Israel. You may be guilty of much evil example, and unwary carriage: Heb. 11:7, 'By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness that is by faith;' and Ezek. 16:51, 52, 'Thou hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done. Thou also, which hast judged thy sisters, bear thine own shame, for thy sins that thou hast committed more abominable than they: they are more righteous than thou: yea, be thou confounded also, and bear thy shame, in that thou hast justified thy sisters.' You either justify or condemn the world. So that in effect they may be your sins: you are sensual, vain. We easily catch a

disease from one another, but do not get health. Nature is more susceptible of evil than of grace.

5. By seeing of their sins conscience may awaken, and thou mayest remember thy own; as Pharaoh's butler said, 'I remember my faults this day.' Their lives are but a glass of the deformity of our natures. There are many Judases, many Cains in thy nature. I was in times past as bad as any, as bold with sin, and as notorious a sinner. Every sin therefore should be a fresh bleeding wound in our own souls. They are but the picture of thy natural face: Titus 3:3, 'We in times past were foolish, disobedient, deceiving, and being deceived.' Thou seest them given up to vain pleasure; remember how it was with thee before conversion, and let this humble thee.

6. If all this do not work, consider the holy angels, that are no way interested, but as it conduceth to God's glory; that do not communicate with us in nature and blood, how they rejoice at the welfare of man. As when the world was made: Job 38:7, 'When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.' So when Christ came, and assumed human nature at his birth: Luke 2:14, 'Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men.' And when the creature repenteth: Luke 15:7, 'I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.' So should we mourn over them to God, who are our flesh, our neighbours, united in the bonds of duty and neighbourhood, it may be church relation.

7. I might tell of the fruits of mourning. The greater party of mourners, the more hope of preservation. We have complained of drought, we have dry bottles: judgments are kept off as long as there

is a sighing party; you are preserved, Ezek. 9:4, as Lot out of Sodom. But if the righteous God see not this fit, and a godly man may be swept away, as two dry sticks burn a green one, yet you shall laugh when others mourn. In heaven there will be joy enough; this is the valley of tears. Wicked men, though now they are dry wood, yet they are fit fuel for hell. Consider of these things. It is a difficult work to soften the heart, and you have need of all the help that may be.

[1.] Consider the compassion of Christ to thee. If he had not mourned and sighed in the garden, and sweat drops of blood, where had thy soul been? Thou wert in thy blood when free grace went a-sighing after thee in the ministry of the word: Ezek. 16:6, 'I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live.' These are intending considerations: 1 Tim. 1:13, 'Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy,' ἡλεήθην. If I had not been all to be-bowelled, and all to be-mercied, I had been a brand fit for the burning

[2.] Take heed of sensuality: Hosea 4:12, 'My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them; for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a-whoring from under their God.' It taketh away the heart, the tenderness and softness; no one thing doth more brawn the spirit. To be given to uncleanness, past feeling: Eph. 4:18, 'Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.'

[3.] Beg the assistance of God's Spirit; he can smite the rock and make waters gush out. That thou mayest not be discouraged, look upon precedents in scripture, the tender hearts of God's people there. The Spirit of God wrought them to this frame: 'Cry, O arm of

the Lord; put on strength as in the ancient days.' God hath promised it: Zech. 12:10, 'I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son,' &c.; and then it follows, 'And the land shall mourn, every family apart,' &c.

## SERMON CLIII

### **Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments.—VER. 137**

THIS psalm is spent in commendation of the word of God. The man of God sometimes commends it for its efficacy, sometimes for its sureness and certainty, and at other times for its sweetness. In this octonary or portion, the word of God is commended for its righteousness. David was sore troubled for the wickedness of his enemies, yea, tempted greatly to impatience and distrust, by looking upon their prosperous estate; for if you consult with the context, you shall find this was spoken in a time of defection, when rivers of tears ran down his eyes because men kept not the law of God. When carnal men pass their time in joy and the godly in tears, it is good then to meditate of God's righteousness. So does David. When they were making void God's law, he was in deep sorrow and tears. It is good so to do, that we may humble ourselves under his mighty hand, and compose our soul to patience and a quiet submission, and with hope to wait upon God in the midst of wrongs and injuries. Simo Caltu telleth us that the emperor Mauritius used these words when he saw all his children slain before his face, and himself ready to be slain after them by Phocas. The historian tells us, ἐπὶ πάντων ἐπεκαλεῖτο, δίκαιος εἶ κύριε καὶ εὐθεῖς αἱ κρίσεις σου—that he did in the

presence of all meekly submit to this great and heavy calamity, crying out, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments.'

In the words the man of God reasons *ab efficiente ad effectum*, a *legislatore ad leges*—from the property of God to the laws that he hath given us. God being essentially righteous and perfectly righteous, yea, righteousness itself, nothing contrary to justice can proceed from him; no iniquity from equity itself, nor injustice from justice itself. God's law, all his dispensations that proceed from him, are as himself is. Therefore in the text you have two things:—

1. What God is: Thou art righteous, O Lord.
2. What his word and works are: Upright are thy judgments.

The word *misphatim*, judgments, implies both—both the rule and his providential dispensations according to that rule. In God's word there is a judicial sentence concerning our thoughts, words, and works; therefore his law is called judgments. It is the judgment of the great God concerning the actions of men, and then the effect thereof when his sentence takes place.

The points are three:—

1. That God is a righteous God.
2. That this righteous and holy God hath given a rule of equity and justice to his creature.
3. That all the dispensations that proceed from him according to that rule are all exactly righteous.

First, That God is a righteous God.

Here I shall show—

1. What is the righteousness of God.
2. Prove that God is righteous.

First, What it is. Amongst men there is a general and a particular justice. The general justice is that whereby we carry ourselves conformable to the rule of religion, 1 Peter 2:24, called there living unto righteousness; and the particular justice is that whereby we give every man his due: so it is taken, Titus 2:12, 'That we should live soberly, righteously, and godlily.' Godliness is that grace which inclines us to give God his portion, and sobriety is that grace which helps us to govern ourselves, and righteousness that grace whereby we give our neighbour his due.

1. Justice is sometimes put for the whole rectitude and perfection of the divine nature; when God acts becoming such a pure, holy, and infinite being; and so God cannot do anything that is against the perfection of his nature; he cannot deny himself, 2 Tim. 2:13. He will not give his glory to another, Isa. 42:8. He cannot be indifferent to good and evil; he will not damn and punish an innocent creature; there is a condescency in all his actions to the perfection of his nature.

2. There is a particular justice with respect to his dealings with the creature, especially man. And before I come to open that, I must tell you that God must be considered under a twofold relation—(1.) As absolute Lord; (2.) As governor and judge of the world.

[1.] As absolute Lord; and so his justice is nothing but the absolute and free motion of his own will concerning the estate of all creatures. In this respect God is wholly arbitrary, and hath no other rule but his



own will; he doth not will things because they are just, but therefore they are just because God wills them. For—

(1.) He hath a right of making and framing anything as he willeth in any manner as it pleaseth him, as a potter hath power over his clay to form what vessel he pleaseth, either of honour or dishonour, Rom. 9:21; and Jer. 18:6, 'As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.' He hath not only might and power, but full right to dispose of the creature according to his own pleasure. As he sustaineth the person of a Lord, he doth what is agreeable to his free and sovereign will. As the good man of the house pleaded, Mat. 20:15, 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?' so God as absolute lord and sovereign may do as he pleaseth. Nothing before it had a being had a right to dispose of itself. Neither did God make it what it was by the necessity of nature, nor by the command, counsel, or will of any superior, or the direction of any coadjutor; neither is there any to whom he should render an account of his work, but merely produceth things by the act of his own will, as absolute and sovereign Lord of all his own actions: 'He works all things according to the counsel of his own will,' Eph. 1:11; and Rev. 4:11, 'Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.' As his wisdom saw fit, so he hath placed creatures in several ranks of being. The fish cannot complain that it was made without feet or hands, nor the ass that it was made for burden, that it is not fierce and mettlesome as the horse, which was made for battle. And we men, whatever was given us by creation, it was not a matter of right, but the mere effect of God's good-will and pleasure. He might have made us stocks and stones, and not living creatures; and among living creatures plants only, with the life of vegetation and growth. Or if he had given us a sensitive life, he might have placed us in the lowest rank; he might have made us toads and vipers, or horse and mule, without understanding, and not

men. And among men, all the blessings and privileges to which we were born might have been withheld without any injustice.

(2.) He hath a right of using and disposing of them so made according to his own pleasure, to appoint them to be high or low, miserable and afflicted, or prosperous and happy, as it shall be for his glory: Rom. 11:36, 'All things are of him, and from him, and to him, to whom be glory.' As God made the creatures for himself, so he governs them ultimately, terminatively for himself. There is no cause of murmuring and repining when he will use us as he pleaseth for his own glory, Isa. 45:9, 10. We cannot say, Why doest thou thus? It is enough to silence all tempests in our souls, God did it: Ps. 39:9, 'I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.' Now this is true in the dispensations of grace as well as in the blessings of this life. To some God gives grace, to others not; some are elected to mercy, others left to perish in their own sins; one is taken, and another left, Mat. 24:40, 41. There were two thieves upon the cross together with Christ; God saves the one, passes by the other. He may do with his own as he pleaseth. He being sovereign is obliged by no debt of law, or the command of any superior power; and therefore 'hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth,' Rom. 9:18. Election is an act of sovereignty and dominion. God might have left all in misery, as he left the fallen angels; none of them that sinned are recovered out of their misery; and are we of a more noble consideration than the angels, than those spirits? One of them could have done God more service than many men could do; therefore, as he left all those angels in their sinful condition, so it is a mercy that, when he might have destroyed all mankind, he would save any. God could have given Judas a soft heart as well as Peter, but he does not. He will be master of his own gifts. Only this clears his justice: none are denied grace, but those that deserve it should be so; none by God are compelled to sin, none are

punished without sin; but in all his gifts, and in what he doth as supreme Lord, his will is his reason.

[2.] God may be considered as governor and judge, and so he gave a law to the creatures; and his governing justice consists in giving all their due according to his law. This is to be distinguished from the former; for God, that is arbitrary in his gifts, is not arbitrary in his judgments. Observe that he is arbitrary in his gifts; he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, but in his judgments he proceedeth with men according to their works, according to a law or outward rule. Of this governing justice the scripture often speaks: Deut. 32:4, 'He is a righteous God, and all his ways are judgment.' So Ps. 7:9, 'He will judge the world in righteousness, and will minister judgment to the people.' Now this governing justice of God is twofold—either legislative or judicial.

(1.) God's legislative justice. This determines man's duty, and binds him to the performance thereof, and also decrees and sets down the rewards and punishments that shall be due upon man's obedience or disobedience. God made man rational, or a voluntary agent, capable of good and evil, with desires of the good and fears of the evil; and therefore God, as universal king, that he might rule him according to his nature, hath made for him a law that revealeth good and evil, with promises to move him by desire and hope of the good, and with threatenings to drive him by a necessary fear of the evil. So Deut. 30:15, 'See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil.' It is true of the law of Moses, and it is true of the gospel of Christ Jesus; he deals with us this way (that I may not make a distinction between the law and the gospel). What is the law of the gospel? Mark 16:16, 'He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.' Now this law is the

rule of man's duty and God's dealings with all those that have received it.

(2.) There is his judicial justice, called also distributive; and this is that whereby he renders unto men according to their works, whether they do good or evil, without any respect to persons: 1 Peter 1:17, 'Without respect of persons, he judgeth according to every man's work.' The persons that may be respected in judgment is some external thing, that hath no affinity with the cause in hand. Now when God comes to judge of the breach of his law, or the keeping of his law, he hath no respect of persons, high or low, rich or poor, professing or not professing Christianity; he deals with them as they have walked according to his law. His judicial or distributive justice is declared at large by the apostle, Rom. 2:5–9. There God's executing judgment according to his law is described, and you find it twofold—remunerative or vindictive.

(1st.) His remunerative or rewarding justice. It is just with God to reward our obedience, and to give men what his promise hath made due to them. It is true we cannot expect reward from God in strict righteousness, or by the exact laws of commutative justice and strict righteousness in this fallen estate, as if there were an inward condignity of our works to that which God gives. Oh no! that is disclaimed by the saints: Ps. 103:3, 'Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;' Ps. 143:2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.' From any exuberancy of merit we cannot expect a reward from God; but we may and ought to encourage ourselves from his righteousness, even that it is not an unrighteous thing with God to give us heaven and happiness when we have served him faithfully, and patiently continued in well-doing. You know the apostle distinguisheth that there is a reward according to debt, and a reward according to grace, Rom. 4:4. Though it be

righteous with God to give the reward, yet he gives it not out of debt, or for any condignity of worth; but he gives it out of grace. And so all the comforts we have from obedience are said to come from the righteousness of God; even the pardon of sin, which is one of the freest acts of God, and wherein he discovers most of his mercy: 1 John 1:9, 'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.' It is not, faithful and gracious, but just. And so for the eternal reward in 2 Thes. 1:6, 7, δίκαιον, 'It is a just or righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you.' Ay! you think it is just with God to punish evil; but is it a righteous thing that he should reward our obedience? Read on: 'And to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven,' &c. God in righteousness is bound by his own promise to give this reward: Heb. 6:10, 'God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love.' How is God's righteousness engaged? Partly by Christ, Christ having given satisfaction equivalent to the offence and wrong to his majesty, and having interposed an everlasting merit, it is just with God to forgive the sin, as it is just for the creditor to forgive the debt when he hath received satisfaction from the surety. And it is just because God is bound by his own promise; he hath promised a crown of life to them at the end of their trial, James 1:12; and it is part of his justice to make good his word; by promise God hath made himself a debtor. So 2 Tim. 4:8, 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge will give me at that day.' Bernard glosseth sweetly upon that place, Paulus expectat coronam justitiæ, justitiæ Dei, non suæ; justum est ut reddat quod debet, debet autem quod pollicitus est. It is just with God to pay what he oweth, and God oweth what he hath promised; and so it is a crown of righteousness which God the righteous Judge will give us at that day. Once more, it is just with God not to forget your labour of love, because it agrees with his general justice, or the rectitude of his nature; it falls in with his law. As God is a holy, perfect being, he

cannot be indifferent to good and evil; it concerns him to see, ut bonis bene sit; et malis, male; that it be well with them that do well, and ill with them that do ill. But how upon terms it should go well with them, that must be interpreted according to either covenant; either according to the exactness of the law, and so no flesh can be justified in his sight, or according to the moderation of the gospel, where the soul sincerely frames itself to do the will of God: and it is not an unrighteous thing with God to give you according to your labour of love, and zeal for his glory.

(2dly.) There is his vindictive justice on all sinners. God punisheth none but sinners, and only for sin, and that ever according to the measure of the sin; as it is more or less, so they have more or less punishment: Rom. 2:9, 'Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.' God will render vengeance to the Gentiles, that had the light of nature to teach them God, to show them the invisible things of his godhead and power; but chiefly upon those that have been bred up in his ordinances, and mostly upon them that have rejected the terms of grace offered them in the gospel; for so it is said, 2 Thes. 1:8, 'He will render vengeance upon all them that obey not the gospel;' and John 3:18, 19, 'He that believeth not is condemned already.' The law is passed upon him; but 'this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.' Their sin is inexcusable that will not lay hold upon the offers of grace. They have no cause to murmur, or impute their damnation to God's secret purpose; in their own consciences they may read the justness of their condemnation. Well, then, this is God's justice; it is that property by which God acts agreeable to his nature as sovereign lord; and agreeable to his covenant as governor and judge of the world, either his covenant of works or grace.

Secondly, To prove that God is just. I shall prove it by four things:—

1. From the perfection of the divine nature. The perfection of the divine will is such that he necessarily loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity. As the perfection of God's understanding includes all intellectual virtues, so the perfection of his will all moral virtues. There can be no virtuous act of the will, either in men or angels, that doth not agree to God in a far more excellent manner and measure; and therefore if there be such a quality as justice and righteousness in angels and men, if holy angels and just men made perfect, certainly there is a just God. This rectitude in men and angels is accidental, and separable from their being. Angels may be angels, yet not just, as appears in the devils; but in God it is essential; as his essence is necessarily, so his integrity must needs be so. In short, God must be just and holy, because he necessarily loves himself, and hates everything that is contrary to himself: Ps. 11:7, 'The righteous God loveth righteousness, and his countenance beholdeth the upright.' If they be just, he loves their justice, because he loves himself; if unjust, he hates their injustice, because they are contrary to himself.

2. He could not else govern the world, or judge men according to their offences. Next his nature, God's office shows him just, that infers his justice as he is governor and judge of the world; so we shall see, Gen. 18:15, 'The judge of all the earth, shall not he do right?' It must needs be so that the judge of the earth will do right: Rom. 5:6, 'Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? God forbid; for then how shall God judge the world?' It is impossible to imagine that he can be the supreme judge who is not just. Among men appeals are allowed, because men are fallible, and apt to pervert equity and judgment; and this is their relief that they can appeal higher. But now, Eccles. 5:8, 'If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting

of judgment and justice, marvel not at the matter; for he that is higher than the highest regardeth, and there be higher than they.' God is the great arbiter of all affairs in the world, where all appeals rest, can go no higher than the will of God; therefore he must needs be just.

3. This was God's great end in giving Jesus Christ, that he might be known to be a just God; therefore he stood so punctually upon satisfaction, that the sinner must die or the surety. No surety so fit to keep up the honour of his law and honour of his justice in the consciences of men as the Son of God, Rom. 3:24–26. God had a mind to be gracious to the creature, but without any disparagement to his justice. Now how should this be? All the wise men in the world that had any sense of the nature and being of God busied themselves in this inquiry, How God could be merciful to the creature, and yet just; but all their devices were vain and frivolous, until God himself found out a ransom and remedy for us, as it is in Job 33:24. Here was the difficulty; God would preserve the notions which the creature had of his being and justice inviolable; he would be known as one that would stand to his law which he had made for the government of the world. Now, there was no way to keep up the credit of it but these two—strict execution or sufficient satisfaction. The execution would have destroyed all the inferior world, the reasonable creatures at least; and the love and wisdom and mercy of God would not permit that the world should be destroyed so soon as it was made, and man left remediless in everlasting misery. Well, then, strict execution would not do it; therefore satisfaction must be the remedy; and such satisfaction as might be sufficient to procure the ends of the law, to keep up the honour of God's justice in the consciences of men. Now this was done by Jesus Christ, whom God had set forth to declare his righteousness, that he might exercise his mercy without prejudice to his justice. If this ransom had not been



found, we should either have slighted God, and not stood in awe of him, or else we had been for ever left under the curse, and under doubtfulness and scruple, wherewith we should have appeased him; but the Lord found out such a means to our hands, that he might declare he was a righteous God.

4. I prove it from the divine nature infused into us. As many as are made partakers of God's grace are more just than others, they hate sin and sinners; so we read, Eph. 4:24, 'That the new man was created after God in righteousness and true holiness.' After God, that is, after the image and pattern of God. Now, if the new creature be made after such a pattern, then certainly God was righteous. We find by experience, the more god-like and virtuous any are the more just they are, more apt to give every one his due, to live without wrong to any, and the more their hearts are set against that which is base and unworthy. Therefore certainly God is righteous, for he hath put such a quality as the copy of his nature into the hearts of men.

Object. If God be so just, why then does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those that desire to be faithful with God so afflicted and calamitous? This is a wind that hath shaken the tallest cedars in Lebanon. The choicest saints of God have been exceedingly hurried and tossed to and fro in their thoughts by this objection against the righteousness of God: Jer. 12:1, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord; yet let me plead with thee.' He holds fast this principle, but yet, Lord, saith he, I am not satisfied; 'Let me talk to thee of thy judgments,' that I may be better informed; 'why doth the way of the wicked prosper?' So David: Ps. 73:1, 'Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart;' but yet the wicked thrive and prosper, and there is no bands in their death. So Hab. 1:13, 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil,' &c. Lord, saith he, I know thou art a holy God; but why can thy providence then look upon them in the world

that deal treacherously and perversely? The clearest-sighted saints may be so bemisted many times that they are not able to reconcile God's dispensations with his nature and attributes, and so quarrel with and reproach and impeach his providence. Yea, the heathens, that knew little of sin and righteousness, were troubled at the afflictions of the good and the flourishing of the wicked, and questioned the being of a God upon this account; and therefore there are two heathens which have written two worthy treatises to vindicate the providence of God. Seneca hath written one treatise, *Cur male bonis, et bene malis*, to show why the good may be afflicted, though there be a God; and Plutarch hath written another treatise, *De sera numinis vindicta*, why the wicked may be spared, and suffered to flourish in the world, though there be a God to take notice of human affairs. These heathens had a sense of this difficulty, for it is an obvious objection.

I answer—In general God's dispensations are just, though we see not the reason of them. The saints hold their principle: Lord, I confess thou art righteous, Jer. 12:1; Hab. 1:13. The justice of God must be acknowledged in all his dealings with us and others, though it appear not to our reason, which indeed cannot discern well; and therefore is unmeet to judge of such high matters as these are: Ps. 36:6, 'Thy righteousness is like the great mountains, thy judgments are a great deep.' The judgments of God are such a deep as we cannot easily fathom the bottom of; and therefore, though we do not see the justice of it, we must believe it, and prefer faith above sense. The Lord may deal otherwise in many things with us than we can express, and see the reason of his doing; and yet he is always just and holy in his proceedings, and it is the duty of his people to believe it: Ps. 97:2, 'Clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.' Augustine's words are a good comment upon that passage. The judgments of God, saith he,

are sometimes secret, but always just, *sœpe occulta, nunquam injusta*. We know not what to make of it; clouds and darkness are round about it. Ay! but though they are unsearchable and secret, they are managed with great judgment and rectitude.

But more particularly to come to speak to the things mentioned in the objection. As to the flourishing of the wicked, four things to that:

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1. God's word doth sufficiently declare his displeasure against them, though his providence doth not. There is *sententia lata, sed dilata*: Eccles. 8:11, 'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.' Mark, there is a sentence pronounced against evil men, but the Lord doth not put the sentence in execution. The sentence is passed against them, both *sententia legis*, the sentence of the law; and so it is said he is condemned already, John 3:18. Nay, there is *sententia judicis*, the sentence which the judge passeth upon a sinner; for he ratifieth the sentence of the law; what is bound upon earth is bound in heaven. Well, the warrant for execution is signed, yet the execution is suspended for just and wise reasons. Sin is not less odious to God because wicked men do not presently feel the punishment of it. There are many righteous ends why execution should be delayed, partly with respect to the Mediator, into whose hands the government of the world is put: Exod. 33:2, 3, 'I will send an angel before thee; I will not go up with thee, lest I consume thee by the way,' compared with Exod. 23:20–23, 'Behold I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared: beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions, for my name is in him. But if indeed thou obey his voice, and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to thy enemies, and an adversary to thy

adversaries; for my angel shall go before thee;' that was Christ, whom they tempted in the wilderness: 1 Cor. 10:9, 'Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted him, and were destroyed of serpents.' Partly that the elect might not be cut off in their unregenerate condition, that the wheat may not be plucked up with the tares, which they might be; if sentence should be speedily executed against every evil-doer, there would be no room left for conversion. Therefore God is not slack, as men count slackness; but only waits, that all those that belong to the purpose of his grace might come to repentance, 2 Peter 3:9. He is long suffering to us-ward, to those that were such as the apostle was, that belonged to the purposes of God's grace. And it is delayed too, that his wrath may be glorified in the confusion of the reprobate: Rom. 9:22, 'He endureth with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction;' that he may show the glory of his power against them, they are hardened and strengthened in their wickedness by their prosperity. When all the favours of God have been abused, and the riches of his goodness set at naught, they have nothing to say for themselves. And sentence is delayed, that the little good they do in the world may not be hindered. God knows how to use all his creatures; even the wicked have a ministry and service under his providence. The Lord would not destroy their enemies all at once, lest the beasts of the field should increase upon them, Deut. 7:22. They serve as a hedge of thorns to a garden of roses for his people. A dead rotten post may support a living tree. It may be God will bring some that belong to his grace out of their loins. Hierome saith, Many times an evil shrub may bear sweet fruit. And God hath righteous ends too, that his people may be humbled, and that their perverse humours may be broken; for so saith the Lord: Isa. 10:12, 'When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria.' When he hath sufficiently humbled and purged his people, then he will do it. And

whenever this temptation comes, when you see sentence delayed, go to the sanctuary, as David did: Ps. 73:17, 'Then you will understand their end.' There you will see sentence is not speedily executed, but it is surely executed. As a chimney long foul will be fired at length: Ps. 55:19, 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God,' when they are high and prosperous; 'but God will hear and afflict them, even he that abideth of old;' he whose essence and providence hath been always the same, he will in due time execute his righteous judgment; and the longer he stays, the more heavy; the longer he is about drawing of his bow, the deeper will his arrows pierce; they are but 'treasuring up wrath to themselves against the day of wrath,' Rom. 2:5. As in Jehoiadah's chest, the longer it was ere it was opened, the more treasure there was in the chest; so they are treasuring up wrath, &c. The fire that hath been long kindling burns the more grievous at last.

2. There are other punishments besides outward afflictions. Invisible judgments are most fearful, blindness of mind, hardness of heart, terrors of conscience. Tertullian ad Marg.—*Cogitemus ipsum magis mundum carcerem esse, exisse eos de carcere, quam in carcerem introisse intelligemus. Majores tenebras habet mundus, quæ hominum corda excœcant: graviores catenas induit mundus, quæ animas hominum obstringunt, 2 Cor. 4:4. Nihil infelicius felicitate peccantium.* No such misery as to be condemned to this kind of happiness, no blindness like a blind understanding, no chains like an obstinate will, no torments like terrors of conscience, under which a man lives for his further punishment, that he may be his own tormentor. Cain had rather die a thousand deaths than be let loose as a vagabond here upon earth, and be delivered over to the hell of his own conscience. Those that are under torments of conscience will call upon the mountains and rocks to cover them.

3. The third consideration is this, providence must not be viewed by halves, but in its whole frame and connection. Do but wait a little, and you shall see God will show himself a righteous God. When we view the dealings of God by pieces, we are apt to break out into those complaints: Ps. 73:11, 12, 'Doth the Lord see? how doth God know? is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world, they increase in riches,' &c. Ay! but stay a while, and you will see, 'There is a God that judgeth in the earth,' Ps. 58:11. I remember the poet Claudian, who had a little tincture of Christianity, though a heathen, as appears by his words, when he saw drones and unworthy men greater than the worthy, and vex the pious, *lætos diu florere nocentes vexarique pios, doubted num inesset rector, &c.*, whether there were any governor of the world, any judge that took notice of things here below, *et incerto florent mortalia casu*, and thought all things were delivered over to blind chance; but, saith he at length, *abstulit hunc tandem Ruffini pœna—absolvit Deos, tolluntur in altum, ut lapsu graviore ruant*. The gods were absolved, for they are lifted up on high, that their fall may be the greater. Men give another judgment of the work of God when it is brought to perfection than what they do when they see the beginning of it. Alas! at first, when we see the beginnings of God, we are apt to say, There is no profit to serve the Lord. Ay! but at length, Verily there is a reward for the righteous. And therefore let us not be rash and hasty, until God hath put his last hand to his work. They are impatient spectators that will not tarry till the last scene of the tragedy, till the Lord brings forth his last work. Our hastiness and impatience will betray us into many foul thoughts of God and his providence.

4. That the solemn triumph of God's justice will be at the last day. If God should punish no sin here, no man would believe a God; if he should punish all here, no man would be afraid of a future judgment.

Now is the day of his patience, and all taste the effects of his common goodness: Acts 17:31, 'He hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world;' that is the great day of assizes for all the world, when the great judge shall appear in his royalty. Now God only keeps a petty sessions; now and then he seizeth upon the hairy scalp of a sinner; but the general assizes is then. In the day of trial it is not fit we should live by sense, but by faith; but hereafter in the day of recompenses all shall be open and clear: Rom. 2:5, 'Thou treasurest up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of Christ.' There is a day that will reveal the justice and righteousness of God, a black day to the wicked it will be, and to God's people a day of redemption. Now his justice is manifested on a few here, then on all. Now God's children have their sentence of absolution from sin in private, in foro conscientiae, their justification and assurance of eternal life; and wicked men have their woful doom in the stings and horrors of their own conscience, they are self-condemned, Titus 3:11; but then sentence will pass publicly. The equity of God's dealings is not now so fully seen, but then the causes will be opened; when the secrets of all hearts shall be manifested, then we shall see how justly God accepted one to salvation, and rejected another to damnation. God's justice is seen by the present government of the world, but not so clearly. Here justice is mixed with mercy to the godly in their afflictions, and mercy is mixed with justice to the wicked in their temporal blessings; but when the Lord shall stir up all his wrath, then we shall see clearly God is a just God, and will keep punctually to the law he hath made for the government of the world.

## **SERMON CLIV**

## **Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments.—VER. 137**

FOR the other part of the objection, that those which desire to be most faithful with God are calamitous and afflicted, as Lazarus lay in poverty and rags while the rich man surfeited in all manner of luxury, I answer—

1. God having an absolute right and dominion over us and our comforts, may give and take them away according to his own pleasure: Job 1:21, 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken;' abstulit, sed et dedit; they are his own he gave at first. If he hath lent us anything for his service and our comfort, he may command it again when he pleaseth, and none can commence a suit against his providence. Whatever straits and poverty we are reduced to, we were poorer than ever we can be made by providence. We came into the world naked. If God should strip us of many comforts, we are not so poor as when we were born.

2. God having intended to bestow eternal blessings upon us, will take a liberty in disposing of outward things. Jesus Christ, when he purchased comforts for us, did not purchase only or chiefly earthly comforts and blessings: Eph. 1:3, 'The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus.' He did not purchase worldly blessings as our chief happiness. The world is a common inn for sons and bastards, where God will show his bounty to all, his creatures; our inheritance is elsewhere, in heavenly places; for though all things come alike to all, we cannot murmur and say, God is unjust; nay, though a child of God should be in a worse condition than the wicked are. A child during his nonage is kept under more severe discipline than a slave, which doth more



live at large. We distinguish between the care of a father and the indulgence of a mother. The father loves his child; ay! but he breeds him up in a strict way. But mothers are fondly indulgent, and would have them pampered and cockered; so evil habits increase upon them. We, that so quarrel for worldly things, would have God show the fondness and indulgence of a mother, and not the wisdom and care of a father.

3. It is fit, before we go to heaven, that we should be tried; therefore God will so manifest his love to us that there may be room to exercise faith and patience, Heb. 6:12. Never any came to reap the comfort of God's promises but there was a time to exercise their faith with difficulties, and their patience with delays; and therefore God will try our sincerity when we have no visible encouragements. God would have us live by faith, and not by sense or present appearance only, 2 Cor. 5:8, to see if we can look above the clouds and mists of the lower world, and encourage ourselves, and grow bold upon the hopes and concernments of the world to come. Nature is purblind, but it is the property of faith to see afar off, 2 Peter 1:9. There is the excellency of faith, if we have but an eagle's eye to see afar off. If we had the fruition of the whole blessing, alas! there were no room for faith. And then for patience, we are not only to be conformed to God, but to Christ; not only to God in purity and holiness, but to Christ in patience and submission and self-denial. There are some of our duties which imply perfection, as justice, holiness, purity, and mercy; of these we have a pattern in God: and some of our duties imply subjection and obedience, and of these we have a pattern in Christ. Now all the heirs of promise God hath conformed to the image of his Son, Rom. 8:29. If we must have all graces, then we must have those graces that are conversant about misery. We should be ignorant of one part of human affairs were it not for these suffering graces; therefore it is agreeable to God's justice that these suffering graces

should have their exercise sometimes. Then the Lord will try our sincerity, whether we follow Christ for the loaves, John 6:26, out of external encouragements, or out of affection for internal reasons, upon pure obedience. God's holiness consists in loving himself, but man's holiness consists in loving God; therefore his holiness need to be tried whether it be a sincere love to God: Ps. 44:17, 'All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant.' There is a trial of love! A man of strength seeks a fit adversary to deal withal. It is no trial to a man of strength and courage that he can bear down a child. If we would try our strength, fortitude, sincerity, and courage, we had need be exposed to difficulty sometimes; as the skill of a pilot is seen in a storm and tempest, and a valiant soldier's in a battle. Verberat nos? lacerat nos Jehovah? patimur; non est sœvitia, certamen est.—Sen. Doth the Lord scourge us? doth he break us, and tear us in all our concernments in pieces? Bear it; it is not cruelty, it is a trial. Religion must cost us something, else it is worth nothing. It will give you no comfort till it be tried, and therefore there is a necessity that we should be tried.

4. Afflictions have their profit and use, and conduce to our good, Heb. 12:11. It yields grace and comfort to us; it is the fruit of righteousness, and the peaceable fruit of righteousness; that is, that righteousness which brings peace. Outward troubles occasion an increase of inward blessings. Outward things are but shadows of better. If God deny the shadow and give us the substance, have we cause to murmur? If God do deny the picture, but give the thing itself, hath that man cause to complain? If we have not abundance, yet if we grow rich in faith, rich in grace, James 2:5, we have no cause to repine against God. Though we flow not in ease and plenty, yet if we have a full tide of spiritual consolation; if we have no respect in the world, yet if we have the favour of God, we have no reason to

complain. Levi had no portion among his brethren, but God was his portion. So it is here; good men have comfort and support, at least in all their troubles; they may be accounted miserable, but they are not so; especially if we consider that a great part of their goodness lies in their mortification and contempt of the world. So that to a man that is as God would have him to be, that which is a misery to others is none to him, for his affections are weaned. Therefore, if we have an increase of grace and spiritual comfort, we have no reason to quarrel against God's providence.

5. Good men are but in part good, and it is fit their carnal part should be chastised, that while there are remainders of sin there should be some trouble, that God should burn and cut here that he might spare hereafter, that we should be judged of God, and not condemned with the world, 1 Cor. 11:32. It is better that we should have our troubles than all our consolations here, and nothing but hell and misery in the world to come.

Use 1. Information. If God be righteous, then all that comes from him is righteous. His word and his works. *Modus operandi sequitur modum essendi.* 'Righteous art thou, O Lord;' and then, 'Upright are thy judgments.' God acts according to his being. It is true a man may be just, and yet all that proceeds from him may not always be just. 'Why? He is not essentially just; but God being essentially just, all that he does or says is just also. A man's actions are one thing, and his rule another. A carpenter that hath a line without him, may sometimes chop beside his line; but a man whose hand is his own line can never chop amiss. So a man's rule is without him; his righteousness is one thing, his nature another; he may swerve, and be just. But God's act is his rule, his righteousness is himself; therefore whatever he does is just and righteous. Men may be deceived, but God deceiveth none, and is deceived by none.

1. His word, and every part of his word, is just; it is in all things right, commanding those things which natural justice exacteth, and forbidding those things which have a natural sinfulness and turpitude in them. God is just, and all his judgments are just. The way he hath set down for the justifying of sinners and receiving them are just and righteous, Rom. 3:26; and the way he hath set down for the sanctifying of men, to guide men in holiness, it is a just law: Rom. 7:12, 'The commandment is holy, just, and good,' becoming such a pure nature to give, and having nothing of exorbitancy or irregularity.

2. The way God hath prescribed for saving such as follow this way of sanctification is just. The righteous judge will give a crown of righteousness in that day, 2 Tim. 4:8. And the way for punishing, such eternally as do despise eternal mercies is just: they have received a just recompense of reward, especially those that neglect so great salvation, Heb. 2:3. God's law flows from his righteous nature, and it is a copy of his righteousness; therefore it becometh those that confess God to be righteous to acknowledge his laws such, and to live according to them.

3. His works. God hath his judgments for those that do not accept the way of righteousness prescribed by him: Ps. 145:17, 'The Lord is just in all his ways, and holy in all his works.' We are too busy in interpreting wrongs to others, but when it lights upon us we do not acknowledge it: Neh. 9:33, 'Thou art just in all that is brought upon us,' &c. Nay, if thy hand be never so smart upon us, Lord, thou art righteous in all. The only way to suppress murmuring and silence disputes, and rebuke the waves and winds of discontent that toss the soul to and fro, is to remember all God's ways are just and true. God taketh it ill when we question any of his works: 'Are not my ways equal? saith the Lord,' Ezek. 18:25. When we thus acknowledge the

dispensations of God to ourselves, we may with profit observe them to others, that we may applaud his proceedings: Rev. 15:3, 'Great and marvellous are thy works, just and true are thy ways, O king of saints.' So Rev. 19:2, 'For true and righteous are his judgments, for he hath judged the great whore which did corrupt the earth with her fornications.' There is no hurt done, but they are confirmed in his promises, and the rule set down in the scripture, not afflicted but on just ground. It is good to observe this in all his dispensations.

Use 2. If God be a righteous God, and all his judgments right, this is terror to wicked men, that securely wallow in the pleasures of sin, without remorse and trouble. Go on in the way of your own hearts, give satisfaction to your senses, please your eye, withhold not your heart from any comfort you delight in; but remember, for all these things God will bring thee to judgment. As cold water stays the working of the boiling pot, so these sober thoughts of God's justice and judgment may abate the fervours of youthful lusts. When you are pampering the flesh, letting loose the reins to all wanton desires, Go on in them; there is a righteous God. Men harden themselves by two things—by God's patience for the present, and thoughts of his mercy for the future.

1. By God's patience for the present. When God doth not strike, but withholds his hand: Ps. 50:21, 22, 'These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.' Christians, patience and forbearance is not absolute remission and forgiveness. God may give you a long day, and yet reckon with you at last: Rom. 9:22, 'He endureth with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.' Mark, there is suffering, long-suffering, and much long-suffering; and yet vessels of wrath fitted for destruction. God suffered Cain to live as a man reprieved; so you may be reprieved. He deals with ungodly men, as

David with Joab and Shimei; he would not acquit them, yet forbare them, and gave order to Solomon to put them to death; your doom may yet be dreadful. Christians, bethink yourselves; there is a sentence in force, and there is but a slender thread of a frail life between you and execution, but a step between you and death; and will you add sin to sin; and heap up more wrath and condemnation to yourselves? Alas! you are but in the state of condemned malefactors, and will you roar and revel as some desperate wretches in the gaol between condemnation and execution? There is but cold comfort in this, to be rescued and to be afterwards executed; and therefore remember God may forbear those whom he will not pardon. Ay! and his anger is most sharp after patience is abused, and most speedy when you begin to reckon the worst is over: Luke 12:20, 'Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.'

2. Men please themselves that they shall do well enough because God is merciful; and so they fancy a God all of honey and sweetness. God is just as well as merciful. Ay! but his justice may be a friend. Can you claim that justice? 1 John 1:9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.' When we with remorse and humble penitence go and confess them before the Lord, then justice is our friend. It is not your friend until you be in Christ: Rom. 8:1, 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.' Why, but am not I in Christ? am not I baptized in his name? Then I say again, there are none in Christ but those that come in in the new covenant way, for him hath God set forth through faith in his blood, Rom. 3:2, 3. If we hope we believe in Christ; if we do, then let me say one thing more: There are none come in the new covenant way that do allow themselves in any known sin; and therefore the justice of God still remains upon you. I prove this latter thus: He that transgresses in one point is guilty of all; therefore so speak and so do as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty, James 2:10–12. There are some

that have judgment without mercy, and others that shall be judged by the law of liberty. He that allows himself to break with God in any one thing, shall not be judged by the law of liberty, but shall have judgment without mercy. Therefore take heed; you will have double condemnation if you love darkness rather than light; that is, if you allow yourselves in sinful courses, and turn your back upon the grace and mercy God offers in Christ.

3. Here is for the comfort of the godly; God is just; but to you also he will be merciful; all his dispensations to you are justice and mercy mingled: Ps. 116:5, 'Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.' Not all mercy and no justice, nor all justice and no mercy; but so just that we may not offend, so merciful that we may yet hope in him: Ps. 25:8, 'Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will he teach sinners in the way.' He is good, therefore will he direct you; he is righteous, therefore we must take his direction. Nay, justice and mercy are both for you. You must not apprehend as if mercy were for you and justice against you. No, no; the justice of God is made your friend; that attribute which is most terrible in God is the pawn and pledge of thy salvation.

The grand inquiry of all the great rabbis and sophists of all the world was this, How justice should be made a friend? It cannot be put out of our mind but that God is just and an avenger of the sinner; but he is faithful and just, 1 John 1:9; just in justifying those that believe in Christ. You have a double claim and holdfast on God; you may come to either court, before the throne of his grace and tribunal of his justice; for there Christ interposed, and satisfied the justice of God. Here the great scruple of nature is solved; that is, how the justice of God should be made our friend. Nay, when you are fainting and discouraged with the scorns and neglect of the world, Heb. 6:10, the just God will reward 'your work and labour of love which ye have

showed toward his name.' It may be vain in the world, but not vain in the Lord, 1 Cor. 15:58. Therefore be cheerful in your service. Men are not paymasters, but God. It is a noble spirit to look for it hereafter, a base spirit to look after it here: 'They have their reward,' saith Christ.

And then against wrongs and injuries we meet with here, the just God, who, as he will do us no wrong himself, so he will not suffer others to do us wrong without punishing of them: Ps. 103:6, 'The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.' He pities the afflictions of them that suffer unjustly, and will execute judgment for them. Mark, first from his pity, then from his justice. From his pity: Judges 10:16, 'His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel;' and 2 Kings 14:26, 'And the Lord saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter, and he saved them.' But how much more will he pity those that are unjustly oppressed by men's hands! Acts 7:33, 34, 'I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people, and I have heard their groaning;' and Isa. 63:9, 'In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and pity he redeemed them.' Therefore, if we look upon the compassions and pities of God, this may comfort us in all wrongs and injuries. Then out of hatred to oppression: Ps. 11:7, 'The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his countenance doth behold the upright.' So again, Ps. 94:15, 'Judgment shall return unto righteousness, and all the upright in heart shall follow it.' Sometimes they are asunder. Earthly judges may refuse the justice of righteousness, a judge may suspend the act of his own judgment; but they shall not long be severed; God will bring forth his righteous judgment: Zech. 8:17, 'These things I hate, saith the Lord.' And then in regard of his providence, God will not be unmindful of his promise: Ps. 9:7–9, 'He hath prepared his throne for judgment, and he shall judge the world in righteousness; he shall minister judgment to his people in uprightness.' Courts of justice among men are not always open, they



have term-time; but God is always ready to hear plaintiffs. They make complaints amongst men, and they are delayed so much and so long that they are discouraged. But we have a friend that is always ready to hear: Ps. 48:10, 'Thy right hand is full of righteousness;' for defending his people and punishing his enemies.

Use 3. To press us to acknowledge this justice of God, that he governeth all things righteously, especially when you are under his mighty hand. The Lord takes it ill when you question any of his providences: Ezek. 18:25, 'Are not my ways equal?' He will be clear when he judgeth, Ps. 51:4. God will be justified in all that he hath done or shall do for the punishment of sin; and therefore, when the hand of God is upon you, take heed you do not reproach God. When his hand is smart and heavy upon you, remember affliction opens the eyes of the worst men. Nebuchadnezzar, that knew no God but himself, no happiness but in pleasing his own humour, yet when he was whipped and scourged, hear him speak: Dan. 4:37, 'Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the king of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment, and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.' Pharaoh: Exod 9:27, 'The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked.' These acknowledgments and confessions come from wicked men, as water out of a still, forced by the fire. But if affliction opens the eyes of wicked men, surely when we are under God's afflicting hand we should give him the glory of his justice, and acknowledge that he is clear in all that he brings upon us. He takes it ill when we murmur and tax his judgment: Micah 7:9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me;' and Lam. 1:18, 'The Lord is righteous, for I have rebelled against his commandment.' And when we submissively stoop and accept of the punishment of our sin after he hath been provoked, then God will plead for us, Lev. 26:41. When we stoop

humbly under God's correcting hand, and bear it patiently, and say, God is just in all this, then it will succeed well. Observe the justice of God, especially his remarkable judgments upon others. The church is brought in acknowledging of it, Rev. 15:3, 'Just and true are thy ways, thou king of saints;' and Rev. 19:3, 'True and righteous are his judgments.' Not that we should sit crowners upon other men's souls, and judge their spiritual condition, and misinterpret providence: I look upon it as a great sin of a faction, and perverse humours. But clearly when men's sins are so great that the judgments of God have overtaken them, we ought to say, 'Just and true art thou, O Lord, and just in all thy judgments.'

I might show here is much to keep the children of God in awe; the Lord is a righteous God; though they have found mercy and taken sanctuary at his grace, the Lord is impartial in his justice. God, that did not spare the angels when they sinned, nor his Son when he was a sinner by imputation, will not spare you, though you are the dearly beloved of his soul, Prov. 11:31. The sinful courses of God's children occasion bitterness enough; they never venture upon sin but with great loss. If Paul give way to a little pride, God will humble him. If any give way to sin, their pilgrimage will be made uncomfortable: God's hand may be smart and dismal. Eli for negligence and indulgence, there is the ark of God taken, his two sons slain in battle, his daughter-in-law dies, he himself breaks his neck. Oh! the wonderful tragedies that sin works in the houses of the children of God. And David, when he intermeddled with forbidden fruit, was driven from his palace, his concubines defiled, his own son slain, a great many calamities did light upon him. Therefore the children of God have cause to fear, for the Lord is a just God, and they will find it so; here upon earth he hath reserved liberty to visit their iniquity with rods, and their transgression with scourges. I might press you to imitate God's righteousness: 1 John 2:29, 'If ye know that he is

righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of God.' You have a righteous God, and here is the thing you should copy out.

## SERMON CLV

### **Thy testimonies, which thou hast commanded, are righteous and very faithful.—VER. 138**

IN the former verse the prophet had spoken of the righteousness of God; now God is essentially righteous, and therefore all that proceedeth from him is righteous. A carpenter, that hath a rule without him, and a line to measure his work by, may sometimes hit and sometimes miss; but if you could suppose a carpenter, the motion of whose hand were his rule, he could never chop amiss. So must we conceive of God; his act is his rule, holiness is his essence, not a superadded quality, his righteousness is himself; therefore from this righteous God there proceedeth nothing but righteousness, and from this faithful God nothing but faith. He discovereth his nature both in the acts of his providence and the institutions of his word. We cannot reason so concerning men, that because they are righteous nothing cometh from them but what is righteous; because righteousness is not their nature, but an adventitious quality: therefore good men may make ill laws, for though they be meant for

good, they may be deceived; and sometimes wicked men may make good laws, to ingratiate themselves, and for the interest of their affairs; but God being essentially, necessarily good, holy, and righteous, his laws are also good, holy, and true: 'Thy testimonies, which thou hast commanded, are righteous and very faithful.'

In the words observe—

1. That there is a revelation of God's will in his word: Thy testimonies.
2. The authority wherewith his revelation is backed: Which thou hast commanded.
3. The intrinsic worth and excellency of these testimonies; it is double—they are (1.) Righteous; (2.) Very faithful.

In the Hebrew, righteousness and faithfulness; that is, very right, and very faithful; the one word is referred to the agenda in religion, the other to the credenda; they are worthy to be obeyed, worthy to be believed. The sum is, God hath his testimonies extant, their authority is inviolable, and their justice and truth immutable.

Some read, *præcepisti justitiam testimoniorum tuorum et fidem valde*—thou hast highly charged and earnestly commanded the righteousness and faithfulness of thy testimonies, as referring to our duty. But most translations agree with ours. Our duty indeed may be inferred; but I shall not make it the formal interpretation of the place. In the texture of the words in the Hebrew these attributes are given to the word itself.

Doct. They that would profit by the word or rule of faith and manners which God hath commanded them to observe, should look

upon it as righteous and very faithful.

So did David here and elsewhere: Ps. 19:9, 'The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.' I shall make good the point by these considerations:—

Prop. 1. That our faith and obedience must be well grounded, or else they will have no firmness and stability. The want of a foundation is the cause of many a ruinous building. Men carry on a fair and lofty structure of profession, but when the winds of boisterous temptations are let loose upon them, all is blown down, because they build upon the sand, and not upon the rock. They take up this profession without sound evidence and conviction in their consciences; and so they are not 'grounded or settled in the faith,' Col. 1:23; 'not rooted and grounded in love,' Eph. 3:7. They take up religion slightly, not looking into the reasons of it, upon tradition or vulgar esteem, they are not undoubtedly persuaded that it is the very truth of God. The good seed withered that fell upon the stony ground, because there was no depth of earth, Mat. 13:5, no considerable strength of soil to feed faith.

Prop. 2. Faith and obedience cannot be well grounded but on such a doctrine as is true and righteous; for who can depend on that which is not true, or who can obey that which is not righteous? Truth is the only sure foundation for faith to build upon, and righteousness for practice. Faith considereth truth: Eph. 1:13, 'In whom ye trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.' And that righteousness is that which bindeth to practice, we may gather from Ps. 119:128, 'Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way.' The word commandeth nothing but what is just and righteous.

Prop. 3. This true and righteous doctrine must be backed with a strong and powerful authority, not only recommended to us, but strictly and severely enjoined, for two reasons:—

1. Because otherwise it will not be observed and regarded, but be looked upon not as a binding law, but as an arbitrary direction. There is a difference between a law and a rule. A bare rule may only serve to inform our understandings, or to give direction; but a law is a binding rule, a rule with a strong obligation. The word of God is not his counsel and advice to us only, but his law; that men may examine and regard it with more care and diligence. God hath interposed his authority: Ps. 119:4, 'Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently;' and in the text, 'Thy testimonies, which thou hast commanded.' God hath commanded us to believe all truths revealed, to obey all duties required; and if God commandeth, there is good reason why he should be obeyed.

2. Divine authority is one means to evidence the righteousness and truth of what is to be believed and obeyed. The righteousness; for if God, who is my superior, and hath a full right to govern me according to his own pleasure, doth command me anything, it is best that I should obey it without reply and contradiction; yea, though I see not the reason of it: Acts 17:28, 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being.' All creatures have their being not only from him, but in him; and therefore sometimes God giveth no other account of his law but this, 'I am the Lord:' Lev. 22:2, 3, 'Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, that they separate themselves from the holy things of the children of Israel, and that they profane not my holy name in those things which they hallow unto me: I am the Lord. Say unto them, Whosoever he be of all your seed, among your generations, that goeth unto the holy things, which the children of Israel hallow unto the Lord, having his uncleanness upon him, that

soul shall be cut off from my presence: I am the Lord.' Therefore it gives rules of practice to be embraced with all the heart, as holy, just, and good. God's authority is founded upon the total dependence of all creatures upon him, and upon his infallible wisdom, truth, and goodness, by which he hath right to prescribe all points of faith to be believed and assented to upon his own testimony, without contradiction: 1 John 5:9, 'If we receive the testimony of man, the testimony of God is greater.' A man that would not deceive us, we believe him upon his word, though he may be deceived himself; but God doth not deceive, nor can he be deceived: by the holy God nothing can be given but what is holy and good; and thereupon I am to receive it.

Prop. 4. This divine authority, truth, and righteousness, is only to be found in God's testimonies, which he hath commanded, or in God's word.

1. There is a godlike authority speaking there, and commanding that which it becometh none but God to command, who is the universal king and sovereign. For it speaketh to the whole world without respect of persons, to king and beggar, rich and poor, male and female, without reservation of honour or distinction of degrees. The word looketh on them as standing before God on the same level: Job 34:19, 'He accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regarded the rich more than the poor; for they all are the work of his hands.' And speaketh to them indifferently and equally: Exod. 20:3, 'Thou shalt have no other gods but me.' Which is not the voice of any limited and bounded power, but of that which is supreme, transcendent, and absolute. And by these laws he bindeth the conscience and the immortal souls of men: Ps. 19:7, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.' Men may give laws to the words and actions, because they can take cognisance of them; but the word giveth laws

to the thoughts: Isa. 55:7, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts;' Mat. 5:28, 'Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.' And the internal motions and affections of the heart, how we should love and fear, and joy and mourn: 1 Cor. 7:30, 'They that weep as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not.' Of these things God can only take notice; the power of man reacheth not to the mind and spirit; they would be ridiculous if they should take upon them to give laws to these. Philosophers might give directions about them, but potentates would not give laws, for it doth not beseem them to interpose their authority in such cases, where it is impossible they shall know whether they are broke or kept. The scriptures upon their disobedience make men liable not only to temporal, but spiritual and eternal punishments; and accordingly are rewards proportioned in case of obedience. The magistrate's wrath lighteth on the body, but God's upon the soul. All that man can do concerns life, or limb, or liberty, or estate; the inward man is exempted from their power; but God threateneth hardness of heart: Exod. 7:13, 'He hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them.' A reprobate sense: Rom. 1:28, 'And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things that are not convenient.' A trembling heart: Deut. 28:65, 'The Lord shall give thee a trembling of heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind.' On the contrary, obedience hath the promises of a soft heart, and peace that passeth all understanding: Phil. 4:7, 'The peace of God, that passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.' Of an increase of grace: Prov. 4:18, 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.' God, that punisheth sin with sin, will reward grace with grace. So for eternal rewards, God threateneth, 'The worm that never dieth, and the fire that never shall be quenched,' Mark 9:44. On the other side,



he promiseth 'Rivers of pleasures that are at God's right hand for evermore,' Ps. 16:11. He that will be believed and obeyed upon terms of salvation, is a God, one that hath power of the world to come. Thus hath God scattered the strictures of his majesty, and given real evidence of interposing his authority everywhere throughout the word. I shall only add, that the scriptures, as God's law, may be considered as the rule of man's duty, and God's judgment. In respect of the commands, they bind man to duty, and are the rule of it. In respect of the sanction, that is, promises and threatenings, they are the rule of God's judgment. In the one God showeth his righteousness, in the other, his truth; in the precepts, righteousness; in the promises and threatenings, truth.

2. All that God hath required of us is very righteous and just, becoming God to give, and man to receive. There is a condescency in these precepts both to God's nature and to ours. They are the copy of God's holiness, and so a fit means to bring us not only into a subjection to him, which is just, he being our creator, but into a conformity to him, which is our happiness. To prove the righteousness which is in God's laws, I shall produce several arguments.

[1.] Surely there is a distinction between good and evil, and all acts are not in their own nature indifferent; that was a monstrous conceit of Carpender and others, contrary to the common sense of men. If this were true, the chasteness of Lucretia should not be more to be prized than the lightness of Lais, nor the virtue of Cato than the dissoluteness of Sardanapalus; and it would be as indifferent for a man to kill his father as his neighbour's dog, to rob in the woods as to hunt a deer or hare, to lie with his father's wife as to contract honest matrimony, to forswear and lie as to be sincere in all our words and proceedings. Now whose heart doth not rise within them at such an

apprehension? If this be thought to be only custom and received opinion that begets this abhorrence, I would ask, Whence cometh it that we all desire to be, if not really, yet seemingly honest? The most wicked are offended when they are taken for such as they are; and endeavour, as much as they can, to clothe their actions with the appearance of probity and uprightness. If men were not sensible that vice were blameworthy and virtue commendable, why should such a desire so universally possess the heart of man, were there not a natural sense of good and evil, and an essential difference between the one and the other, which we are sensible of, nature itself valuing and esteeming the one, and blasting the other with severe marks of her improbation and hatred? And I do with the more confidence urge this argument, because there is difficulty in the exercise of virtue, because of the conflict of the sensual appetite; and on the other side, many delights and pleasures accompanying vice, by which it gets an easy entrance into our souls, and dominion over our desires. Why should a thing so much against the bent and hair be accounted worthy of praise, and the contrary, which hath such a compliance with our natural desires, be accounted worthy of blame? And were there only custom and tradition for it, would men so universally conspire to decree honours for that which is contrary to their corrupt nature, and to disapprove what is suitable to it? It cannot be. Would they desire the reputation of virtue, when their desires choose vice, and impel them to it, and hold them under it, if they were not sensible that the one hath a comeliness, and the other a turpitude in it? Thus hypocrites do clearly attest the excellency of uprightness and honesty. Well, then, the testimonies which God hath commanded are very righteous, for they forbid those things which have a natural turpitude and indispensable sinfulness in them; and command those things which are plainly and evidently lovely and praiseworthy: Phil. 4:8, 'Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure,

whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.'

[2.] It is such a rule and direction as men would choose if they were at their own liberty, provided they were wise, and not brutified by their inordinate passions, evil customs, and discomposure of soul; for all such are incompetent judges. For there is nothing preserveth the rectitude of human nature, and maketh men to live as men, according to the dictates of reason, as the serious observance of this law. Break it a little, and so far a man turneth beast: so that it was well said of one, A saint or a brute. For the law is so written upon man's heart, and so connatural to his reason, that you must extinguish the nature of man before you can raze out all the sentiments of this law: Rom. 2:14, 15, 'For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another.' As long as we have these hearts that we have, we cannot wholly except against the justice and equity of these laws and rules of commerce between God and his creatures. It is true, all truths are not alike evident, but they that seriously mind the one will be led on to the other, at least will find none contrary to such conclusions, as may be drawn from principles naturally known, and will be encouraged to go on till God reveal more to them. This is so evident, that the wiser any among the heathen are, the nearer they come to this rule, and have framed something like it for the regulation of men, though with great mixtures of their own folly. The perfect discovery of man's duty God reserved to himself and his own writings, elsewhere there is but *ficta rectitudo* and *picta justitia*, poor counterfeits in the laws of civil nations and institutions of philosophy; *sapientia eorum abscondit vitia, non abscondit*; there

was only a little hiding and disguising of sin that it might not appear too odious. In short, the less knowledge any nation or society of men have of this law, the more brutish and barbarous they have been, and so accounted to be by all that have known what civility and human converse mean; and on the contrary, the more polite and civil, the nearer they come to it. Whom would you judge to be more civil, the Romans or the Scythians? the wise and good man, or the sot and fool? Even among us, the more punctually any keepeth to this law, the more he differeth from others, as much as an angel from a man, or a man from a beast: 'The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour,' Prov. 12:26. It is clear as the sun; whether men will or nill, they must acknowledge it, and do when they are serious; for they approve them while they hate them, wish their latter end like theirs, intrust them more than others, presume more from them than others. Out of all I conclude, that the very frame and constitution of the reasonable and immortal soul and body of man doth dictate the equity and justice of this law, and it doth result from the image of God, wherein man was created.

[3.] That law is just and righteous, the violation of which men judge to be justly punished. I use this argument because under punishment men are serious, for it rubbeth up and reviveth the sense of a divine power. Now, for the violation of this law God hath judged persons, families, nations, and kingdoms, and conscience is sensible of the justice of God's judgments exercised upon them. God is clear when he judgeth, Ps. 51:4; his eminent judgments carry light and conviction with them; and wherefore have his judgments been executed? Rom. 1:18, 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;' Heb. 2:2, 'Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' There is a fear after some notorious breach, even in those that are not acquainted

with God, a shyness of his presence, ever since Adam run to the bushes; so it is. All which doth seal the righteousness and truth of this law, and how justly God may reckon with us about it.

[4.] There is an intrinsical righteousness in all the duties commanded in God's law. Besides the will of the lawgiver, there is a justice in the things themselves. By what measure will we take justice? We usually understand it to be to give every one his due. So doth the law, it commandeth us to give God his due and man his due. Love is *πλήρωμα νόμου*, the fulfilling of the law. The law is comprised in one word, 'love;' to love God, himself, and his neighbour. Is there not justice in all this? The natural relation we have to God calleth for love to him; for he made us, and is the strength of our lives, and the length of our days: Deut. 30:20, 'That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave to him; for he is thy life, and the length of thy days.' Self-love and self-preservation, if that be not a natural principle, nothing is. Our neighbours we are bound to love, because of consanguinity; they are our own flesh and blood, and God hath bidden us do to them as we would to ourselves: Mat. 7:12, 'Therefore all things, whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.' There is a universal consanguinity between all mankind, which hath its root in the communion of one and the same nature, and in the dependence and derivation from one common stock. The eminence of the divine nature is the foundation of the honour which we tender to it; and the equality of our nature is the foundation of the justice which we use to one another. So that here are natural, immutable obligations and grounds of right. Go to particulars: How equal is it that we should acknowledge but one God! They are drunk that see double, strangely depraved that see more. That we should not worship him before an idol, which is very apt to taint our minds with

a gross opinion of God, as if he were some limited, finite being. It is a great lessening of reverence to see what we worship. Not to take God's name in vain by a false oath, that breedeth atheism and contempt. That there should be a day to remember the creator of all things; everyday's work is no day's work; but there must be a limited time. For reverence to parents, all nations call for it. For murder, adultery, stealing, false accusations, man's interest will teach him the necessity of those laws that forbid these things. Contentation is a guard to all the rest, it is fit the God of the spirits of all flesh should give a law to the spirit: 'Thou shalt not covet.' Yet this is the law of God, to which scripture is subservient; and all the admonitions, reproofs, exhortations, dehortations, examples, directions, histories of the obedience and virtue of some, with their rewards; of the disobedience, apostasy, rebellion of others, with their punishments; all is to enforce this law. The doctrine of Christ, and redemption and reconciliation by him, I bring not under this first head, because that is a favour and privilege; and the justice and equity of gospel precepts will soon appear, when once we have consented to the law that it is good. But of that in the next head.

3. For the truth and faithfulness of God's testimonies. This may be considered either in revealing or performing, making or making good his promises.

[1.] For truth and faithfulness in making such offers and promises of pardon and eternal life in case of obedience, and threatening a curse and everlasting punishment in case of disobedience. Surely there is no doubt in all this, because they are revealed by God, who is the supreme and original truth, and who neither is nor can be deceived; for God's understanding is the rule and measure of all other truths: nothing is true but what is constant to his knowledge. And he cannot deceive us; that will not agree with the goodness of his nature and

love to mankind; therefore he is called 'God that cannot lie,' Titus 1:2.

[2.] In making good. God hath given us the most solemn assurance: Heb. 6:17, 18, 'God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation.' He hath demitted himself to the terms of a covenant, given us a seal: Rom. 4:11, 'And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith.' Pledge: 2 Cor. 1:22, 'Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of his Spirit in our hearts.' He hath stood upon his truth above all things: Ps. 138:2, 'I will worship towards thy holy temple, and praise thy name, for thy loving-kindness, and for thy truth; for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.' One part of the word verifieth another; in one part you have the promise, in another the accomplishment, the great promise of sending Christ: Heb. 10:5–7, 'Wherefore, when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure: then said I, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.' He would not go back, being willing to keep the promise afoot. It was on our part a handwriting against us, in testification of our guilt and need of expiation; but on God's part an obligation of debt to pay our ransom. Still he accomplisheth promises in the return of prayers; and though the great payment be in the other world, yet here God remembereth us still, accomplishing the intervening promises, and giving proof of his truth. So that they that are acquainted with his name will never distrust him: Ps. 9:10, 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.' They that have known his way, and the course of his dealings, will have a confidence in him.

Prop. 5. They that would receive the word as the word of God, must be soundly convinced of, and seriously consider, this righteousness and faithfulness in the testimonies, which he hath commanded; for till then the word worketh not on them: 1 Thes. 2:13, 'For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.' And till then they are but customary Christians, and can never rightly believe nor obey: John 4:42, 'Now we believe: not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.' First their faith depends on the common tradition, or the testimony of the church; afterwards on the sure ground of the word itself, in which they find such clearness and efficacy, that they cannot but yield to God. The authority of man is nothing to it, when our faith is bottomed on a surer ground, the authority of God speaking in his word.

1. There must be sound conviction, or belief of this. This is called, 'The acknowledgment of the truth,' Titus 1:1, ἐπίγνωσις τῆς ἀληθείας; and Col. 2:2, 'The riches of the assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.' An assurance that God will keep touch with me, that he will not delude me in the terms propounded in the gospel. This full persuasion of the truth of God's testimonies we must all aim at, and seek after. The assurance of my interest and my salvation is another thing, and yet that I am not to neglect, but with this I am to begin.

2. There must be serious consideration; for that improveth all truths, and maketh them active and effectual. God's complaint of his people is that they will not consider: Isa. 1:3, 'The ox knoweth his owner,



and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.' They do not lay truths in the view of conscience. Food without mastication and chewing nourisheth not. A thing not considered doth profit as little as if not believed, as a forgetting God is a kind of denying of him. Seriously then debate it with yourselves. You must consider the authority of God. Authority is that right which a superior hath to prescribe to such as are under him. Doth God usurp upon you when he giveth you a law? or hath he left you in the dark, that you do not know whether this be his law, yea or no? Are there no strictures of his majesty in the very economy and frame of it? Can any but a God speak at such a rate? And for his justice, hath he commanded anything to your hurt? No, it is all for thy good: Deut. 6:24, 'And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always.' And for his truth, men may deceive and be deceived, and though they often speak truth, they do not always so; but God seeth by his own light, not by discourse, but vision. Truth is his nature, from which he can no more swerve than from himself; and what need he court a worm, and flatter us? Thus should we urge our hearts.

Use 1. Let us own and improve the word, as a righteous and faithful word, which God hath commanded for our good.

1. Own the authority of it. It is not an arbitrary thing; the truths revealed imply a command to believe them, the duties required imply a command to obey them: Mat. 17:5, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him.' God hath commanded us to hear Christ, to believe in his name, to love one another: 1 John 3:23, 'And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.' As we value his word, and would one day see his face with comfort, we should bind his precepts upon our hearts. Say

to thy soul, As thou wilt answer it to God another day, take care of this.

2. Own and improve the righteousness of his testimonies. Man having a total and absolute dependence upon God, God might govern us in what manner it pleased him; for it is just 'that one may do with his own what he will,' Mat. 20:15. But what hath the Lord required of thee, but to love him and serve him? Not to pluck the stars from the sky, or to guide the chariot of the sun, not such sublimity of knowledge and learning, nor such a quantity and proportion of alms, nor to lance thyself, or offer thy first-born, nor rivers of oil, nor thousands of rams, for a burnt-offering: Micah 6:8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' The Lord's commands are not rigid and severe and unreasonable, but sweet and desirable, that we should do wrong to none, do good to all, and maintain communion with him; and is this burthensome? Go try the drunkard's life and the adulterer's life; you will see the temperate, the chaste, have much the sweeter life of it. Therefore let there not be one disallowing thought of what God hath required. Could we bring you to esteem the word, other things would come on more easily.

3. Own it and improve it as a faithful word, building upon the promises, fearing the threats thereof. The word will not deceive them that are ruled by it. Consider your condition, and what will be the event of things. There is a curiosity in men to know their own destiny. We may easily know what shall become of us by the word of God; and if men were not more curious to know their end than careful to amend their lives, they need not seek any other oracle: Rom. 8:13, 'For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.' so for the

end of any action; if the word of God say it will be bitter in the latter end, though it bring profit and pleasure for a while, believe it against all the wicked men in the world, and say, I do more believe this one text and place of scripture than all that men can do and say. Mind the great duties of the gospel, and venture your souls in Christ's hands upon these terms: 1 Tim. 1:15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' I have nothing but God's word, yet I will venture my salvation, my all, upon it, upon his bare word. Comfort yourselves in the midst of difficulties with the truth of God's word, when all sense and outward seeming is contrary to the promise. Before a promise be accomplished there will be unlikelihoods. I will instance in Paul's prediction: Acts 27:24–26, 'Lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island,' &c. Yet how many difficulties came to pass! First, no isle appeareth; they are tossed in the Adriatic sea for fourteen days together; they knew not where they were, nor whither they did go. Thus doth God delay the accomplishment of the promise; they know not how nor which way it shall be made good. Another difficulty was, that, meeting with some isle, it fell out in the night-time; they deemed they drew near to some country, but yet feared they should be split upon the rocks, ver. 30; the shipmen were ready to flee out of the ship, leave Paul and his fellows in danger, upon pretence of casting out anchors out of the fore-stern, and so they were ready to miscarry in the haven. When this difficulty was over, and it was day, they were not able to row to land, because of their long fasting, having eaten little or nothing for fourteen days. Another difficulty was, when they would have thrust the ship ashore it was broken all in pieces, what with high banks and two seas meeting. Another difficulty was, when they were to swim to land, they think of killing the prisoners, and the captain, willing to save

Paul, kept them from their purpose, and so they escaped all to land. Therefore do not distrust the word; but especially bear up with the hope of eternal life, though remote and in another world, which we never saw: Heb. 11:13, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them;' Rom. 2:7, 'To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for life, and glory, and immortality, eternal life.' You will meet with bitter conflicts, heavy troubles, sad desertions; yet remember God's word is a faithful word, and let this cheer and revive you.

Use 2. Express these virtues of the word. We must be righteous and true if the word of God be so, for the impression must answer the seal and stamp: Rom. 6:17, 'But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin; but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you;' 2 Cor. 3:3, 'Ye are declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart;' Phil. 2:16, 'Holding fast the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.' A Christian is the Bible exemplified; such a conformity there must be there to the law of God; the same light that shineth forth in scripture should shine forth in the lives of the godly; so it was in Hezekiah: Isa. 38:3, 'Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.' And of David it is said, 1 Kings 3:6, 'Thy servant David walked before thee in truth, and righteousness, and uprightness of heart'.

1. For righteousness. A Christian's business is to give to every man his due, to do what he is bound to do to God and man; Mat. 22:21, to 'render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things

that are God's.' Whether by the law of nature: 1 Tim. 5:8, 'If any provide not for his own, and especially for them of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.' Or by relation, as Boaz did the part of a kinsman to Ruth: Ruth 3:13, 'Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth.' Or by place or station: Neh. 6:11, 'And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.' Or by paction or agreement: Col 4:1, 'Masters, give to your servants that which is just and equal.' Or according to rules of prudence, equity, charity: Phil. 4:5, 'Let your moderation,' τὸ ἐπιεικὲς, 'be known unto all men;' whether it be fear or honour that be due: Rom. 13:7, 'Render therefore to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.' Or good-will: ver. 8, 'Owe no man anything, but to love one another.'

2. For truth. You are to adhere to the truth, 'not to be carried About with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but, speaking the truth in love, ye may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ,' Eph. 4:14, 15. To speak nothing but truth in your ordinary communication: Eph. 4:25, 'Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour.' To perform what You promise, though to your loss: Ps. 15:4, 'He sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.' Thus should the whole course of our lives express the properties of the word.

Use 3. To show the reason why men are so backward in obedience, so prone to that is evil, so uncomfortable in trouble. We do not believe

that the testimony of God is righteous and true, very true, every tittle of it; but we are slow of heart to believe; therefore is the faithfulness and truth of the word inculcated. Christ saith, 'Believest thou this?' John 11:25. Could we believe the word more, what advantage should we have in the spiritual life! what fear of God! what joy of faith! what readiness of obedience! But we cannot depend upon God's word, and therefore are easily shaken in mind. Our hearts are like a sea, one wave riseth up after another. We must be fed with sense, and God must do all immediately, or else we are apt to sink under our discouragements.

## SERMON CLVI

**My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.—VER.**

**139**

IN these words you may observe—(1.) Two different persons; (2.) A different carriage mentioned.

1. Two different persons are spoken of, David and his enemies. By enemies is not to be understood those only that were troublesome to himself, but those who were an opposite party to God, who opposed themselves against God and godliness; these without any breach of the law of love may be counted enemies: Ps. 139:21, 22, 'Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies.' It is a comfort and satisfaction to the godly to have no enemies to themselves but such as are enemies to God also, such as rise up against God.

2. There is a different carriage mentioned, and ascribed to these two parties; on the one side, oblivion and forgetfulness of God's law; on the other side, zeal.

[1.] On the enemies' part, oblivion and forgetfulness of God's word. The word of God is not effectual usually, but where it is hid in recent memory. They 'have forgotten thy word;' a proper phrase to set forth them in the bosom of the visible church who do not wholly deny and reject the word and rule of scripture, but yet live as though they had forgotten it; they do not observe it, as if God had never spoken any

such thing, or given them any such rule. They that reject and contemn such things as thy word enforceth, surely do not remember to do them.

[2.] On David's part here is mentioned zeal, or a flagrant affection, which is set forth—(1.) By the vehemency of it; (2.) By the cause of it.

(1.) By the vehemency of it, 'My zeal hath consumed me.' It was no small zeal that David had, but a consuming zeal. Vehement affections exhaust and consume the vital spirits, and waste the body. The like expression is used, Ps. 63:9, 'The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up.' Strength of holy affection works many times upon the body as well as the soul, especially zeal, which is a high degree of love, and vents itself by a mixture of grief and anger. What a man loves, he would have it respected, and is grieved when it is dishonoured and under disrepute. Both have an influence upon this consuming, this wasting of the spirits that is spoken of in the text, because they had lessened and obscured the glory of God, and violated his law; and there was in him a holy care, ardour, and earnest endeavour to rectify this abuse, and awaken them out of their security, and reduce them to their duty.

(2.) Here was the cause of it. Why was David so much wasted, pined, consumed, and troubled? Because they 'have forgotten thy word;' the contempt of God, and the offence of God sat nearest his heart; as if he had said, I should more patiently bear the injury done to myself, but I cannot be coldly affected where thy glory, O Lord, is concerned; since I have had a taste of thy grace, and felt the benefit of thy word, I cannot endure it should be contemned, and it much moves me to see creatures so mad upon their own destruction, and to make so light of thy salvation. Thus was David consumed, not at the sight of his own, but at other men's sins; and not at others in general, but



them, his enemies, that they should make void the law of God. Such was his love to the word, that he could not endure the contempt and violation of it; and such was his compassion to the souls of men, that it grieved him exceedingly to see any of the workmanship of God to perish, to be captivated to the world, to be made factors for the devil, and fuel for hell-fire, and to be so violent for their own destruction.

Doct. That great and pure zeal becomes those that have any affection for the word and for the ways of God.

Here is a great zeal; for David saith, 'My zeal hath consumed me;' it preyed upon his spirit. And here is a pure zeal, for he mentions not personal injuries, but disrespect to God's word. When the same men are our enemies and God's enemies, we should be more zealous for God's cause than our own. Now both the greatness and purity of his zeal did arise from his love to the word, as appears from the precedent and subsequent verses. In the precedent verses he had told them, 'Just and upright are thy testimonies, and very faithful,' therefore 'my zeal hath consumed me,' because this word should be slighted and contemned. And it appears also from the following verse, 'Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.' He was troubled to see such a holy and pure word to be trampled under foot, and especially that those seem to disown it (he doth not say they deny it) who had generally professed to live under this rule; that they made light and disregarded the precepts, in which I found so much comfort and delight.

In the prosecution of this point I shall—

1. Show what is true zeal.
2. Why all that love the word should have this great and pure zeal.

First, What is true zeal? There is a carnal zeal and there is a spiritual zeal.

1. The carnal zeal (to begin with that) is threefold:—

[1.] That which comes from an ill cause, and produceth ill effects. An ill cause, as hatred of men's persons, or envy at their gifts and excellences, or their success and happiness in the world: James 3:14, 'If ye have bitter envying in your hearts.' It is πικρὸν ζῆλον, if you have bitter zeal in your hearts. There is a kind of bitter zeal, and malignity at their excellency, whether gifts, graces, rank, dignity in the world. And in ver. 16 he tells us this bitter zeal produceth confusion and every evil work. To be consumed and eaten out with envy is little commendable. This is not the zeal of the text. With this zeal were the chief priests filled when they saw that the gospel came into some reputation, and that the people, do what they could, did haunt and frequent it. We read, Acts 5:17, ἐπλήσθησαν ζήλου. We render it, They were filled with indignation; it is in the Greek and in the margin, They were filled with zeal; with this bitter zeal, malignity, envy, indignation, they would bestir themselves to suppress the growing gospel by all the means that possibly they could.

[2.] There is another sort of carnal zeal which hath an ill object, though it may be a good cause from whence it proceeds, such as an ignorant zeal, which proceeds from some love to that which men call religion, but falsely; and so the apostle saith, Rom. 10:2, 'I bear them witness that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge;' and such a zeal had Paul when he was a pharisee. He gives an account of it, Gal. 1:12–14, 'How that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.' Paul was a man that never acted against his

conscience, no, not when he was a pharisee; he still acted according to his light; but when he was blinded by pharisaical prejudices, he wasted the church of God, and was exceedingly zealous for a false religion. Thus is such a zeal as possibly might have a tolerable cause, but it had a bad object, a zeal about the dictates of a deluded conscience, and this zeal, *perniciosior est, quo flagrantior*, is the more pernicious the more earnest it is. It hath often raised confusions in the church, when men are led with a blind zeal they think for God; if they be under, then they make divisions; if they get a-top, then they are persecuting and oppressing. This is the zeal of a deluded conscience. In short, zeal must have a right object, otherwise it may be great, but cannot be good, pure, and holy.

[3.] Another false zeal is when it hath no ill object, but it exceeds in the measure and degree, and is far beyond the weight of the thing that it is laid out upon. This is a superstitious, a trifling zeal, which runs out to externals, and is altogether employed about lesser things of religion, as the pharisees, Mat. 23:23, that made a great business about a small matter, tithing mint, and anise, and cummin, but neglected weighty duties, faith, judgment, righteousness, and the great things of the kingdom of God. The apostle tells us, Rom. 14:17, 'The kingdom of God is not meat and drink,' in being of this party and that; many all their care and strength of their souls runs out in matters of less importance, keeping up a party and faction in religion; we should first make conscience of principal matters. Superstitious scrupulosity is always damageful, like those that come into a shop to buy a pennyworth of a commodity, and steal a pound's worth. Oh! they have a great zeal for lesser things when it runs out mightily about outward things, either for that or against that; and in the meantime they cherish the world, pride, envy, carnal evil affections, that are destructive to and the bane of godliness.

2. There is a spiritual holy zeal which we may describe—(1.) By its cause; (2.) by its object; (3.) by its effects; (4.) by its use as to public reformation; (5.) as to its use as to Christians' private exercises, to carry on the spiritual life with fervour, warmth, and vigour.

[1.] I am to speak of the cause of it. The true cause of holy zeal is love to God and what belongs to God. Zeal is *ferventis amoris gradus*, a higher degree of love; it is the fervour of divine charity. We should mark still what spirit inflames the zeal that we have. Every man is eaten up with one kind of zeal or another. The zeal of the world eats up many, Ps. 127:2. They bereave their souls of good, and all for a little pelf; they work in the fires, they load themselves with thick clay. The zeal of the flesh inflames many; they are mad upon carnal delights, can let go all considerations so as they may fulfil their lusts; they are consumed with these kind of zeals. Another spirit should be working in us, a zeal for God; and that comes from an entire love to God. When the soul doth heartily and earnestly love God above all, then there is a strong desire of promoting God's glory and interest; there should be that spirit which breathes in our zeal, and with this zeal should we be eaten up and spent. Now they that love God will love all them which belong to God. Friends have all things common, so it is between us and God; the injuries done to him will be as grievous to us as if they were done to ourselves: Ps. 69:9, 'For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up, and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me;' and the glory that comes to them is as acceptable as if some great benefit had come to us: Acts 15:3, 'Declaring the conversion of the Gentiles, and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.' Oh! this is great joy to a gracious soul when God's interest thrives in the world. Oh! this is that they would willingly hear spoken of; their hearts are upon it, when God's interest stands or falls, such an earnest desire of the glory of God, which is the highest degree and measure of love to God.

[2.] Let us speak of the object of zeal. In three things God's interest lies in the world, viz., his truth, his worship, and his servants. Now it is not enough to have zeal that we do not oppose any of these, but they must be tenderly regarded and looked after, and we must be affected with these things as we would with our own concernments. When wrongs are offered to any of these, either to God's truth, his worship, or his servants, they must go more nearly to our hearts than any personal injuries done to ourselves. What we cannot remedy we must mourn for. All these three concur in Elijah's speech: 1 Kings 19:10, 'I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts;' there is his zeal. Why? 'For the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant;' there is his truth perverted: 'they have thrown down thy altars;' there is his worship overturned: 'they have slain thy prophets with the sword;' there his servants are wronged. So that zeal mainly is concerned when God suffers loss in any of these things. If his truth be perverted, his worship overturned, his servants be despitefully used, vexed, and grieved, then zeal presently shows itself in opposing these things, or in grieving for them.

(1.) Zeal seeks to preserve the truth of God inviolable. Truth is a precious depositum, trust, and charge which God hath committed to the keeping of his people; and without zeal to defend and propagate and maintain it, though with the greatest hazard, it will never be kept, and you will never be faithful to God. We are a kind of feoffees for the present age, and trustees for the future; and the charge of God's truth is put into our hands, and we must see it be transmitted to the world pure and undefiled. Therefore, Jude 3, ἐπαγωνίζεσθαι, 'We must contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.' When others would violate the truth we must contend with them: Jer. 9:3, 'They are not valiant for the truth.' A Christian needs not only the labour of an ox, that he may be diligent, but the valour of a lion, that he may appear for God in defence of his

truth when it is invaded and encroached upon. And especially doth this concern the officers of the church; this zeal they should have for the word: Titus 1:9, ἀντεχόμενον, 'Holding fast the faithful word.' The word signifies to be good at holding and drawing; that is, when others would wrest it out of our hands, we should hold it fast; as a staff that another would take out of our hands, we hold it faster and wrestle with him. So should we wrestle, contend, and hold fast the truth, when others would draw it from us. And Phil. 1:27, 'Striving together for the faith of the gospel.' Oh! we should not let one dust of truth perish. This is to be zealous for the truth, standing to, and striving for the defence thereof, in our way and place. If God had not raised up zealous instruments in every age to plead for his truth, what a sad case would the church have been in? Truth would have been buried under a great heap of prejudices, and Christ's kingdom have been crushed in the very egg, and religion strangled in the cradle. But there is a cloud of witnesses gone before us. In every age God sets up some of all sexes, ages, conditions, that have owned his despised and oppugned truths, and have not counted their lives dear, so as they might give their testimony to the truth of God, Rev. 12:11, and have more greedily embraced martyrdom than others honours and dignities in the church; as Sulpicius Severus observes, they have with greater desire affected the glory of martyrdom and suffering for the truth, that they might be faithful to God and the souls of men in future ages, and to preserve God's truth inviolate; they have greedily sought this honour to suffer for God. And Ignatius, he could say, Come, saith he, I desire the beasts that are prepared should be let loose for me; it is better to die for Christ than to command the ends of the earth. And Basil, when the Arian emperor threatened those that did oppose his religion should die the death. The wild beasts, let them be let out; would to God it were so, that I had the honour to die for the truth of Christ! This was notably for the increase of Christ's

kingdom, and thus the Lord hath inspired his people with a holy love and zeal.

(2.) For his worship, that that may not be corrupted, but his institutions kept pure. Zeal is conversant about that too: Exod. 20:5, 'Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.' In the first commandment, God forbids a false god; in the second, he forbids the false means of worship, as before the false object. Now, because the means of worship are apt to be perverted, the Lord shows how jealous he was for his worship: 'I am a jealous God;' if the institutions of God be perverted, then 'I will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.' The children are considered in that commandment, because usually the interest of families is our great snare, when an idol is set up, or a false means of worship. The chiefest false worship is an idol; and the greatest sin is put for all the rest, before an idol, the imagination or invention of men, when that is set up. The Lord speaks of the interest of families, because men are apt to think they shall undo them and their families if they contend in this matter. Now, be you zealous of my worship, for I will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. That the interest of families might not abate our zeal, the Lord takes the family into the curse for the violation, and likewise into the blessing for zeal for his institutions. And so Christ saith, John 2:17, 'The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up.' We should be zealous for God's worship. Ministers should preach zealously, and magistrates govern zealously to purge God's house, and Christians pray zealously; every one of us, as far as the bounds of our calling will permit, should be zealous for God's worship. *Quis comeditur zelo Domus Dei?* saith Austin—who is he that is eaten out with the zeal of God's house? He that desires that no human invention may be blended and mixed with God's worship, and would fain amend what

is amiss. This zeal is the only right and acceptable principle of reformation, our great indignation against all false worship whatever. I remember the story of Valentinian, who was afterwards emperor, when according to the duty of his place, being captain of the guard to Julian the apostate and emperor, he was engaged to attend him into the heathen temple of fortune, and the priests were to sprinkle the lustrating and holy water—for that ceremony was common to the heathens with the papists—and a drop of it lighted upon Valentinian, he struck the priest that did it, and said, Thou hast defiled me, thou hast not purged me (he thought his garments to be contaminated, and not his body sanctified), and he tore off his belt, renounced his honour, rather than he would do anything that should be contrary to his religion; and for this Julian sent him into banishment, and within a year and a few months, the story tells us, that he received the reward of his holy confession and owning of Christ, the Roman empire. For the soldiers, being weary of this pagan emperor, as soon as he died chose Jovinianus (that had been banished, and a fellow sufferer with him), who recalled him and other Christians from their exile, and after having reigned not full eight months, he died, and Valentinian was chosen emperor in his stead.

(3.) The third thing we should be zealous for is God's servants; when they are oppressed we should own and cherish them, as good Obadiah did the prophets, who 'hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water,' 1 Kings 18:4; and Jonathan owned David though his father was greatly displeased with him, and flung a javelin at him, 1 Sam. 20:32; and Esther pleads for the Jews when they were doomed to destruction, Esther 7:3; and Nicodemus pleads for Christ that he might not be condemned unheard: John 7:50, 51, 'When the council was ready to condemn him, Nicodemus saith to them (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them), Doth our



law judge any man before it hear him? And then they went their way.' That stopped the persecution for that time. Certainly they have little zeal for God, that can see good men perish before their eyes, and have not a word to speak for them. This Nicodemus, that was before infirm and weak, that sneaked unto Christ, that came to him by night, gets courage in the time of need to speak for Christ.

[3.] What are the acts of zeal with respect to these objects?

(1.) It quickens us to our duty, and makes us publicly active for God: Gal. 4:18, 'It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing.' Oh! how remiss and sluggish would we be otherwise in matters of God's kingdom and glory, if we had not a strong degree of love to stir us up to appear for God, in the worst times, and in the way and places that is proper for us! Paul when he saw the whole city given to idolatry, it is said, his 'spirit was stirred in him,' Acts 17:16; he could not contain; and again, Acts 18:5, Paul 'was pressed in spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.' That heroic act of Phinehas when he saw the laws of God broken, and nobody ready to vindicate the honour of God; he took a javelin in his hand and thrust the offenders through, Num. 25:7; and the Lord saith afterwards, ver. 11, 'Phineas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy.' He had an extraordinary call to do that; he was high priest, but he went then upon *jus zenorum*. So Elijah, 1 Kings 18:40, 'He took the prophets of Baal and brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.' There was an extraordinary call; but we are all to be active in spreading and defending the truth, and promoting the purity of God's worship, and welfare of his people, as far as our calling and places permit.

(2.) It maketh us spare no cost, yea, it judgeth that best done for God which costs us most, as David would not serve God with that which cost nothing, 2 Sam. 24:25. That is worth nothing that cost nothing in religion. Jezebel she was zealous for Baal, and maintained four hundred of his priests at her table. In the primitive times they sold all things that they had, and had all things common: and the Israelites they offered so plentifully to the tabernacle, that Moses was fain to forbid them, to put a stop, because there was enough given for the advancement of God's worship, Exod. 38:8. And therefore certainly they are cold, and have little zeal for God, that love as the Corinthians did, *ἀδάπανον εὐαγγέλιον*, a gospel without charges, would be at no cost for Christ. This was Paul's case; there the poor saints of Macedonia which had but from hand to mouth, they ministered to him, and maintained him when he was at Corinth, a rich and opulent town. Paul would depart from his right rather than prejudice the gospel. Therefore they that will be at no cost for Christ, maintaining his truth, upholding his worship, relieving his people, have no zeal.

(3.) It vents itself by holy grief and anger when any of these are violated. (1.) With holy grief. We should be touched, and that to the quick, with other men's sins, when they neglect their duty, pervert all that is right and honest, and seem not to be concerned with the glory of God, 1 Peter 2:7, 8. It is said of Lot, 'his righteous soul was vexed' at the wickedness of the Sodomites; and 'he vexed himself,' not with Sodom's injuries, but with Sodom's impurities; he could not redress the evils, but he mourns for them. So the prophet Jeremiah for the stubbornness of the people: Jer. 13:17, 'But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, and mine eye shall weep sore,' &c. Though they would not hearken, amend, nor any way regard these things, yet it grieved him exceedingly. So you shall see the like of Ezra, chap. 10:6, 'He mourned because of the

transgression of them that had been carried away.' The transgression of God's people was very grievous to him. Thus we read of Eli, 1 Sam. 4:13, 'Eli sat by the wayside watching; for his heart trembled for the ark of God.' The glory of God was dear to him; and when religion is in danger, God dishonoured, it leaves a mighty impression upon the hearts of those that have a zeal and strong love to God. (2.) It vents itself by indignation and holy anger; as Christ whipped the buyers and sellers out of the temple, and showed his divine power therein, John 2:15. And 'remember them, O God, that defile the priesthood,' Neh. 13:29; and Exod. 32:19. Meek Moses, yet his anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hand; and Ezra 9:3, 'When I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head, and of my beard, and sat down astonished.' Thus deeply are God's children affected with God's public dishonour, though not occasioned by themselves, but occasioned by others, and this is to have a zeal for God.

[4.] The qualifications and concomitants of this holy zeal. I will name three:—

(1.) It must be accompanied with knowledge and discretion; that is to say, there must be a distinct knowledge of the cause that we take up, else we may be factors for the devil's kingdom when we think we are acting for God, and be persecuting the saints when we think we are destroying his enemies. It must be out of the knowledge of the cause of the evil to be renounced and the good to be established. There is a blind zeal: John 16:2, 'Whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.' The pseudo-Christians, the literal Christians, have a blind zeal against the serious Christians, and if they can excommunicate them and throw them out of the church and kill them, they think this is acceptable service to God. All this is blind zeal. In Rom. 10:2, the apostle saith, 'They have a zeal of God, but not

according to knowledge;' therefore there must be light as well as heat in this fire, else it is not the fire of the altar, but of a common hearth; nay, we must not only know the truth, but also the worth of the cause. The truth of the cause, that must be guided still by wisdom, and we must observe all the seasonable circumstances in discovering ourselves for God, else it will produce strange, evil, and malignant effects, which tend much to the dishonour of God, and prejudice of the gospel. Look, as a blind horse that is full of mettle, but is always stumbling, so they never act commendably and seasonably. The church of God hath had bitter experience in all ages of the sad effects of misguided zeal; when it hath not been seasoned with knowledge and discretion to time things, it hath tended much to the hindrance of Christ's kingdom, and the promotion of Satan's interest in the world. Christ in one place bids us to 'be wise as serpents,' Mat. 10:16; and in another place, not to give that which is holy to dogs, 'nor cast pearls before swine,' Mat. 7:6; otherwise we unprofitably sacrifice ourselves, and hinder the good which we would promote. It was a grievous thing to Paul, and pressed upon his spirit, to see all Ephesus given to idolatry, and mightily affected with Diana's worship; yet we read, Acts 19:10, he was two years at Ephesus before he spake against Diana; he observed his season before he took the liberty and thought himself bound to speak against that false worship. The historian tells us of Andes, a Persian bishop, that was under Varrans, that, having an unguided zeal, got some Christians together to destroy the temple of fire, which the Persians worshipped. Saith Theodoret, Not as he ought to do; and what is the issue? Varrans the emperor, that was formerly favourable to the Christians, when he saw they affected power, and would destroy the worship of the country, what then? He was filled with cruel persecution, he skinned the backs of some of the Christians, and the faces of others, drew splinters through their flesh, used horrible torments, which the historian takes notice of, and it conduced to the total suppression of the Christian religion. Therefore

this wildfire when it runs abroad without discretion, and not being seasoned with prudence, it doth a world of harm to the church of God. We must observe the time, circumstances, and when it is most behoveful for the glory of God, the good of the church, and cause we would promote. See Videlius, lib i. cap. 1.

(2.) This zeal also must be mingled with compassion, that as we mind the glory of God, so we may pity deluded souls. When we are zealous against the sin we must have commiseration of the sinner, as knowing the weaknesses and prejudices of education that are incident to human nature. This is, to be sure, most agreeable to Christ's pattern. He wept over Jerusalem that stood in a state of enmity to him, Luke 19:41; and when he was angry with the unbelief of his countrymen, at the same time he was grieved at the hardness of their hearts, Mark 3:5. In Christ's anger there was more of compassion than of passion. And Samuel he mourned for Saul when he saw him no more, 1 Sam. 15:35; and the apostle, when he had zealously declaimed against the false teachers, he falls a-weeping, Phil. 3:18. When we show love to God there should not be a hatred and ill-will to the persons of men, but we should bewail their obstinacy and blindness. Those that are all for destruction, and ready to call fire from heaven, they know not what spirit they are of; they have a fiery zealous spirit, but that which doth not become the temper of the gospel.

(3.) Zeal must be constant, Gal. 4:18; the fire on the altar must never go out; we cannot be without it for a moment. There are some that have zeal for a fit, but soon grow weary of it; they are zealous in prosperity, then they are forward and active for God; but when it comes to trouble, they give up all to oppositions. On the contrary, others in their affliction and low estate, they have a warm sense of religion, but when they are all well at ease, they are lost in the

delights of the flesh, and drowned in the cares of the world, and their zeal for God is checked. And we see that some in their youth have a good savour and towardliness, and seem to have a very tender conscience, but after their first heats are spent they are very careless, and grow inordinate, and all their zeal for God is gone: Gal. 5:7, 'Ye did run well; who did hinder you, that ye should not obey the truth?' David was as zealous when the crown was upon his head as when God humbled him and kept him low. Many think zeal a cumber as they increase in worldly wisdom, and so cast it off. Nay, in gross hypocrites you shall find this, they will be zealous in good company, and as vain and loose in bad. Let any grave servant of God be there, they seem to kindle a great fire, but as soon as they are gone, they put it out again. Ay! but true zeal should always continue and be of a lasting and of an increasing flame.

[5.] To speak of the private and personal use of zeal, what need we have to keep up a warm frame of heart towards God and heavenly things (hitherto we have considered it as it respects God's public interest); it is also of private use both in resisting of sin, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

(1.) In resisting of sin. A man never doth anything to purpose in purging out sin until he hath a zeal for God: Rev. 3:19, 'Be zealous therefore, and repent.' Repentance is set on and quickened by zeal. Doth zeal, think you, serve only to rectify the disorders of other men, and not our own? No, certainly; we should begin at home; we should take care that God be exalted in our own hearts, as well as his interest be not infringed in the world. First our Saviour adviseth us to pluck out the beam out of our own eyes, Mat. 7:5. Unless we be blameless ourselves we can have no confidence or hope to do much good to others. The first stone should be cast at ourselves; we should repent of our own sin, our own lusts, the plague of our own heart; if

anything we are apt to allow that is contrary to God, this should be a great grief to us. Unless we cleanse our own unclean sinks at home, how can we hope for reformation abroad? Men cry out against public vices, as the lapwing will croak abroad to draw off the person from her own nest; it is all but the deceit of the heart; and usually we find it to be so in the world. Most men are better acquainted with other men's duties than their own; with the magistrate's duties more than their own, and so other men's sins more than their own. But it is not so where zeal is unfeigned; there it begins at home; they will allow nothing in their own hearts that may be contrary to God's interest and to the sovereignty of his Spirit.

(2.) Also in perfecting holiness. The whole business of the spiritual life must be carried on in warmth and vigour: Rom. 12:11, 'Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' It is ζέοντες πνεύματι, seething hot in spirit. Nothing done for God should be done negligently, but affectionately. To be lukewarm and key-cold, that makes no work in religion; but when a man hath a great zeal for God, oh! then he profits and gets ground, then sin decays, grace is strengthened, love is more rooted in his heart every day, and he doth more for God. Paul profited in the Jewish religion, Gal. 1:14. Why? Because he was 'more zealous than others.' This is the man that will be the honour of God's ordinances, that man that will show forth the virtue and power of religion, when his heart grows warm for God and zealous for God.

Secondly, Why we ought to look after a great and pure zeal, if we have any love to God and the law of God and his ways.

1. Why a great zeal?

[1.] Because it is not zeal else, if it be not in some good degree; for zeal is a great fire and a vehement flame; not only love, but vehement love; it must needs be great: Cant. 8:6, 7, 'For love is as strong as

death, jealousy is cruel as the grave.' Zeal is cruel as the grave; read it so: 'Many waters cannot quench love,' &c. Mark, our love to the ways of God should be of such a nature, such a warm and zealous working of heart towards God, that many floods cannot quench it, that nothing can bribe it. Surely the best things deserve the best affections; therefore whatever we do in religion and for God, we should do it with all our might, Eccles. 9:10.

[2.] Otherwise it will not do the work. Such as increaseth with opposition; as fire, when you put on more fuel, it grows more vehement; so unless it be a zeal that grows earnest with discouragement, alas! it will soon be quenched. We shall meet with many discouragements from within and without; but when we can resolve with David, the more they scoffed and opposed him, he would 'be yet more vile,' 2 Sam. 6:22. So the more trouble they meet with in the ways of God, the more they will cleave to him, and will please God though with the displeasure of men. True zeal is inflamed with difficulties. As lime, the more water they pour on, the more it burns; as Nehemiah's courage it sparkled the more the more it was opposed: 'Should such a man as I flee?' Should I betray the cause of God? This is the true zeal, when it sparkles by opposition. As Paul, the more they persuaded him, the more he seemed to be bound in spirit to go to Jerusalem, Acts 21:13; though they did even break his heart, they could not break his purpose. Such a zeal as is quenched with every drop of water, and goes out with every flout and scorn, will never do it; therefore we had need have a great zeal, that we may harden ourselves against all oppositions we meet with in the way.

2. It needs to be pure, too; such a fervent affection had need be right, for since it makes men so active and resolute, certainly it should go upon clear grounds. I showed before nothing hath done more mischief in the world than wild zeal; it is like fire out of its place, that



sets all the house in a flame; it doth not comfort and refresh those that have it, but it destroys and consumes all. But why must we have pure zeal?

[1.] Because there is a false zeal, and a self-seeking zeal, which men have while they pretend much love to God and good of souls, but are really hunting after their own interest: Gal. 4:17, 'They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you that ye might affect them;' that is, they sought to rend their affections from Paul, and from their faithful pastors, that they might affect them; so he tells us, Phil. 1:15, 'Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife.' There may be a zeal that comes merely out of envy and strife; Jehu could say, 'Come, see my zeal for the Lord,' 2 Kings 10:16.

[2.] This false zeal doth a great deal of mischief. It is a dishonour to God to pretend to him, and to put the varnish of our cause upon God. God himself is involved in the deceit, Jer. 4:10. It is a strange expression to be used to God, 'Ah! Lord God, surely thou hast greatly deceived this people.' The false prophets did it in his name. And it divides the church as well as dishonours God: Gal. 4:17, 'They would exclude you, that ye might affect them.' The meaning is, they would rend you from the body of the Christian church, and alienate the minds of God's people, so as to devote them to a faction: Phil. 1:16, 'They preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds.' And it hardens the persons themselves, as Jehu boasted of his zeal, and it was only self-seeking, and the Lord counts it murder, Hosea 1:4.

Use. Have we this pure zeal, such a zeal as David speaks of? There are many notes by which it may be discerned; as—

1. When injuries done to God or religion affect us more than injuries done personally to ourselves; when we carry ourselves in an

indifferency in our own cause, but not in God's. Compare Num. 12:13, with Exod. 32:19. Moses could with a meek spirit bear all the injuries done to himself, but could not contain himself when he saw injury done to God, but breaks the tables.

2. When the same enemies are God's enemies and ours. David was sensible not of the inhumanity of his enemies, but that which most troubled him was because they were God's enemies and forsook his words. David was not so much troubled at Absalom's rebellion, as dying in his sins.

3. When there is a compassion mingled with our zeal. Fleshly anger is all for destruction; holy anger is for conversion, when they grieve, and seek to redress the matter.

4. True zeal is universal; it is most against their own sins, and the sins of those that are nearest, and runs out upon weighty things. But those that tithe mint and cummin, and neglect weighty things, they have not true zeal. There are many instances of this false disproportionate zeal of a conscience, taken up for a turn. When there is a partial conscience—in some things men are mighty scrupulous, and strain at a gnat and swallow a camel—it discovers the hypocrisy that lights upon the professors of religion, full of heinous outcries upon small things, yet dashing upon things that are against the fundamentals of the covenant.

## SERMON CLVII

**Thy word is very pure: therefore thy  
servant loveth it—VER. 140**

THERE are three things in this verse:—

1. The excellency of the word, thy word is very pure.
2. David's respect to it, thy servant loveth it.
3. The connection between both, in the illative particle, therefore.

1. The excellency of the word, 'Thy word is very pure.' That which we render 'very pure,' signifieth tried in the fire and refined; the Septuagint reads it, πεπυρωμένον λόγιόν σου σφόδρα, thy word is set on fire; and so you may see it explained, Ps. 12:6, 'The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times.' The expression may import two things—(1.) The infallible certainty of the word; (2.) The exact purity.

[1.] The infallible certainty of the word, as gold endureth in the fire when the dross is consumed. Vain conceits comfort us not in a time of trouble, but the word of God, the more it is tried, the more you will find the excellency of it. The promise is tried, as well as we are tried, in deep afflictions; but when it is so, it will be found to be most sure. In the old translation it is, Thy word is proved most pure: Ps. 18:30, 'The word of the Lord is tried; he is a buckler to all them that trust in him.' So Prov. 30:5, 'The word of the Lord is pure; he is a shield to all that trust in him.' As pure gold suffers no loss by the fire, so the promises suffer no loss when they are tried, but stand to us in our greatest troubles.

[2.] It notes the exact perfection of the word. There is no dross in silver and gold that hath been often refined, so there is no defect in the word of God.

2. Here is David's respect to the word; speaking of himself in the third person, he saith, 'Thy servant loveth it.' The children of God love the word, and the duty and obedience it prescribeth, so as effectually to follow it; that is love, and none but that.

3. Here is his reason for it, 'Therefore I love it,' because it is pure. Wicked men hate it and slight it for this reason: the word of God is so pure that it ransacks their consciences, and therefore they cannot endure it: 'The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be,' Rom. 8:7. But the saints do the rather embrace it: wicked men could wish it were less strict, that it might be calculated to their turns; but the children of God love it for this reason.

Doct. That God's children see such purity in his word that therefore they value it and love it exceedingly.

The point will be made good by four considerations:—

1. That the word of God is pure.
2. That this pure word must be loved and esteemed by us.
3. That we must not only love God's word, but see why we love it.
4. Among all the grounds and reasons of our love to the word of God, this is the most noble and excellent, to love it for its purity.

For the first of these, that the word of God is pure, yea, as it is superlatively expressed in the text, it is very pure, that will appear in two respects—it is pure in itself, and it maketh us pure.

1. It is pure in itself, because it is a holy rule, fit for God to give and us to receive, exactly comprising the whole duty of man. We need not seek elsewhere for direction in order to true happiness: Ps. 19:8, 'The

commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;' as metal refined from all dross, so here is not the least mixture of error, folly, or falsehood, not the least corruption or flaw to be found in it, as in all other books of human composure. All other writings come as short of the scripture as a coal doth of the sun. The whole art and design of this holy book is to advance the spiritual and heavenly life, and not to fashion our outward carriage a little for converse with men, but to bring us into fellowship and communion with God, and to direct us to do all things from holy principles, in a holy manner, to holy ends. There is no dead fly in this box of ointment, no blemish of weakness and imperfection; it hath the manifest impress of the author left upon it, and is the copy of that exact holiness which is in God himself.

2. The word is very pure, as it maketh us pure if we diligently attend unto it: Ps. 119:9, 'By what means may a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereunto according to thy word.' It is not said, By what means may a young man guide his way; as if he were yet to choose, or were as white paper, indifferent to any impression. But by what means shall a young man cleanse his way? Man's heart naturally is a sink of sin, and he delighteth to wallow in this puddle, as swine do in the mire; he hath gotten a tang and smatch of the old Adam. Now, is there no way to make his heart and his way clean? Yes, if he will take God's counsel, and direct his life according to the word. A young man that is in the heat and strength of his lusts, he may be cured and cleansed. Christ prayeth, John 17:17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.' The work is God's, but he doth it by the truth or his will revealed in the word. He hath reserved the power of his Spirit for this dispensation and way of institution of mankind. A moral lecture may make a man change his life, but it is the word of God that changeth his heart: his Spirit goeth along with his word. So John 15:3, 'Now you are clean through the word that I

have spoken unto you.' The word is the instrument of purifying sinners, and to get rid of their sins. But how doth the word make us pure? As it is an appointed instrument of the Spirit, and as it is an accommodate instrument to such an end and purpose.

[1.] It is an appointed instrument by which the Spirit will work: 1 Peter 1:22, 'Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit.' It is the Spirit of Christ that powerfully worketh it, but yet in and by the truth: he worketh by his own means, he will not join his assistance with other things. The sum of what I would say is this, it was meet that God should give a rule to his creatures, or else how should they know his will? and then it was meet he should honour his rule by owning it above all other doctrines, by the concomitant operation of his Spirit, that this might be a constant authentic proof of its divine authority. The efficacy of the word is a pledge of the truth of it.

[2.] It is a commodious instrument for this end and purpose, for there is a wisdom in all God's institutions. He that looketh upon an axe will say, This is an instrument made to cut; so he that looketh upon the scriptures must needs say, This is a means to purify. The word is more morally accommodated to work upon the heart of man than any other instrument, means, or doctrine in the world. Now the word doth so commodiously serve for this purpose because there are—(1.) Such pure precepts; (2.) Such pure examples; (3.) Such great helps to purity; (4.) Great encouragements to purity; (5.) Such great terrors to dissuade men from sin.

(1.) There are pure precepts, setting forth the nature of that purity that is pleasing to God; and so, on the one hand, they serve to humble us for our natural filthiness; for *verum est index sui et obliqui*—truth showeth itself, and discovereth error also, James 1:18.

It is such a pure doctrine that it showeth a man his natural face, and discovers soul-spots. And, on the other side, by these precepts and doctrines we are urged and enjoined to seek after true purity and holiness of the right constitution: 1 Tim. 1:5, 'The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.' The word telleth us God will be served, and that he will be served with a pure heart. The right end and scope of the whole law, as it is a gospel rule, is love to God and man, flowing from a sincere and renewed heart, and a good conscience rightly informed of God's will, and faith unfeigned, apprehending the grace of God towards us in Christ our Redeemer. So that you see there is required of us not only good actions, but good principles and ends.

The apostle telleth us ἔργον νόμου, the work of the law, was written upon man's heart, Rom. 2:14. Natural conscience will take notice of some gross acts, urge to some external conformity and show of duty; but the word of God taketh notice not only of acts, but the frame of the heart; not only of sins, but also of lusts. If ever there were an instrument fitted to do a thing, the word is fitted to make men pure and holy. Briefly, then, the word requireth purity of heart and life. That we should be pure in heart: Mat. 5:8, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;' and pure in life: 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way,' Ps. 119:1. You have both in one place: James 4:8, 'Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded;' both must be cleansed, both heart and hands. But we must first begin with the heart. The heart is that polluted fountain from whence floweth all the pollution of life: Mat. 15:19, 'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, blasphemies,' &c. It is in vain to cleanse the outside, unless the heart be cleansed; and therefore the scripture presseth us to wash our hearts from wickedness, Jer. 4:14. There is the difficulty. It is more easy to heal an outward wound than to stanch an inward bleeding; and the cause

is within. The purity of the outside is loathsome to God unless the heart be cleansed; it is more easy to prevent disorders in our conversations than to cleanse our hearts; and therefore the scripture mainly calleth upon you to purge sin out of the heart, Mat. 23:26, 27. Therefore the great design of the word of God, with which it travaileth, is to get the heart clean; as Elisha when he would cure the brackishness of the waters, cast salt into the fountain, so doth the word of God seek to cleanse the hearts of men, and all its wooings and pleadings and entreaties tend to this.

(2.) There are pure examples and patterns. We miscarry by low examples, and grow loose and careless seeing others to be so; therefore the word is still to keep us humble under our defects, unsatisfied with our present measure, always contending, and striving towards the mark: it propoundeth all manner of examples to us. It propoundeth the example of God: 1 Peter 1:15, 'Be ye holy, as he that hath called you is holy, in all manner of conversation.' God is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works; and so should we be. And the scripture presseth us to be holy as Christ is holy: 1 John 3:3, 'He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, as Christ is pure.' It is impossible there should be an exact equality, yet some answerable conformity there should be. God is essentially, immutably, infinitely holy: he loveth himself so much as he can be loved. His essence and his being is the same with his holiness. Our holiness is a superadded quality. God's holiness is like a vessel of pure gold, where the substance is the same with the lustre; but our holiness is like a vessel of earth gilded with gold; the substance is one thing, the varnish another. But yet this God and Christ must ever be before our eyes; we must be holy as he is holy; we must always be increasing in holiness. We must come into an abiding state of holiness. There must be some kind of conformity between God and us, and Christ and us; and head and members must be all of a piece.



He will shoot farther that aimeth at a star, than he that aimeth at a shrub; so he will be more holy that doth as God doth, than he that doth as sinful creatures do, like himself. Nay, the scripture propoundeth the example of the saints, Heb. 6:12. We need all kinds of examples. As we need high and glorious examples, that we may not rest in any low degrees and beginnings of purity, so lower examples, that we may not be discouraged, and think it impossible. And therefore the saints of God are propounded to us, men and women of like affections with us, the same natural interests, and we the same grace with them; the way to heaven is a trodden path all along; you may see the footsteps of the saints before you.

(3.) The scripture offereth great helps to purity. Christ died to purchase it for us: Eph. 5:27, 'He gave himself for us, that he might sanctify and cleanse us by the washing of water through the word.' And God hath promised to give this clean heart to them that seek after it, and undertaketh to give what he requireth: Ezek. 36:25–27, 'I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you: a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh: and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.' God hath promised this to somebody, and why not to you? You are as fair for this promise as any; and if God hath not excluded you, why will you shut yourselves out from the grace offered?

(4.) There are in the scripture excellent encouragements and motives from the reward promised to the pure. Lactantius saith of the heathen, *Virtutis vim non sentiunt quia ejus præmium ignorant*—that they were ignorant of the force of virtue, because they were not acquainted with the reward of it. There is a great force in scripture

arguments in this kind. See how the scripture speaks of these promises; they are so great, so pure, and so expressly binding in their condition and qualification annexed. They are so great, 2 Cor. 7:1, that 'having such great and precious promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God.' And then so pure: 1 John 3:3, 'He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself as Christ is pure.' It is not barely said, He hath hope in him, but, He that hath this hope. It is not a Turkish paradise, but a sinless estate; not an estate wherein we shall be engulfed in all sensualities, but satisfied with the vision of God, and made like him. Heaven is not only to be looked upon as a place of happiness, but a state of likeness to God. Once more, so many and so expressly binding to purity, in their condition and qualification annexed. See what the word of God speaks to purity, if we would enjoy the favour of God, and have him good to us: Ps. 73:1, 'Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.' Who are they that God will be good to? To Israel. All are not Israel that are of Israel; but those whose consciences are cleansed by the blood of Christ, and study to be clean and holy in heart and life, those are God's Israel. However things fall out here, how blustering and boisterous soever the times are, yet God will be good to them that are his Israel. If we would have his favour actually exhibited, if we would have God to shine upon us, we must look after purity: Ps. 18:26, 'With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure, and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward.' God will be to man as man is to God. No degree of purity shall go unrewarded; the holy use of the creatures is their privilege: Titus 1:15, 'To the pure all things are pure.' To the wicked all things are defiled, and they have a curse with their blessings; but to the pure these blessings are lawfully enjoyed, and are sanctified to them, and they receive every temporal mercy as a blessing of the covenant. Would we be accepted in our service? Prov. 15:26, 'The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the

Lord, but the words of the pure are pleasant words.' The thoughts and words of wicked men are an abomination to the Lord, but the thoughts and words of the saints are his delight. God hath respect to the person and then to his services; so that we must be pure in heart if we would have our services accepted of the Lord. Once more, the pure are those that shall be employed with honour for God: 2 Tim. 2:21, 'If a man purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel of honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.' Again the purified and cleansed are meet to receive and retain the word: 1 Tim. 3:9, 'Hold fast the mysteries of faith in a pure conscience.' None receive the word with such profit, and retain it with such warmth, as the pure in heart. Precious liquor is not put into musty, filthy vessels; if it be, it is corrupted and spoiled presently. Let a man be addicted to any worldly lust, and he will soon lose all the sense of good he hath received. Once more, none pray aright but the pure: Zeph. 3:9, 'For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may call upon the name of the Lord;' and 1 Tim. 2:8, 'Lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;' and Heb. 10:22, 'Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.' Then we draw near to God with comfort, being sure of audience. Once more, if we would be happy for ever more, who are they that shall see God? Mat. 5:8, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' You shall see the question propounded in Ps. 24:3, 4, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? who shall stand in his holy place?' And the question is answered in the third verse, 'He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.' It standeth upon us to examine how it is with us, since all the visible church are not saved; the pure and holy are they that shall see and enjoy God. Filthy dogs and impure and unclean swine are not suffered to enter into the new Jerusalem.

(5.) Here are terrible threatenings; the word is impatient of being denied; it would have holiness and purity upon any terms; there is something propounded to our fear as well as to our hope. Sometimes the word of God threatens with the loss of happiness: Heb. 12:14, 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' If there were no more but this, this were enough to terrify us (to be shut out from the presence of the Lord!) if it were rightly considered. But oh! how miserable will the poor creature be that the word threatens with the loss of the vision of God, supposing the soul subsists! This is enough to overwhelm us, that we shall never enter into the place where God is: Rev. 21:17, 'There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth or worketh abomination.' But we hear of a worm that shall never die, a pit without a bottom, a fire that shall never be quenched, and torments that are without end and without ease. God shall say, I would have purged you, but you would not be purged. Whose heart doth not tremble at the mention of these things? Oh! then you see the word is very pure.

The second consideration, that this pure word must be valued and esteemed and loved by us. Here I shall show you what it is to love the word, and then why.

1. What it is to love the word.

[1.] Negatively.

(1.) It is not an outward receiving, or a loose owning of the scripture as the word of God. Many carnal men may so receive it, or rather not contradict it: they receive the word of God, not upon any divine testimony and evidence of the Spirit of God, but upon the authority and credit of men, the practice and profession of the nation where they live, and the injunctions of the civil state, or the tradition of the church. This is the just account of most men's faith and love to the

word, and therefore they never feel the power of it. It cometh with power when it is the evidence of the Spirit, 1 Cor. 2:4; human credulity breedeth no true love to the word of God.

(2.) This love is not a bare approbation of purity and holiness many approve that which they never choose and follow. None in the face of the church can be such a wretch as not to think that it is a good thing to be holy, that strictness is commendable. Mark 6:26, Herod revered John. There is an excellency in holiness, and it winneth esteem, even there where it is not embraced. Purity is a stricture of God's majesty, and so it is feared. Where it is not loved, it breedeth an awful respect in wicked men. Natural conscience so far doth homage to the image of God, and doth incline men to think well of holiness, and to show some respect to it.

(3.) It is not a pang or passionate delight; as some, when the word falls upon them, they may be stirred a little; it is not a love that is controllable, or easily overcome by other loves: John 5:45, 'How can ye believe, that seek honour one of another?' As Herod rejoiced in John's light for a season, and, Mark 6:20, he loved John's preaching, but he loved his Herodias better; and therefore off goes John's head. The love that he had, it was controllable by a higher love. Unless we be so addicted to the word that it prevaieth over all contrary inclinations, we do not love the word. Whether it be sensuality, or pride, or covetousness, it will be casting off the dominion of the word: John 8:37, 'My word hath no place in you;' it doth not sink down into their hearts that it may bring forth fruit in their lives.

[2.] Positively, what is it then?

(1.) It is such a love as causeth us to wait at wisdom's gates, to consult with the word upon all occasions, to read it, hear it, meditate on it as the great instrument of sanctification. You will take it for

your counsel, Ps. 119:4. That we love we will be thinking on often, and exercising our minds in it: Ps. 1:2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' Oh, how few love the word thus! Few read and delight in the scriptures because of the purity and holiness that is in them. They read them for dispute's sake, or to know the mystery, or to be able to hold up an argument; but as they serve to make us pure and heavenly, who loves them so? as they forewarn us of sin, and quicken to grace and love to God? Ps. 19:10, 11, 'Thy word is sweeter than honey or the honeycomb,' because by 'them thy servant is forewarned.' Then we love the word when we love it for this reason.

(2.) We love the word when we are chary of transgressing it, or doing anything contrary to the tenor of it. We are bidden to keep the commandment as the apple of the eye, Prov. 7:2. The eye is a tender thing, offended with the least dust. Oh, take heed of offending the word of God! Fear of offending is a sure note and effect of love. So he that loves God, he fears the commandment: Prov. 13:13, 'Whoso despiseth the word, shall be destroyed; but whoso feareth the commandment, shall be rewarded.' A wicked man maketh no bones of a commandment, regardeth not what the word saith, but doth according to the bent of his own will. Those that will turn their back upon a commandment for the least temptation, they have no true love to the word of God. But now a godly man is one that feareth a commandment; he is afraid to do anything against the express will of God. If a commandment stands in his way, it is as much as if an angel with a drawn sword stood in his way, as the angel stood with a drawn sword in Balaam's way: they had rather have all the world against them, than the word against them, Isa. 66:24. This awful regard of the word of God it is a good evidence of our love to it.

(3.) Then we are said to love the word when we cheerfully and readily delight to do what it requireth in order to the glory of God and our own salvation: that is love; for true love is not only notional, but practical: 1 John 2:4, 'He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.' Our love to God is known by our obedience to him; so our love to the word is known by our obedience to it. And therefore we love the word in good earnest when we observe it readily and diligently, whatever it costs us: Rom. 6:17, 'Ye have obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine that was delivered to you.' Look, as there is a cold love to a man's brother, when we say, Be clothed, be warmed; so there is a pretended love to the word that endeth in talk, and not in action; which is as if a man should hope to pay his debts by the noise of money, and instead of opening his purse to shut it; as ridiculous it is to think to put off our duty with good words.

(4.) It is a rooted affection. A carnal man may have his affections moved, and be a little stirred with this pure doctrine, but he is soon put out of humour; he is not changed by it, he hath not a constant affection to God and holy things: Gal. 4:18, 'It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing;' to hold out to the end, and still to keep up a warm respect to the word of God. This is to love it, to have the word ingrafted into the stock of corrupt nature, James 1:21. It is not something tied on, but ingrafted into the soul; it hath place in the heart.

2. Let me show you why.

[1.] The necessity of this love to the word appears because without this love we cannot be accepted of God; unwilling and constrained service is of little acceptation with him: 1 Cor. 13:1–3, 'If I should give my goods to the poor, and my body to be burnt, and have not charity,

it profiteth me nothing.' If a man hath never so many excellencies, if he spend his goods and life and all for God, without this sincere love to God and his ways, all is nothing. God doth not value men by the pomp of their services, but by the affection of their hearts in them; he needeth not the service, and he seeth the heart. A man is pleased so his work be done willingly or unwillingly, for he needeth the labour of the slave; but he seeth not into his heart; but God hath no need of us, and he seeth whether we give him the heart or no. So that if we have not charity, all that we do is nothing.

[2.] Without this love your work will be very difficult, grievous, and irksome to you. It is love maketh all things pleasant and easy, and to go on roundly: 1 John 5:3, 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.' A love to the commands of God will make us do them with cheerfulness. When a man loves God, it will be no grievous thing to serve him. It is said, Neh. 4:6, 'That the building went on because the people had a mind to the work.' The building of the temple was a difficult task to remove the rubbish, and carry on such a vast piece of work; but they had a mind to the work, and then it went on. Love to anything makes it go on sweetly and cheerfully, as we use to say; so in God's service, if we love the work, we cannot count it difficult.

[3.] You will never be constant with God without this love. An unwilling servant is ever running from his work, and he that hath not a heart fixed and set will find discouragement enough in heaven's way. They fell off that received not the truth in the love of it, 2 Thes. 2:10. Fear hath compulsion in it, but it will not hold when the fear is worn off; but love is a lasting affection, when your hearts love holiness, and you love the work for the work's sake.



Third consideration. It is not enough to love the word, but we must look after the grounds and reasons of this love.

1. Because a true love to the word is not blind, but rational, and may be justified: Mat. 11:19, 'Wisdom is justified of her children.' All that love God and his truth are able to plead for it. If you are not able to show your grounds and reasons for your love to the word, your love is but customary: Phil. 1:9, 'I pray that your love may abound in all knowledge and judgment.' Such a love and zeal is commendable as hath a proportionable measure of knowledge going along with it. When the spouse had spoken so much of her beloved, the question is propounded, Cant. 5:9, 'What is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost thus charge us?' Christians should be able to say what is their Christ, and what is the religion they do profess; that there is more in their religion than in all religions in the world.

2. Because many love it upon wrong reasons. There may be a natural and carnal love to spiritual things. Look, as a religious man in outward things rejoiceth spiritually, so a carnal man in spiritual things rejoiceth carnally. So Herod rejoiced in John's preaching with a human passion, Mark 6:20, as he was a plausible preacher, and a rare and pregnant interpreter of the law. This was but a carnal affection; that is, thus: They may be pleased with notions, and elevated strains of wisdom. I remember a moralist gives this similitude: A gallant going into a garden prizeth flowers altogether for the beauty of them; but a physician he looks after their use and virtue in medicine, but they both go to look after flowers. So a godly man delights in the word of God; it is that he may be brought under the power of it, and made more holy and heavenly-minded; but others go to hear an argument rationally traversed, or to hear cadences of speech and pleasant language. It is not enough to take a liking to things, but we must know why. Nay, let me tell you that

mere foreign and external reasons may sway us to delight in the word; when religion is in request, and groweth in fashion, and becometh matter of reputation, it is no great matter to be an honourer and admirer of it. Simon Magus will be a disciple and turn Christian too, when the whole city of Samaria listened to the apostles, and embraced their doctrine, Acts 8; when there was so great an outward affluence.

3. The more we view the grounds and reasons, the more our love is increased. It is clear the will and affections are moved by the understanding, and that ignorance is the cause of the contempt of the Lord's grace: 'If thou knewest the gift,' John 4:10. We love, and fear, and hate, and joy, according to the apprehensions that we have of things; and therefore the more knowledge we have, the more love: Phil. 1:9, 'I pray that your love may abound in all knowledge.' If thou dost not increase in knowledge, thou wilt never increase in affection: 2 Peter 1:2, 'Grace and peace be multiplied unto you by the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ our Lord.' Now, the more these grounds and reasons are drawn forth in the view of conscience, the more our love is stirred; as the more we beat the steel upon the flint, the more the sparks fly out.

Fourth consideration. Of all the grounds and reasons of our love to the word of God, the most noble and excellent is to love the word for its purity.

1. Because, this showeth indeed that we are made 'partakers of the divine nature,' 2 Peter 1:4. For I pray you mark, when we hate evil as evil, and love good as good, we have the same love and hatred that God hath. It showeth that the soul is changed into the likeness of God when we love a thing for its purity. God hath no interest to be advanced by the creature; he loves them more or less as they are

nearer or further off from his glorious being. When once we come to love things because they are pure, it is a sign that we have the same love that God hath.

2. This argueth a suitableness of heart to what God requireth, for things affect us as they suit with us: 'They that are after the flesh savour the things of the flesh,' Rom. 8:5. The pure will only delight in pure things, but swine delight in puddles; they that have the spirit of the world, they must have worldly pleasure and honour, but the pure will delight in the word of God: 1 Cor. 2:14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of God,' and because they are not suitable to him. First we love things as suitable to our necessity, and then we love them upon interest, and afterwards as suitable to our disposition. Now it argueth a good frame of heart, and a deep sense of God's interest, when we love the word because it is so pure. A man first loves the word customarily, because he is born there where that religion is in fashion; and then when he beginneth to have a conscience, he loveth it for pardon and peace, as it offers a Saviour: his own happiness, self-love, puts him upon seeking after God; then afterwards his heart is suited to God's will, and there is something of kin in his heart to the will of God revealed without, and he loveth it for its suitableness of nature unto the will of God.

3. To be sure this love is no way questionable, but is an undoubted evidence of right and sound love to the word of God. Many pretend to have a high estimation and respect to the doctrine of God when they cannot digest the directions of it, because it is contrary to their desires and carnal affections; they reserve something in their hearts that makes their love questionable. They that have not a real love to the word of God are but lightly tinctured with religion, not deeply dyed. The stony ground received the word with joy. Men may have strong affections and strange stirrings in their souls, and yet not be

right with God. But here is an undoubted evidence, to love the word for its purity. A man's love may be questionable, because he may love the word upon foreign motives, either because of novelty, or fineness of expression, or public countenance and credit, or external advantage, John 6:26. *Vix diligitur Jesus propter Jesum.* Or they may love it for internal reasons, as it is a good word, as they that tasted of the power of the world to come; they may look upon it for pleasure and profit, but not as good and holy. Many look upon the gospel as good and profitable, as offering peace, and pardon, and comfort, and eternal life. Nature, that hath naturally a sense of religion, hath also a hunger after immortality and blessedness; and therefore the promises of the gospel may be greedily caught after, as offering everlasting life and blessedness. But now a love to that which is pure and holy leaveth a more durable impression upon the soul. And further, many have a liking to the purity of the word, and a general approbation of it, as it is a fit rule for creatures to live by; yet unless there be a strong prevailing affection, all comes to nothing; and therefore nothing but this love to the word because of its purity is unquestionable.

4. Unless we love the word as pure, we shall fail in many other parts of religion; we shall not love God as we ought, for God is lovely, not only as the fountain of blessedness, but as he is the most pure and perfect being. He was *diligibilis naturæ* before any emanation of goodness passed from him. We are to love him in desertions, when we feel no good from him, and he seemeth to write bitter things against us, Isa. 26:8. So that we cannot discharge this duty to love God as he is a pure and perfect being if we do not love the word because it is pure. And we shall not love the saints as we ought without this, Ps. 16:3. We are to love them for the image of God in them. 'If you love them that love you, what thanks have you?' Mat. 5:46. We are to love the saints as saints, and for that reason. Once

more, we are to hate sin, as filthy, as it is a gross absurdity, and deordination of the human nature: Ps. 96:10, 'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.' Now, till we have this frame of heart, to love the law as it is pure, we can do none of these things; for there is the same reason for the one as for the other; and therefore it is not a nicety, but a necessary frame of heart.

Use 1. To inform us that they can never love God and his ways that hate purity, till their hearts be changed. There are a sort of men in the world whose hearts rise against purity; for if they see any make conscience of sin, they brand them with the name of Puritans; so those that seek to keep themselves from sin, and the more holy they are, they are an eyesore to them. Now, can they say, I love thy law because it is pure, and cannot endure to see it copied out in others? Oh, what a vile disposition is this in you, to be despisers of that which is good! 2 Tim. 3:3. None live up to the purity of their profession but you scorn them; and let me tell you, you scorn that which is most glorious in God himself. Would a father take it well that a slave should mock his child because it is like him? So will God take it well that you should scorn those that are good, because they are like their heavenly Father? These are of the seed of the serpent, who are full of enmity; they have the old antipathy, Gen. 3:15; Prov. 29:27. It is a vile scorn of the God of heaven to hate a man for his holiness. And they can never love the law, whatever they pretend, that do not love the law for its purity. A carnal distempered appetite hath no taste for the word of God, as it is a direction to holiness, 2 Cor. 2:14.

Use 2. To inform us in what rank to place principles. There are several sorts of principles; there are some that are false and rotten, and some more tolerable, and some good and sound, and some rare and excellent.

1. There are some false and rotten principles, as carnal example and custom. Men will do as they have done, or as others do; they will own the religion that their fathers have done, be it what it will. By the same reason you may serve Mahomet as well as Christ. A man that standeth upon the vantage-ground is not taller than another; such are of no better constitution than the Turks, only they stand upon the vantage-ground. Another rotten principle is vainglory, to be seen of men, Mat. 6; they pray and give alms to be seen of men. 'Come see my zeal for the Lord of hosts,' saith Jehu. Vainglory many times filleth the sails, and carries us on in the service of God. So secular and worldly interests and ends; as the Pharisees made long prayers that they might devour widows' houses, Mat 23; that is, they made long prayers and show of devotion, to be trusted with the management of widows' estates, to make a prey of them. All that I shall say to this principle is this, that it is better for the world that men would serve God anyhow, that Christ should be served out of vainglory, than not served at all; as the apostle saith some preach Christ out of envy, and others out of good-will, but I am glad so Christ be preached, Phil. 1:18; though they themselves be rotten-hearted hypocrites, yet the world fares the better for it.

2. There are some more tolerable principles, the hope of temporal mercies. When we come and pray, and do not seek the favour of God, but seek temporal mercies: Hosea 7:14, 'They howled upon their beds for corn and wine.' Or the fear of temporal judgments, Isa. 58:5; Jer. 2:16; when all that they do is to remove some temporal judgment: 'In their afflictions they will seek me right early.' And I think I may add one thing more here, the fear of eternal death, when it is alone (otherwise it is a grace); they shall be damned else; and so it is a sleepy sop to appease an accusing conscience, and so it is but a sin-offering. Though it requireth some faith to fear what is to come, yet fear of punishment alone showeth you are slaves, and only love

yourselves: the devils fear and tremble, but do not love. You may fear a thing though you hate it. So far as the heart is affected, with the fear of hell, it is good.

3. There are very good and sound principles, yet do not always argue grace, as when duties are done out of the urgings of an enlightened conscience; this may be without the bent of a renewed heart, but yet the principle is sound; for the first thing that influenceth a man is to consider himself a creature, and so to look upon himself as bound to obey his creator. I shall illustrate it by the apostle's words in another case: I must preach the gospel, and 'woe unto me if I preach not the gospel,' 1 Cor. 9:16, 17, 'Whether I do it willingly or unwillingly, yet a dispensation is committed to me.' So saith the soul, Whether I be fitted to do God service or no, God must be obeyed. But because God's precept is invested with a sanction of threatenings and rewards, here comes in the fear of hell and the hope of heaven. The Lord hath commanded me to fly from hell; this is a good principle: so the hope of heaven, Heb. 11:26; it is a sound principle: a man may be gracious, or he may not. Many have a liking to heaven and eternal life, as it is a state of happiness, not of likeness to God. Where it is not alone, it is a very sound principle, but as it is, it may sometimes be the sign of a renewed man, and sometimes not.

4. There are rare and excellent principles, when we act out of thankfulness to God, when we consider the Lord's goodness, that might have required duty out of mere sovereignty; he hath laid the foundation of it in the blood of his own Son, 1 John 4:19; when we love him out of the sense of his love to us in Christ, and when the grace of God that hath appeared teacheth us to deny ungodliness, Titus 2:11; when the mercies of God melt us, Rom. 12:1; when there are no entreaties so powerful as that of love. Again, another principle that is rare and excellent is when the glory of God doth season us in

our whole course, that it may be to the praise of his glorious grace, 1 Cor. 10:31. Another is complacency in the work for the work's sake, when we love the law because it is pure, when I see it will ennoble me and make me like God, when I love God and his ways, when nothing but so noble employment doth engage me to his service; and service to God is the sweetest life in the world.

## SERMON CLVIII

### **I am small and despised; yet do I not forget thy precepts.—VER. 141**

HERE David proveth the truth of his former assertion, that seeing the word of God was so pure, he loved it for its own sake, and that he did not court religion for the portion that he should have with it, but for itself. Some are mere mercenaries; no longer than they are bribed by some worldly profit, have they any respect for God and his ways. The man of God was of another temper. If God would bestow anything on him, well; if not, he would love his word still; yea, when it brought him apparent loss, meanness, and contempt, yet this could not make any divorce between his heart and the word: 'I am small and despised,' &c.

In the words we have—(1.) David's condition; (2.) David's carriage under that condition. His condition might have been a snare to him, yet still he keepeth up his affection.

1. His condition is set forth by two notions, the one of which implieth the other. God's providence, 'I am small.' God had reduced him to straits. The other, man's treatment of him, 'and despised.' The one showeth what he was really in himself, the other what he was in the



opinion of others: mean in himself, and contemptible in the eye of others. The Septuagint has, νεώτερος ἐγὼ εἶμι καὶ ἐξουδενωμένος—I am the younger, and set at nought; therefore the Greek interpreters suppose it relateth to the story where God bids Samuel to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king, and the elder children were brought forth, who were taller, and more likely too; and they said of them, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him; and when Samuel inquired for another, they told him, 1 Sam. 16:7, 'That there remaineth the youngest, and he keepeth sheep;' then, when he was but a youth, and a despised stripling, his heart was with God, and God favoured him. Or else they refer it to the time when Eliab his eldest brother despised him, 1 Sam. 17:28. Others think this was verified when the elders of Israel forsook him, and clave to Absalom. Rather I think it general to any afflicted condition, when he was little in estate and reputation, rather than in years; elsewhere so is this word 'small' taken: Amos 7:2–5, 'Jacob is small; by whom shall he arise?' when his condition was helpless and hopeless, and interest inconsiderable in the world. So here: 'I am small and despised;' I am looked upon as a man of no value and interest.

2. David's carriage under this condition, 'Yet do I not forget thy precepts.' First, here is a μείωσις; less is said, more is intended: I do earnestly remember them. Again, a man may be said to remember or forget two ways—notionally or affectively. Notionally, a man forgets when the notions of things formerly known are quite vanished out of his mind; affectively, when, though he retaineth the notions, yet he is not answerably affected, he doth not act suitably. So it is taken here, and implieth as much as I am steadfast in the profession of this truth: as they say in a like case, Ps. 44:17, 'We have not forgotten thee, nor dealt falsely in thy covenant;' not parted with any point of truth, or neglected and dispensed with any part of duty. 'Precepts' is put for the whole word of God: 'I do not forget thy word,' the

comforts and duties of it. None do so far forget God and his precepts as those that make defection from him. The sum of all is, My mean and despicable condition doth not make a breach upon my constancy, but still I keep the credit of being a faithful servant to thee. His temptation was double. His faithfulness had made him small (God seemeth to forget us in our low estate, yet we should not forget him), and had made him despised. Though we lose esteem with men by sticking to the word of God, yet the word of God should lose no esteem with us.

Doct. They that love God may be reduced to a mean, low, and afflicted condition. 'I am small,' saith David. The Lord seeth it meet for divers reasons.

1. That they may know their happiness is not in this world, and so the more long for heaven and delight in heavenly things: Ps. 17:14, 15, 'From men of the world, which have their portion in this life: as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' Christ gave his Spirit to the rest of the disciples, and the purse to Judas; he had the keeping of the bag, that was the worst. God's dearest children usually have the least in this world, that they may look higher; as Levi had no portion among his brethren, because God would be his portion. Others have more plentiful accommodations for back and belly; they are better clad, their tables more plentifully furnished and supplied, larger portions for their children. They that look to save anything or get anything by religion but the saving of their souls are foully mistaken; if we have more than others, religion calleth for more disbursements. Charity and liberal distributions exposeth to troubles; religion moderateth our desires, and forbids all unjust ways of acquiring wealth, calleth upon us to forsake all for a good conscience. Therefore they that follow Christ out of a design to be rich in this world, lose their aim.

Not but that hypocrites sometimes make a market of religion, but then God is angry, and they, and the church too, pay for it at last: not but that religion bringeth in temporal supplies: Mat. 6:33, 'First seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you,' ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται; food and raiment it bringeth in. God may give some a more plentiful allowance; especially if they be faithful stewards, then they are intrusted with more; but generally they are mean and small, or if they have more of this world's goods, they have their afflictions in other kinds.

2. It is necessary to cut off the provisions of the flesh and the fuel of their lusts. A rank soil breedeth weeds, and when we sail with a full stream we are apt to be carried away with it. We either glut ourselves with the pleasures of the flesh, or grow proud, and hanker and linger after the pomp and vanities of the world, and neglect God. And therefore God is fain to diet us, and to keep us bare and low; as he is said to cut Israel short, 2 Kings 10:32, when he straitened their coasts and borders. So for our cure we need not only internal grace to abate the lust, but external providence to catch away the prey and bait by which it is fed. The wise man saith not only, Give me grace, but 'Give me neither poverty nor riches,' Prov. 30:8, 9; and Gal. 6:14, 'By whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.' Both parts are necessary. Riches are a great temptation; we would root here, and grow sensual, worldly, and proud, if God did not snatch our comforts from us, when we are apt to surfeit of them. A plentiful portion of temporal things is spiritually dangerous.

3. That they may be more sensible of his displeasure against their sins and scandalous carriage, by which they have dishonoured him and provoked the pure eyes of his glory. Never have scandals fallen out but some great woe followed: Mat. 18:7, 'Woe to the world, because of offences.' Therefore God hath brought his people low that

he may vindicate his name, which through their means is blasphemed, Rom. 2:24, and make his people sensible of their sin. The world shall know that he doth allow sin no more in them than in others; and therefore, though they were as the signet upon his finger, he will pluck them off, and make them feel the smart of their wanderings: Amos 3:2, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.' They that have been so near and dear to him, the world might think he did approve their sins if he did not manifest his displeasure at them. Usually their sins go nearest his heart, and meet with the sorest vengeance: Deut. 32:19, 'When the Lord saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provokings of his sons and of his daughters.' Their relation to God, their privileges, and the consequences of their actions, aggravate their sins; and therefore God is most quick and severe in punishing their sins. We complain we were brought low, but were not our provocations first very high? The most religious cannot wipe their mouths, and excuse themselves as faultless. Oh! what a sad part hath been lately acted upon the public stage! What a trade have many driven for themselves under a mask of religion! What breaches in the body of Christ, uncharitable divisions, making a profession of the name of Christ for carnal ends!

4. That we may learn to live upon the promises, and learn to exercise suffering graces; especially dependence upon God, who can support us without a temporal visible interest. Compare Rev. 12:11, 'And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives to the death;' Rev. 13:7, 'And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them; and power was given him over all kindreds and tongues and nations.' You shall see how the enemies overcome, and the saints overcome; the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The beast raiseth the world against the saints, and prevaieth over their

bodies; he overcomes them by spoiling them of liberty, lives, and temporal estate; but they overcome by adhering to truth, and resisting his temptations and their own corruptions even in the lowest estate by suffering. So for other graces,—patience, meekness, self-denial, spiritual comforts. As the stars in their order fought against Sisera, so all graces are exercised in their turn: Rev. 13:10, 'Here is the faith and patience of the saints;' that is, a time to act these graces. A full third of the scriptures would be lost which containeth comfort for afflicted ones, if God did not exercise them with temporal afflictions.

5. That God may convince the enemies that there is a people that do sincerely serve him, and not for carnal selfish ends, Job 1. The carnal world suspects private, selfish, worldly aims and designs in all that we do, and attributes all our duties to interest; being themselves led by interest, they cannot think others are led by conscience. Men are apt to suspect and malign what they will not imitate. There is, sometimes too much advantage given; many are mercenaries, only esteem the ways of God when beneficial to them: John 6:26, 'Ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled.' Therefore it is needful to heighten the price of religion when it is too cheap a thing to be a Christian. This God doth by bringing his people low, that the world may see some will cleave to him in all conditions; not only when his ways are befriended, but when frowned upon. God will glorify himself and his truth by their constancy.

6. That his glory may be more seen in their deliverance; and therefore before God doth appear for his children, he bringeth them very low. Thus Paul, 2 Cor. 1:9, 'We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raised the dead;' and Ps. 136:23, 'He remembered us in our low

estate, for his mercy endureth for ever.' His mercy and power is the more glorious in our rescue.

All that I shall say by way of use on this point is this—

1. That when we are a small people, and persons of no interest, we have a liberty to use it to God; you may make use of your weak and low condition as an argument of pity. So doth the prophet Amos, 'Jacob is small;' so doth David here and elsewhere: Ps. 109:22, 'But I am poor and needy; deliver me for thy name's sake;' and Ps. 69:29, 'But I am poor and sorrowful; let thy salvation, O God, set me on high.' It is some ease to acquaint a friend with our griefs that can only pity us, much more when we have liberty to go to God, who can and will help us, and will allow us to complain to him, though not of him.

2. When God's ends are accomplished there is hope: Isa. 10:12, 'When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion;' when he hath chastised his people, and brought them to his purpose, then he will reckon with his enemies; when heaven is minded more, and earth less. We naturally mind earthly things, and please ourselves with the dreaming of a happy estate in the world; the appetite of temporal dominion, and wealth, and honour, and peace is natural to us, and very hardly subdued; and therefore we would fain flourish here, and do not comfort ourselves in our crosses with the meditation of the glory of the world to come, but are always feeding ourselves with desires and hopes of earthly happiness, and of turning the tide and current of affairs, that things may again smile upon us; and when frustrated and disappointed of this hope, our soul fainteth. Your worldly happiness will be a snare to you while you are thus affected, Mat. 6:33. Prepare for heaven, and God will give you so much happiness by the way as will be needful and fit for you. Again,

when we are mortified, and the cross hath purged out sin, Isa. 27:9, the cross hath done its work. So when we are humble: Lev. 26:41, 'If then their uncircumcised hearts be humble, and they accept of the punishment of their iniquity.' To be meek in spirit and to trust in the Lord is a forerunner of mercy: Zeph. 3:12, 'I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.' When you bring honour to God by your sufferings: James 1:4, 'But let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.' When it is most for God's glory to do it: Deut. 32:36, 'For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left.'

Doct. God's people, when they are brought low, are usually a very despised people, the most despised people under heaven.

Here I shall show—

1. That this is the usual lot of an afflicted people.
2. But especially of the people of God.
3. The trial is very grievous to them.

1. An afflicted people are usually a despised people: Ps. 123:4, 'Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.' They that are proud, and have all things flow in upon them according to their own will, contemn and slight others, and take no notice of their burdens, unless it be to increase them; they pour vinegar on the wound. The heathens had a reverence for places stricken with thunder, because the hand of God had touched them; but here it is not so: Job 12:5, 'He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thoughts of him that is

at case.' While we are burning lamps, shining in riches and greatness, we shall have enough to look after us; but a poor, broken, dying lamp, a snuff, that is ready to go out, everybody holdeth their nose at it. Whilst the enemies are honourable, great, tumble in wealth and the excess of carnal delights, they despise those that are mean and low, and fallen under God's hand.

2. The people of God, much more common sufferers, may meet with some pity in their calamity, but the godly are subject to reproaches and mockings in their troubles; and this many times proveth the heaviest part of the cross, and maketh it most grievous to be borne. It is so partly because they are fallen from their great hopes, carried on in a way of religion. Where is their God, their fasting, prayer? As if all were now delusions and fantastical impressions. And partly because the presence of God is sensibly gone from them. The presence of God among his people maketh them wise, courageous, prosperous. How should one chase a hundred, and a hundred put a thousand to flight? But when God leaveth them, they grow despicable and ridiculous above all others: Hosea 14:1, 'Return to the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.' 'All that honoured her shall despise her, because her nakedness is seen,' Lam. 1:8. A dispirited, judgment-blasted people shall be contemned. And partly because the cause for which they suffer may be strangely disguised and ill-represented to the world. Satan was first a liar and then a murderer, John 8:44. Elijah was thought the troubler of Israel. They may not only persecute, but say all manner of evil against us falsely for Christ's sake, Mat. 11:19. Christ is called a glutton, a wine-bibber; and Stephen a blasphemer. And partly by Satan's instigation; by this means he maketh the despisers increase their sin and hasten their judgment, and so he dissuades and discourages many weak Christians from owning the despised ways of Christ; yea, it taketh off



much of the cheerfulness and courage of the strong in the profession of godliness.

3. It is very grievous. Contempt maketh our other trials more sharp. Every man thinketh himself worthy of some respect, and would be somebody in the world, and therefore, when we are laid aside as if dead and useless, the temptation is the greater. Saul could better bear death than contempt: 1 Sam. 31:4, 'Draw thy sword and thrust me through, lest the uncircumcised come and abuse me.' Zedekiah was afraid of mocking: Jer. 38:19, 'Lest they deliver me into the hands of the Chaldeans, and they mock me.' But not only as we are men is it grievous to us, but also as Christians; because this contempt reflecteth upon our hopes and the worship of God; it hindereth our service: while we were esteemed we did more good, and had greater advantages. It may revive the sense of guilt. God saith, 1 Sam. 2:30, 'Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.' We have made God's name to be reproached, and religion to be lightly esteemed; we may own the justice of God in all this.

Use. Oh! then, let us be fore-armed against this temptation, that when we lose esteem with wicked men, because we will not comply with their lusts, we may bear it patiently. Surely we stand too much upon honour and respect, and have too tender a sense and feeling of contempt, when it discourageth us in the ways of God. A Christian should seek the honour that cometh from God only, and be content with his approbation. I know it is a blessing to have respect with men; it is said of our Lord Christ that he grew in favour with God and with men, Luke 2:52; the same also is spoken of Samuel: 1 Sam. 2:26, 'And the child grew, and was in favour with God and with men.' It is a blessing where it may be had without any violation of duty. When God blameth us not, and men have no just complaint against us, our

care must be to provide things honest in the sight of God and men, Rom. 12:17; to take away all cause of offence both from Jew and Gentile, and from the church of God, 1 Cor. 10:32. But if men will not be pleased but with the offence of God, we should count it a privilege to be worthy of the world's hatred. *Gratias ago Deo meo, quod dignus sum, quem mundus oderit*, saith Hierome; be not discouraged if they slight you that slight God and Christ and their own salvation. Our self-love is too great when so tender to suffer a little disgrace and contempt for Christ, who hath suffered so many and and so great indignities for us. Therefore, though we be small and despised, let our affection be as great to the word as ever; say, 2 Sam. 6:22, 'I will yet be more vile than this, and base in mine own sight.' Alas! many cannot bear contempt, *coguntur esse mali ne viles habeantur*, as Salvian complains in his days. As we should not forsake the despised ways of God, so not be dejected and troubled at it; better we be despised than God dishonoured; therefore let us purchase the glory of God with our disgrace. To animate you—

1. Consider it is the usual lot and portion of God's children. When God meaneth thoroughly to humble his children, he suffereth them to be odious in the eyes of the people where they live: we need so sharp a means to do us good, therefore the church complaineth of contempt: Lam. 3:45, 'Thou hast made us as the off-scouring and refuse in the midst of the people.' You will say this was a sinning nation. Nay, the apostle saith the same thing of himself and other apostles: 1 Cor. 4:13, 'We are made the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things;' cast out, as the sweeping of the city. Yea, Christ himself complaineth, Ps. 22:6, 'I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people;' as if he were but as a worm to be trod upon in respect of the world. Thou canst not be more despised than Christ was. So Isa. 53:3, 'He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; we hid

our faces as it were from him: he was despised, and we esteemed him not.' Well, if this be a common lot and portion of God's people, it is more usual to persecute with contempt than with violence; men are kept off by the restraint of laws.

2. Shall we not suffer a little for Christ who suffered so much for us? He hath endured greater reproaches for our sakes; and what are we to him? If he endured shame, was made a curse for us, what a softness and tenderness have we for our interests! Mat. 10:24, 'The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord,' &c.

3. We must be dead to esteem, credit, and reputation, as well as other things, or else we are incapable of the kingdom of heaven: John 5:44, 'How can ye believe, that seek honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh of God only?' John 12:41, 42, 'These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.' It is not enough to deny brutish pleasures, to escape sordid covetousness, but all prizing of our own credit, content to be nothing, that Christ may be all in all, or else there is some affection not yet subdued to Christ's interest; any interest of ours that cometh into competition with Christ must be denied.

4. This is the true fortitude. We all affect to be counted men of spirit and courage; there is not a greater evidence of it than when we can endure contempt for Christ. Military valour depends upon bodily spirits; it is a more brutish thing. Peter, that ventured upon a band of men, was overcome by the weak blast of a damsel's question. He that can in a generous contempt count man's day nothing: 1 Cor. 4:3, 'But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment,' &c.

5. The more despised in the world for righteousness' sake, the more honourable with God. If they could hinder your esteem with him it were something, 2 Cor. 10:18. He is approved whom the Lord commendeth. They will ever be of great account in heaven that have washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb, and kept themselves unspotted from the world, and are clothed with the sun and have the moon under their feet, Rev. 12:1. The true and afflicted despised church is in the eyes of God fair as the sun, pure as the moon, Cant. 6:10. You are an elect seed, a royal priesthood, 1 Peter 2:9.

6. If we cannot endure a little disgrace for God, what shall we do when called to resist unto blood? Jer. 12:5, 'If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, how canst thou contend with horses?' *Scommata nostra ferre non potes, &c.*

7. God hath his times of bringing you into request again: Ps. 37:6, 'He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day;' Zeph. 3:19, 'Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee, and will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out, and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.' All God's children were despised in their time, and yet afterwards were honoured. There is a resurrection of names as well as persons. Abraham gave Isaac his son to God in sacrifice, and received him again; so we receive our names from reproach and contempt. He that draweth light out of darkness is able to revive our credit and esteem; if not in this world, yet in the world to come we shall be glorious, though our condition be never so contemptible here; our reward is not in this life. When he dies, the beggar is carried into Abraham's bosom. Would you be in the condition of Dives or Lazarus? to wallow in ease and plenty, and go to hell, and be cast out with the devil and damned spirits? or to be

poor and despised here, to be carried by angels into the presence of God hereafter? So at the day of judgment: Mat. 10:32, 'Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father in heaven;' we shall be publicly owned.

8. Great contempt shall be poured upon those that now contemn you. When Hanun offered injury to David's servants, he took severe revenge of it. God will require an account of all the wrongs and affronts that are put upon his servants. The wicked shall be made the scorn of good men and angels: Ps. 52:6, 7, 'The righteous also shall see and fear, and laugh at him. Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness; but I am like a green olive-tree,' &c.

Doct. That though our condition be small and despicable, yet we should be still faithful in our respects to God and his word.

1. The temptation will not excuse us. *Esse bonum facile est, ubi quod vetat esse remotum est.* Our trial is expressly mentioned in the promise, as necessary for our crowning: James 1:12, 'When he is tried;' when the temptation is over, the trial is past. It is no praise for a woman to be chaste that hath no suitors. Adam was tempted by Eve, and Eve by Satan, yet both bore their burden. *Si taceret Deus et loqueretur Satan, &c.* Why should we hearken to Satan's suggestions rather than God's admonitions?

2. God observeth what we do in our trouble: Ps. 44:20, 21, 'If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god, shall not God search out this, for he knoweth the secrets of our hearts?' If we slacken our service to God, or fall off to any degree of apostasy, the judge of hearts knoweth all; God knoweth whether we have or would deprave and corrupt doctrine, worship, or

ordinances, or whether we will faithfully adhere to him, to his word, and worship, and ordinances, whatever it cost us.

3. God and his law are the same, and therefore though our condition be altered, our affections should not. If we love the word of God upon intrinsic reasons, there is the same reason we should adhere to it with love still, as to embrace it out of love: ver. 142, 'Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.' Among men, that may be just to-day which is not so to-morrow, because they and their laws alter; but God's law is the eternal rule of righteousness, that never alters.

4. In our poor and despicable condition, we see more cause to love the word than we did before; because we experiment supports and comforts which we have thereby: Rom. 5:3, 'Knowing that tribulation worketh patience,' &c.; 2 Cor. 1:5, 'For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.' God hath special consolations for his afflicted and despised people; and makes their consolation by Christ to run parallel and to keep pace with their sufferings for Christ.

Use 1. Carry your duty still in remembrance. The first step of defection is to forget what God hath commanded. There is an oblivion, and a darkness for the present on the mind, so that a man knoweth not what he knoweth, as Hagar saw not the well that was before her, till God opened her eyes. Therefore revive the grounds of your adherence, if you would constantly adhere to God. The temptation cometh afresh upon you every day, with all the enticing blandishments; so should the reasons of your duty. It helpeth our perseverance to consider how strong and cogent they are, and what wrong we should do to God and religion to consent. At first a man beholds temptations with horror; but being familiarised, our

thoughts are more reconciled to them; therefore recollect yourselves, and remember the reasons you first had to put you upon your duty; and if you duly consider them, they will be strong and cogent to repel the temptation, that would take you off from it.

Use 2. It showeth who are lovers of the word and who not. On the one hand, some love the precepts of God when they are in honour and esteem, have many to join with them, and they see peace and plenty follow the profession of it; but rather than they will endure trouble and contempt, forsake it. The Samaritans would be Jews when the Jews were favoured; but in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, when the Jews were in trouble, they would be called Sidonians, οὐκέθ' ὠμολόγουν τὸν ἐν Γαριζὶν ναὸν τοῦ μεγίστου θεοῦ, dedicating their temple not to Jehovah but Jupiter (Josephus). These never received the love of the truth. On the other side, when a man loveth it alike in all times and in all conditions, when rich, when poor, in liberty and in bonds, when the ways of God are countenanced or when despised, it is all one to him; they love it not for outward respects, but internal reasons.

## SERMON CLIX

**Thy righteousness is an everlasting  
righteousness, and thy law is the truth.—**

**VER. 142**

IN this verse the word of God is set forth by a double notion, of righteousness and law; accordingly two things are predicated of it: as it is righteousness, it is said to be an everlasting righteousness; and as it is law, it is said to be the truth. Both imply our duty: as there are truths in the word, it is man's duty to believe them; as there are commands, it is man's duty to obey them. I shall treat first of the notions, secondly of the predications.

First, The notions; and there the word is first called righteousness, 'Thy righteousness.' God's righteousness is sometimes put for the righteousness which is in God himself; as ver. 137, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord;' Ps. 145:17, 'The Lord is righteous in all his ways.' And sometimes for the righteousness which he requireth of us; as James 1:20, 'The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God;' that is, the righteousness which God requireth of us; and here in the text. Once more, that righteousness which God requireth of us in his word is sometimes taken, in a limited sense, for the duties of the second table, and so usually when it is coupled with holiness, Luke 1:75; Eph. 4:24, 'The new man is created after God in righteousness and true holiness.' Holiness giveth God his due, and righteousness giveth man his due. Sometimes it is taken in a more general sense, as to imply the whole duty and perfection of man; thus righteousness when it is put alone.

In this general sense I take it here, and observe this point—

1. The word of God is righteousness. This is one of the notions by which it is expressed in this psalm; so it is called in the text.

The reasons.

[1.] Because it is the copy of that righteousness which is in God. God's natural perfections are represented in the creatures, his



majesty and omnipresence in the sun, but his moral perfections in the word. The heavens declare his excellent majesty and glory, but his law, his purity, righteousness, and holiness—Ps. 19, the sun and the law are compared together,—as the creatures in their kind set forth God, so doth the word in its kind. Well may it be called righteousness, because it is the fairest draught and representation of God in his moral perfections, the chief of which are called righteousness and holiness. The knowledge we get by the creatures tendeth to exalt God; the knowledge we get by the law to humble and abase man, because of our impurity; and therefore the prophet, when he saw God, cried out, Isa. 6:3, 'Woe is me! I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips;' and David, when he contemplated the holiness of the law, cried out presently, Ps. 19:12, 'Lord, cleanse me from my secret sins.'

[2.] It is the rule and pattern of all righteousness and justice in man; for our righteousness is a conformity to God's law. Indeed, habitual righteousness is a conformity to God's nature; actual righteousness, to his law. His Spirit reneweth our nature according to the image of God, and telleth us what is pleasing to God: Isa. 51:7, 'Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law.' They that have the law of God in their hearts do only know righteousness, that is, know what belongs to it; the new nature is tried, and all our ways tried by it.

[3.] It is the great instrument to promote righteousness. It maketh the man that doth observe it just and righteous before God. There is a twofold righteousness before God—the righteousness of justification and the righteousness of sanctification. The righteousness of justification, that is the great truth revealed in the scriptures. Nature saw nothing of that; the heathen saw something of a breach, that there was need of appeasing God, but nothing of a

righteousness before God: that secret was hid from the wise men of the world, and reserved for the scriptures; and therefore the apostle saith, Rom. 3:21, 22, 'But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God, which is by Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all that believe.' The law and the prophets set forth this mystery to teach men, that we are to be justified before God by faith in Christ. Nature could convince us of guilt, but not of a righteousness.

2. For the way of sanctification, or how a man that is justified should approve himself to God and men. The scripture crieth up another righteousness, that becometh justified persons; that is, the way to be righteous is to do righteousness: 1 John 3:7, 'Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doth righteousness is righteous.' So it is said of Zacharias and Elizabeth, Luke 1:6, that 'they were righteous before God, and walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.' So Deut. 6:25, 'And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments, before the Lord our God, as he commanded us.' This wisdom we learn from the word, where nothing but righteousness is recommended; for it cometh from the righteous God, who is essentially good and holy, and cannot be contrary to himself in commanding unjust things: and therefore his commandments are in all points right. There is no way right to prove principles but by arguing ab absurdis, and so prove the goodness of them. What a miserable case would the world be in if there were not such a law and rule! a place of villanies and wickedness. And therefore here is righteousness, and all righteousness; we need not seek further for direction. Sure God can tell what will best please him, and our sense and experience inform us what things are good and honest in the sight of men.

Use. Let us live as becometh them that have such a righteous rule: 'Wisdom is justified of her children,' Mat. 11:19. Let us bear witness by our faith, profession, and godly life to the doctrine of God. This is to glorify the word, Acts 13:40, when we express the excellencies of it in our practice; do not only approve it in our judgments, and commend it with our mouths, but express it in our lives. Practice glorifieth more than verbal praise. Let us show that the word is righteousness; that is to say, the copy of God's righteousness, by being the rule and instrument of ours. Let us look after the righteousness of justification. We can never be truly righteous, unless we lay the foundation of the spiritual life in faith in Jesus Christ, and repentance from dead works, that maketh way for the spirit and power of godliness; for Christ is made of God to us righteousness before he is made sanctification, 1 Cor. 1:30. There is no acceptance with God without it: Rom. 5:19, 'By the obedience of one, many were made righteous.' Thereby our persons are accepted. In ourselves there is none righteous, no not one; and it is dangerous to look after any other righteousness while this is neglected: Rom. 10:3, 'Being ignorant of God's righteousness, they went about to establish their own righteousness,' &c. Again, let me press you to look after the righteousness of sanctification, to see that we be renewed by the Spirit, and entered into a holy course; and not only so, but we go on still in righteousness: Rev. 22:11, 'He that is righteous, let him be righteous still.' We are renewed but in part: Prov 15:9, 'The Lord loveth him that followeth after righteousness;' that maketh it his business to grow more righteous every day, and increase the acts, to perfect the habit; this earnest endeavour must never be left off.

Secondly, Now I come from the notion to the predication. This righteousness, it is an everlasting righteousness: it is so in two respects—in the constitution among men, and in the effects of it.

1. In the constitution of it. The covenant of grace is an everlasting covenant; so it is called Heb. 13:20; and the gospel is called the 'everlasting gospel,' Rev. 14:6; and 'I will make an everlasting covenant with you,' Isa. 55:3. The privileges of this covenant are eternal. Christ 'hath obtained an eternal redemption for us,' Heb. 9:12; Dan. 9:24. There is an unchangeable righteousness which Christ hath established in the church; he is the Lord our righteousness. His righteousness is still the same, and the plot was first laid in his everlasting decrees. The terms of life and salvation held forth in the new covenant are to continue for ever, no change to be expected. From the beginning of the world to the end thereof, the covenant of grace cannot cease; the obligation still continueth; men are for ever bound to love God and their neighbour. There shall no time come when the law of loving God and our neighbour shall be reversed and out of date. The covenant is essentially the same, under all the diversity of administrations. And as the privileges, so the duties are of an eternal obligation. Among men, τὰ δίκαια κινούμενα, that is just at one time that is not just at another. Lawgivers cannot always live to see their laws executed, and men cannot foresee all occasions and inconveniences, and therefore often repeal their laws. But God is wise; he hath made an unchangeable law, and he forbiddeth things intrinsically evil, and commandeth things intrinsically good.

2. As to the effects of it, in case of obedience or disobedience. (1.) In case of disobedience, eternal wrath lighteth on them that reject this covenant, that walk contrary to it, they shall be eternally miserable: 2 Thes. 1:9, 'Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.' Not a temporal but an everlasting destruction; and Mark 9:44, 'The worm shall never die, and the fire shall never be quenched.' An eternity of torments, because they despised everlasting mercy, and rejected the authority of an

everlasting God. Having offended an infinite God, their punishment abideth on them for ever. If they will stand out their day, it is fit their recovery should be hopeless. (2.) The benefits are eternal in case of obedience. There is everlasting grace, everlasting comfort, and everlasting life: 1 John 2:17, 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the word of God abideth for ever.' The Spirit is given as a comforter that shall abide for ever, John 14:16; and 2 Thes. 2:16, 'God who hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace.' And it is fit it should be so, because it is built upon God's unchangeable love, and Christ's eternal merit and intercession. God's love is an everlasting love, Jer. 31:3. The efficacy of Christ's merit never ceaseth, Heb. 13:8. His continual intercession ever lasteth, Heb. 7:25, and Rom. 8:39, 'Nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ.' He liveth for ever, by which we continue for ever in the favour of God, and the covenant standeth firm between him and us; the fountain of comfort is never dried up.

Use 1. To inform us of the difference between the laws of God and the laws of men. There are many differences, some of which I shall touch by and by; this expression offereth two—it is righteousness, and everlasting righteousness.

1. It is righteousness. Men have and do often decree wickedness by a law, not only in the first table, where man is most blind, but also in the second; not only in their barbarous worship, their sacrificing of men, but also in their human constitutions. The Lacedemonians held it lawful to steal, if he were not taken ἐπ' αὐτῷ φέρειν, in the very act. In Cyprus they held it lawful for their virgins, if they were poor, to prostitute themselves to get a dowry or portion. By the law of the twelve tables a man might kill his wife if she smelt of wine or counterfeited his keys. And among the Romans, if a slave had killed

his master, all his fellow-slaves were put to death with him, though never so innocent. By the same laws, a father might thrice sell his child; they might tear their debtors in pieces if they were not solvent. Thus blind were men in their own concerns and what made for human commerce; much more in the way of pleasing God and the interest of the world to come. Bless God for this righteous law. Again

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2. It is everlasting righteousness; not only righteous at the first giving out, but righteous in all ages and times; and should we slight this rule that will hold for ever? In the world, new lords new laws; men vary and change their designs and purposes; privileges granted to-day may be repealed to-morrow, but this word will hold true for ever; our justification by Christ is irrevocable, that part of righteousness is everlasting. Be sure you are justified now, upon terms of the gospel, and you shall be justified for ever; your forgiveness is an everlasting forgiveness, and your peace is an everlasting peace: Jer. 33:34, 'I will remember your sins no more.' So the other righteousness of sanctification, it is for ever. Approve yourselves to God now, and you will approve yourselves at the day of judgment.

Use 2. Exhortation.

1. Let this take us off from seeking things that have no continuance in them. The everlastingness of the word is opposed often to the transitory vanities of the world: 1 Peter 1:23–24, 'All flesh is grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass: the grass withereth, and the flower falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever.' Why should we hunt after that glory that soon fadeth? So 1 John 2:17, 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' All these things change, and move

up and down by divers circumrotations; we sit fast and loose in the world, but in the covenant of grace all is sure.

2. Let us choose this word to live by, that we may be partakers of that everlasting good which cometh by it. Oh, let us regard it! Eternity is concerned in it. If the righteousness of God be everlasting, let us begin betimes to get interested in it, and persevere in it to the end. Let us begin betimes, for we have but a few days to live here in the world, and so either to express our thankfulness or lay a foundation for our eternal hopes; therefore let us set about the work the sooner. And let us persevere; our care to keep this law must be perpetual, not like temporaries. Many will carry themselves well and godly for a while, but afterwards fall off; this doth not become an everlasting law; there is the same goodness in God's law that there was at first.

3. Let us comfort ourselves with the everlastingness of the privileges offered to us in God's word. The redeemed of the Lord should have an everlasting joy: Isa. 35:10, 'And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.' Let other things end and change as they will, our right by the new covenant changeth not. Sometimes we are in request in the world, and sometimes in disgrace; but God's love is everlasting and sure. We are not in with him to-day and out tomorrow; he hath dealt with us upon sure and unchangeable terms; nay, when you die, you may comfort yourselves in this, Ps. 103:17, 'The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, upon them that fear him, and his righteousness upon children's children.' Yea, not only in the changes of your outward condition is here an everlasting spring of comfort, but also in the ups and downs of your spiritual condition, and the clouds which now and then darken your comfort and hope in God. In a time of desertion we seem to be dead and cast off; yet remember God loves to be bound for ever: 2 Sam. 23:5, 'Although my house be

not so with God, yet he hath made an everlasting covenant.' Though we are not so punctual, exact, and faithful, but are subject to many errors and failings, yet God will mind his eternal covenant: Ps. 89:33–34, 'Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail; my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.' Death doth not dissolve it, nor desertions break it off.

Now for the second notion by which the word of God is expressed, 'thy law,' from whence observe—

Doct. That the word of God hath the nature and force of a law.

It is often so called in scripture; not only the decalogue, which is the abridgment of all moral duties, but the whole scripture is God's law: Isa. 51:4, 'A law shall proceed from me;' and Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of God;' and the gospel is called 'the law of faith,' Rom. 3:28. Here I shall show you how necessary it was that God should give man a law, both as we are considered apart, and with respect to community; and then show that the word hath the force of a law.

1. Consider man apart. Surely the reasonable creature, as it is a creature, hath a superior to whose providence and ordering it is subject. So all the creatures have a law, by which the bounds of their motion are fixed and limited: Ps. 148:6, 'He hath established them for ever and ever; he hath made a decree which shall not pass;' Prov. 8:29, 'He gave the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment.' The sun, moon, and stars are under a law; all the creatures are balanced in a due proportion, and guided and fixed in their tract and course by an unerring hand, which is a kind of law to them. As a creature, man is subject to the direction of God's providence, as other creatures are; but as a reasonable creature, he is capable of moral government; for so he hath a choice of his own, a



power of refusing evil and choosing good. Other creatures are ruled by a rod of iron, necessitated to what they do by an act of God's power and sovereignty; but man, being a voluntary agent, is governed by laws which may direct and oblige him to good, and warn and drive him from evil. This law was at first written upon man's nature, and that was sufficient while he stood in his integrity to guide him and enable him to serve and please God in all things propounded to him. The law written on the heart of man was his rule and principle. But that being obliterated by the fall, it was needful that God should give a new law, to guide man to his own blessedness, and to keep him from erring. The internal principle of righteousness being lost, the laws of men could not be sufficient, for they have another end, which is the good of human society. They aim not at such a supernatural end as the enjoyment of God; their laws reach no further than the ordering of men's outward conversations, and meddle not with the inward workings and motions of the heart, of which they can take no cognisance. These may be inordinate, do a great deal of mischief; therefore, as the wise God directed men to give laws to order men's actions, so he would himself give laws to order the heart, which man cannot reach. Lay all these together, and there is a necessity that God should give a law to man.

2. But much more if you consider man in his community, as he is a part of that spiritual community called a church. All societies of men from the beginning of the world have found the establishing of laws the only means to preserve themselves from ruin. There is no other way against confusion; and would God leave that society which is of his own institution, that of which he is the head, and in which his honour is concerned, without a law? Deut. 32:9, 'The Lord's portion is his people,' which was set apart to serve him, and to be to him for a name and a praise. Surely a people that have God so near them, and are in special relation to him, have their laws by which they may be

governed and preserved as to their eternal good, unless we should say God took less care for his own people than for others. This necessity is the greater because this society is spiritual; though made up of visible men, yet combined for spiritual ends, commerce and communion with God, and that mostly in their spirits, which maketh this society the hardest to be governed, and this, the most scattered and dispersed of all societies throughout all parts of the earth, should therefore be knit together with the strongest bonds. Surely then there needeth a common law, whereby they may be united in their conjunction with Christ, the head, and one another, that it may not be broken in pieces; and this to be given by God, that he may preserve his own authority and interest among them.

This law is the scripture, those sacred digests in which God hath discovered not only his wisdom and justice, but his will and imperial power, what he will have us do. The one showeth the equity, the other the necessity of our obedience; surely this is his law or none. The church to whom the law was given, God hath constituted the keeper of its own records; never acknowledge another; nor can any other make any tolerable pretence.

Now, having brought the matter home, I shall show you wherein it hath the nature and force of a law, as we commonly take the word; and here I shall—

1. Show you wherein it agrees.
2. Wherein it differs from the ordinary laws of men.

1. Wherein it agreeth.

[1.] A law is an act of power and sovereignty by which a superior declareth his will to those that are subject to him. There are two

branches of the supreme power—legislation and jurisdiction; giving the law, and governing according to the law so given. And so God's power over the reasonable creature is seen in legislation, and in the administration of his providence there is his jurisdiction. In the scripture he hath given the law, and he will take an account of the observance of it; in part here, at the petty sessions; hereafter, more fully and clearly at the day of general judgment. But for the present, here is God's power seen over the creature in appointing him such a law. God hath the greatest right and authority to command: Isa. 33:22, 'The Lord is our judge and our lawgiver.'

[2.] That there is not only direction given to us, but an obligation laid upon us. There is this difference between a law and a rule—a bare rule is for information, a law for obligation. So herein the word of God agrees with a law; it is not only the result of God's wisdom, but the effect of his legislative will. He would not only help and instruct the creature in his duty, but oblige him by his authority. *Decretum necessitatem facit, exhortatio liberam voluntatem excitat*, saith the canonist. Exhortation and advice properly serveth to quicken one that is free, but a decree and a law imposeth a force, a necessity upon him. So Hierome, lib. ii. contra Jovin—*Ubi consilium datur operantis arbitrium est, ubi præceptum necessitas servitutis*. A counsel and a precept differ; a precept respects subjects, a counsel, friends. The scriptures are not only God's counsel, but his precept. There is a coactive power in his laws. God hath not left the creature at liberty to comply with his directions if he please, but hath left a strict charge upon him.

[3.] Every law hath a sanction, otherwise it were but an arbitrary direction; the authority might be contemned unless it hath a sanction, that is, confirmed by rewards and punishments; so hath God given his law under the highest penalties: Mark 16:16, 'He that

believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned;' Gal. 6:8, 'If ye sow to the flesh, of the flesh ye shall reap corruption;' Rom. 8:13, 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.' God telleth them what will come of it, and commandeth them to abstain as they will answer to God at their utmost peril. The obligation of a law, first, inferreth a fault, that is, contempt of authority; so doth God's, as it is his law, and so it will infer a fault in us to break it; and as we reject his counsel, it inferreth punishment, and the greater punishment the more we know of God's law: Rom. 2:9, 'Tribulation, wrath, and anguish upon every soul that doeth evil, upon the Jew first, and also upon the Gentile.' Why the Jew first? They knew God's mind more clearly.

[4.] A sanction supposeth a judge, who will take an account whether his law be broken or kept, otherwise all the promises and threatenings were in vain. The law, that is the rule of our obedience, is the rule of his process; so the word of God hath this in common with other laws; therefore God hath appointed a judge and a judgment-day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, by the man whom he hath appointed; and 2 Thes. 1:8, 'He will come in flaming fire, to render vengeance on all them that know not God, and obey not the gospel.' According to the law they have been under, Gentiles, Christians, they must all appear before the Lord, to give an account how they have observed God's law. Now in patience he beareth with men, yet sometimes interposeth by particular judgments, but then they shall receive their final doom.

2. Let us see wherein they differ from ordinary laws among men.

[1.] Man in his laws doth not debate matters with his subjects, but barely enjoineth and interposeth authority; but God condescendeth to the infirmities of man, and cometh down from the throne of his

sovereignty, and reasoneth with and persuadeth and prayeth men that they will not forsake their own mercies, but yield obedience to his laws, which he convinceth them are for their good: Isa. 46:8, 'Remember this, show yourselves men; bring it to mind again, ye transgressors;' Isa. 1:18, 'Let us reason together, saith the Lord.' God is pleased to stoop to sorry creatures, to argue with them, and make them judges in their own cause: Micah 6:2, 3, he will plead with Israel, 'O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against we.' He will plead with Israel about the equity of his laws, whether they are not for their good. It is a lessening of authority for princes to court their subjects—they command them; but God will beseech and expostulate and argue with his people; 2 Cor. 5:20, he draws with the cords of a man, sweetly alluring their hearts to him.

[2.] The laws of God bind the conscience and the immortal souls of men; the laws of men only bind the behaviour of the outward man, they cannot order the heart. God takes notice of a wanton glance, of an unclean thought, a carnal motion, Mat. 5:28. Men's words and actions are liable to the laws of men; they cannot know the thoughts; but the law of God falls upon the counsels of the heart: Rom. 7:14, 'For I know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal;' Heb. 4:12, 'It is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.'

[3.] The law of God immutably and indispensably bindeth all men without distinction; no man beggeth exemption here because of their condition; there is no immunity and freedom from God's law. Men may grant immunity from their laws: 1 Sam. 17:25, 'He will make his father's house free in Israel.' Men's laws are compared to spiders' webs; the lesser flies are entangled, great ones break through. God doth not exempt any creature from duty to him, but speaketh impartially to all.

[4.] Men's laws do more propend to punishment than they do to reward. For robbers and manslayers death is appointed, but the innocent subject hath only this reward, that he doth his duty, and escapeth these punishments. In very few cases doth the law promise rewards; the inflicting of punishments is its proper work, because its use is to restrain evil; but God's law propoundeth punishments equal to the rewards; eternal life on the one hand, as well as eternal death on the other: Deut. 30:15, 'See I have set before thee this day life and good, death and evil;' because the use of God's law is to guide men to their happiness. This should be much observed; it is legis candor, the equity and condescension of man's law to speak of a reward; it commands many things, forbids many things, but still under a penalty; that is the great design of man's power; in very few cases doth it invite men to their duty by a reward; only in such cases where every good man would not do his duty. It is more exact and vigilant in its proper and natural work of punishing the disobedient, that wickedness should not go unpunished; the common peace requireth that; but that good should be rewarded, there is no human necessity. Human laws were not invented to reward good, but prevent evil.

Use. Let us humble ourselves that we bear so little respect to God's word, that we so boldly break it, and are so little affected with our breaches of it. Do we indeed consider that this is God's law? The greatest part of mankind fear the prince more than God, and the gallows more than hell. If every vain thought or carnal motion in our hearts were as the cutting of a finger or burning in the hand, men would seem more afraid of that than they are of hell. Nay, I will tell you, men can dispense with God's law to comply with man's: Hosea 5:11, 'Ephraim is oppressed, and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked after the commandment.' A little danger will draw men into the snare, when hell will not keep them from it. Oh, let us rouse up ourselves! Is not man God's subject? Is he not a more

powerful sovereign than all the potentates in the world? Doth he not in his word give judgment on the everlasting estate of men, and will his judgment be in vain? Hath not God appointed a day when all matters shall be taken into consideration? If you can deny these truths, go on in sin and spare not; but if conscience be sensible of God's authority, oh! break off your sins by repentance, and walk more cautiously for the time to come! Every sin is ἀνομία, 1 John 3:4, a breach of God's eternal law; and will God always wink at your disloyalty to him?

Nothing remaineth to be spoken to but the last clause, 'Thy law is truth.'

Doct. God's law is truth.

1. I shall show in what sense it is said to be truth.
2. The reasons why it is truth.
3. The end of this truth.

First, In what sense it is said to be truth.

1. It is the chief truth; there is some truth in the laws of men and the writings of men, even of heathens; but they are but sorry fragments and scraps of truth, that have escaped since the fall; but the truth of the word is transcendent to that of bare reason. Here are truths of the greatest concernment, matters propounded that are very comfortable and profitable to lost sinners, 1 Tim. 2:16. Here moral duties are advanced to the highest pitch: Deut. 4:6, 'Keep therefore and do them, for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations.' The end of these is not only to regulate your

commerce with men, but to guide you in your communion with God, and help you to the everlasting enjoyment of him.

2. It is the only truth, that is, the only revelation of the mind of God that you can build upon; it is the rule of truth. A thing may be true that is not the rule of truth. There is *veritas regulata*, and *veritas regulans*; the word is the measure and standard, and they are true or false as they agree or disagree with it. Every custom and tradition must be tried upon it; from the beginning it was not so; from the beginning, my Christianity is Jesus Christ. We must not attend to what others did, but what Christ did, who is before all; every dictate of reason must be tried by it, for here is the highest reason. It is written to make the man of God perfect, or else it cannot guide you to your happiness, 2 Tim. 3:15, 16. Every revelation must be tried by it, Gal. 1:8. If an angel or man bring any doctrine which differs from or is besides the written word, it is a cursed doctrine: this is the rule.

3. It is the pure truth; in it there is nothing but the truth, without the mixture of falsehood; every part is true as truth itself. It is true in the promises, true in the threatenings, true in the doctrines, true in the histories, true in the precepts, true in the prohibitions. God will make it good to a tittle. True in moralities, true in the mysteries of faith; not only true in duties that concern man and man, but in the sublimer truths that concern commerce with God, where nature is more blind: Ps. 19:9, 'The testimonies of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' It is true where a carnal man would not have it true, in the curses and threatenings. If God's word be true, woe to them that remain in a sinful way, they shall find it true shortly, and feel what they will not believe. It is true where a godly man feareth it will not be true; no promises contradicted by sense but will prove true in their performance. Whatsoever, in the hour of temptation,



carnal reason may judge to the contrary, within a while you will see your unbelieving fears confuted.

4. It is the whole truth; it containeth all things necessary for the salvation of those that yield up themselves to be instructed by it: John 16:26, 'He shall teach you all things,' and remember you of all things;' John 16:13, 'Lead you into all truth;' in all things that pertain to religion and our present conduct towards everlasting happiness. Therefore nothing is to be hearkened to contrary to what God hath revealed in his word; there is no room left for tradition, nor for extraordinary revelations; all that is necessary for the church is revealed there; it is a full perfect rule.

Secondly, The reasons.

1. From the author; God is a God of truth, and nothing but truth can come from him, for God cannot lie, Titus 1:2. The truth of the law dependeth upon the truth of God; therefore it must needs be without error; yea, it corrects all error; if God could deceive or be deceived, you might suspect his word.

2. The matter itself; it commends itself to our consciences by the manifestation of the truth: 2 Cor. 4:2, 'Approving yourselves by the word of truth,' 2 Cor. 6:7. If the heart be not strangely perverted, and become an incompetent judge by obstinate atheism and corrupt affections, it cannot but own these truths to be of God: 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost,' 1 Cor. 4:4.

3. The end of it, which is to regulate man and sanctify man. Now it were strange if he should be made better by a lie and a cheat: John 17:17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.' Certainly it is the most convenient instrument to reduce man to his wits, and make him live like a man.

4. It pretends to be the law of God; it is so, or else it would be the greatest cheat in the world; for it speaketh to us from God all along, and by virtue of his authority. None can be so brutish as to think that the wisest course of doctrines that ever the world was acquainted with is a mere imposture.

Use 1. To commend the word of God to us; we cannot have true doctrine, nor true piety, nor true consolation without the scriptures. Not true doctrine: Isa. 8:20, 'To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them.' It is to be condemned of falsehood, if not according to the word. You cannot have true holiness, for holiness is but scripture digested and put in practice, James 1:18. The foundation of the spiritual life is laid in the word; scripture faith and scripture repentance are still fed by the word. It teacheth us how to believe, and how to repent, and how to pray, and how to live, especially the heavenly life; and there can be no true comfort and peace without the word: Rom. 15:4, 'That ye through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.'

Use 2. 1. We should consider the truth of the word, partly in the general, for the strengthening and settling of our faith, and to make it more clear and solid and certain: Eph. 1:13, 'In whom ye trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth.' When boisterous temptations would carry us to some evil, which God hath forbidden and severely threatened, that the point of the sword of the Spirit be put to the bosom of it, Deut. 29:19, 20.

2. When you are settling your souls as to the main point of acceptance with God: 1 Tim. 1:15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' The word will never deceive them that seek righteousness there.

3. When difficulties arise that oppose the promise or expectation of relief according to the promise, you should urge the truth of the word in the very face of difficulty: 'Thy law is truth.' Take Paul's instance, Acts 27. God by promise gave all that sailed with Paul in the ship their lives, yet how many difficulties came to pass! At first, when they were in the Adriatic Sea for so many days and nights, and had neither seen sun nor stars, they knew not where they were, nor whither they should go; here was little appearance of God's making good his word to Paul. Another difficulty fell out, they feared they were near some country; they sounded and found they were near some land, but what land they could not conjecture, and were afraid of being split in pieces against the rocks; but the shipmen, that knew the danger of these seas, they must go out of the ship, they would make use of their long boat, and so they were ready to miscarry in the sight of the land, but Paul prevented them. And after it was day, the men were so spent because of long fasting and conflicting with the waves, they could not ply the oar. Another difficulty, they were where two seas met; they ran the ship aground and resolved to kill Paul and the rest of the prisoners, lest they should swim to land; but the captain, willing to save Paul, prevented that purpose; and so at length they came all to shore, though followed with difficulty upon difficulty. God made good his promise to a tittle, ver. 44. Pray observe how Paul urged God's promise against the greatest difficulties, as sufficient ground of encouragement to expect relief: ver. 25, 'For I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.'

## **SERMON CLX**

**Trouble and anguish have taken hold of  
me, yet thy commandments are my**

## delights.—VER. 143

IN the words we have—

1. David's temptation, trouble and anguish have taken hold of me.
2. David's exercise under that temptation, thy commandments are my delight.
3. The benefit of that exercise, notwithstanding the greatness of the temptation, yet. It is propounded with a non obstante.

First, The temptation was very great, for he speaketh of trouble and anguish. The joining of synonymous words, or words of a like import and signification, increaseth the sense; and so it showeth his affection was not ordinary; yea, both these words have their particular use and emphasis. Trouble may imply the outward trial, and the difficulties and straits he was in; anguish, inward afflictions: the one, the matter of the trial, and the other the sense of it. The other expression also is to be observed, 'Have taken hold of me;' in the Hebrew, 'have found me;' so the Septuagint renders it, θλίψεις καὶ ἀνάγκαι εὔροσάν με; and the vulgar Latin out of them, tribulatio et angustiae invenerunt me, 'have found me,' that is, 'come upon me,' as the expression intimateth. Troubles are said to find us, because they are sent to seek us out, and in time will light upon us. We should not run into them, but if they find us in our duty, we should not be troubled at them. Sometimes in scripture we are said to find trouble, and sometimes trouble to find us. We are said to find trouble. David said, Ps. 116:3, 'I found trouble.' And so now here in the text, trouble and anguish found him. There is no difference, or if any, the one noteth a surprise. Trouble findeth us when it cometh unlocked for;

our finding it noteth our willingness to undergo it, when the will of God is so, especially for righteousness' sake.

Secondly, David's exercise under this great temptation, 'Thy commandments are my delights.' Where we have—

1. The object, 'thy commandments.' The commandment is put for the word in general, which includeth promises as well as precepts, the whole doctrine of life and salvation. However, the property of the form is not altogether to be overlooked; even in the commandments or the conscience of his duty, he took a great deal of comfort.

2. The affection, 'delight.' He had said before that he did not forget God's statutes when he was small and despised, ver. 141; now he delighted in them. This was his great love to the word, that he could find sweetness in it when it brought him trouble, such sweetness as did allay all his sorrows, and overcome the bitterness of them.

3. The degree, 'delights,' in the plural number; he did greatly delight in it. *Omnis oblectatio mea*, saith Junius—thy commandments to me are instead of all manner of delights and pleasure in the world.

Thirdly, The next is the opposition of this exercise to that temptation, 'yet.' It is not in the original, but necessarily implied, and therefore well inserted by our translators, to show that the greatness of his straits and troubles did not diminish his comfort, but increase it rather. The points are these:—

1. God seeth it necessary sometimes to exercise his people with a great deal of trouble.

2. This trouble may breed great vexation and anguish of spirit, even in a gracious heart.

3. Notwithstanding this trouble and anguish, gracious hearts will manifest their graciousness by delighting in the word.

4. They that delight in the word will find more comfort in their afflictions than troubles can take from them, or such sweetness as will overcome the sense of all their sorrows. This was always David's help to delight in the word, and this brought him comfort though in deep troubles.

For the first point, that God seeth it necessary sometimes to exercise his people with a great deal of trouble. Though they are highly in favour with God, yet they have their share of troubles as well as others. This is true if you—

1. Consider the people of God in their collective body and community, which is called the church. It is the church's name: Isa. 54:11, 12, 'Oh thou afflicted, and tossed with tempest!' Names are taken a notionibus; things are known and distinguished by their name; it is one of the way-marks to heaven: Acts 14:22, 'Through many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God;' as the way to Canaan lay through a howling wilderness. If we were told before that we should meet with such and such marks in our journey to such a place, if we found them not, we should have cause to suspect we were out of our way. From the beginning of the world, the church hath always been bred up under troubles, and inured to the discipline of the cross: Ps. 129:1, 'Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say.' The spirit of enmity wrought betimes. The first family that ever was in the world yielded Abel the protomartyr, and Cain the patriarch of unbelievers. While the church kept in families, the outward estate of God's people was worse than their neighbours. Abraham was a sojourner, though owned and blessed by God, when the Canaanites were possessors, and dwelt in

walled towns. Jacob's family grew up by degrees into a nation, but Esau's presently multiplied into many dukes and princes. And as they grew up, they grew up in affliction. Egypt was a place of retreat for them for a while, but before they got out of it, it proved a house of bondage. Their deliverance brought them into a wilderness, where want made them murmur, but oftener wantonness. But then God sent fiery serpents, and broke them, and afflicted them with other judgments. After forty years' wandering in the wilderness, they are brought into Canaan, a land of rest; but it afforded them little rest, for they forfeited it almost as soon as they conquered it; it flowed with milk and honey, but mixed with gall and wormwood. Their story, as it is delivered in the book of God, acquaints you with several varieties and intermixtures of providence, till wrath came upon them to the utmost, till God saw fit to enlarge the pale and lines of communication by treating with other nations. Now, if the Old Testament church were thus afflicted, much more the New. God discovered his approbation and improbation then more by temporal mercies and temporal judgments. The promises run to us in another strain; and since life and immortality were brought to light in the gospel, we must not expect to be so delicately brought up as never to see an evil day. He hath told us, 2 Tim. 3:12, 'We must be conformed to our head,' Rom. 8:29; and expect to pledge Christ in his bitter cup, and our condition must inform us that our hopes were not in this world, 1 Cor. 15:19. In the gospel dispensation God would deal forth temporal blessings more sparingly, and spiritual with a fuller hand; the experience of all ages verifieth this. When religion began first to fly abroad into all lands, the pagans first persecuted it, and then the pseudo-Christians; the holiest and best people were maligned, and bound, and butchered, and racked, and stoned, but still they multiplied. It were easy to tire you with various instances in every age. Those that went home to God were those that came out of tribulations, and had washed their robes, and made them white in

the blood of the Lamb, Rev. 7:14. There is always something set afoot to try God's servants, and in the latter times the roaring lion is not grown more gentle and tame, rather more fierce and severe: Rev. 12:12, 'For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.' Dying beasts struggle most. As his kingdom beginneth to shake, so he will be most fierce and cruel for the supporting of it.

2. As to particular persons: 'The whole creation groaneth,' Rom. 8:22; and God's children bear a part in the concert; they have their share in the world's miseries, and domestical crosses are common to them with other men in the world; yea, their condition is worse than others: chaff and corn are threshed in the same floor, but the corn is grinded in the mill and baked in the oven. Jeremiah was in the dungeon when the city was besieged. The world hateth them more than others, and God loveth them more than others. The world hateth them because they are so good, and God correcteth them because they are no better. There is more care exercised about a vine than a bramble. God will not let them perish with the world. Great receipts call for great expenses first or last. God seeth it fitting, sometimes at first setting forth, as the old Germans were wont to dip their children in the Rhine to harden them, so to season them for their whole course; they must bear the yoke from their youth or first acquaintance with God, Heb. 10:32. Sometimes God lets them alone while they are young and raw, and of little experience, as we are tender of trees newly planted, as Jacob drove as the little ones were able to bear: 1 Cor. 10:13, 'He will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able.' They are let alone till middle age, till they are of some standing in religion: Heb. 11:24, 'Moses when he was come to years,' μέγας γενόμενος. Sometimes let alone till their latter time, and their season of fighting cometh not till they are ready to go out of the world, that they may die fighting, and be crowned in the field.



But first or last, the cross cometh, and there is a time to exercise our faith and patience before we inherit the promises. I will not enlarge in the common-place of afflictions, and tell you how necessary the cross is to subdue sin, which God will do in an accommodate way to weaken pride, to reclaim us from our wanderings, to increase grace, to make us mindful of heavenly things; these are discussed in other verses: to make us retreat to our great privileges, to stir us up to prayer, &c. *Tribulatio tam nobis necessaria, quam ipsa vita, immo magis necessaria, multoque utilior quam totius mundi opes, et dignitates, saith Luther*—we think wealth is necessary for us, dignity and esteem is necessary for us; no, affliction is necessary for us: 1 Peter 1:6, 'If need be, you are in heaviness,' &c.

Use 1. Let us look for troubles and provide for them. We shall not always have a life of ease and peace; the times will not always be friendly to religion: 'Then had the churches rest,' Acts 9:31; halcyon days. The enmity of wicked men will not always lie asleep; we would gather rust and grow dead, therefore look for them. If because you are Christians you promise yourselves a long lease of temporal happiness, free from troubles and afflictions, it is as if a soldier going to the wars should promise himself peace and continual truce with the enemy; or as if a mariner committing himself to the sea for a long voyage, should promise himself nothing but fair and calm weather, without waves and storms; so irrational it is for a Christian to promise himself rest here upon earth. Well, then, let us learn beforehand how to be abased and how to abound, Phil. 4:12. He that is in a journey to heaven must be provided for all weathers; though it be sunshine when he first sets forth, a storm will overtake him before he cometh to his journey's end. It is good to be fore-armed; afflictions will come, and we should prepare accordingly. We enter upon the profession of godliness upon these terms, to be willing to suffer afflictions if the Lord see fit; and therefore we should arm

ourselves with a mind to endure them, whether they come or no. God never intended that Isaac should be sacrificed, yet he will have Abraham lay the knife to his throat. Sorrows foreseen leave not so sad an impression upon the spirit. *Tela promissa minus feriunt*. The evil is more familiarised before it come: Job 3:25, 'The evil that I feared is come upon me.' When our fears prophesy, we smart less; it allayeth the offence; we meet with nothing but what we thought of before: John 16:1, 'These things have I spoken unto you, that you should not be offended.'

Use 2. If you are under afflictions, *μὴ ξενίζεσθε*, 1 Peter 4:12, do not strange at it, more than at night and day, showers and sunshine; as these things fall out in the course of nature, so do troubles and afflictions in the course of God's providence; it were a wonder if otherwise. We do not wonder to see a shower of rain fall, or a cloudy day succeed a fair: 1 Peter 5:9, 'All these things are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.' All the rest of God's people are fellow-soldiers in this conflict.

Use 3. When we are out of affliction, let us bless God that we are out of the affliction. The greatness of the trouble, danger, misery, straits whereinto God doth cast his own doth lay a greater obligation of thankfulness upon those that are free from those evils. If thou beest not thankful for thy health, go to the lazarhouses, look upon the afflicted state of God's people, and that may quicken you to thankfulness for being freed from them.

Use 4. Advice; do not draw sufferings upon yourselves by your own rashness and folly: James 1:2, 'Count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations.' We must not seek or desire trouble, but bear it when God layeth it on us. Christ hath taught us to pray, 'Lead us not into temptation.' It is a folly for us to cast ourselves upon it; if we

draw hatred upon ourselves, and run headlong into dangers without necessity, we must make ourselves amends by repentance, otherwise God will not. If a man set his house on fire, he is liable to the law; if it be fired by others, or by an ill accident, he is pitied and relieved. We are to take our own cross when made to our hands by God's providence, not make it for ourselves; not to fill our own cup, but drink it off if God put it into our hands. We must come honestly by our crosses as well as by our comforts, and must have a call for what we suffer as well as for what we do, if we would have comfort in our sufferings.

Doct. This trouble may breed much vexation and anguish of spirit even in a gracious soul. David speaketh of anguish as well as trouble.

1. Partly from nature. God's children have the feelings of nature as well as others. Christ Jesus, to show the truth of our nature, would express our affections; he had his fears and tears, Heb. 5:7, and so hath legitimated our fears and sorrows. It is an innocent affection to have a dislike of what is contrary to us, to our natural interest; to be without natural affection is among the vices. And—

2. Partly from grace. The children of God are more sensible than others, because they have a reverence for every providence, and look upon it as a good piece of religious manners to observe when God striketh, and to be humble when God is angry, Jer. 5:3; slight spirits are not so much affected. Ordinarily they see not God, nor own God in every stroke; but when the windows of heaven are opened, and the mouth of the great deep below, there must needs be a great sense.

3. Yet there is in it weakness and a mixture of corruption, which may come from an impatience of the flesh, which would fain be at ease: Gen. 49:15, 'Rest is good.' Therefore we are filled with anguish when troubled, either from distrust, or at least from inattentiveness to the

promises. As there is a negative faith in the wicked, not contradicting the truth of the word, so a negative distrust in the godly, not regarding, not minding the promise, or not regarding the grounds of comfort which it offereth to us; as Hagar saw not the well that was nigh her till God opened her eyes, Gen. 21:19; so Mark 6:52, 'They considered not the miracle of the loaves;' therefore are amazed in themselves beyond measure. 'Have ye forgotten the five loaves and two fishes?' Heb. 12:5, 'And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh to you as unto children.' Yea, sometimes there may be positive distrust, or actual refusing comfort: Ps. 77:2, 'My soul refused to be comforted.' As they may not mind comfort, so in great troubles refuse comfort in greater distempers.

4. Sorrow and trouble may revive inward trouble. Affliction in itself is a part of the law's curse, and may revive something of bondage in the hearts of God's children, which is good and useful so far as it quickeneth us to renew our reconciliation with God. Spirits entended by religion are more apprehensive of God's displeasure under afflictions: Num. 12:14, 'If her father had spit in her face, should she not be ashamed?' If it humble under the mighty hand of God, it is well; but when it filleth us with perplexities and amazement, like wild bulls in a net, or produceth uncomely sorrow, roaring like bears, or mourning as men without hope, it is naught.

Use. Let us take notice how affliction worketh. There is a double extreme, slighting the hand of God, or fainting under it, Heb. 12:5; we must beware of both. There must be a sense, but it must be kept within bounds; without a sense there can be no improvement; to despise them is to think them fortuitous. They come from God; their end is repentance, their cause is sin. Two things men cannot endure to have despised, their love and their anger. When David's love was slighted, he vowed to cut off all that pertained to Nabal; and

Nebuchadnezzar, when his anger was despised, commanded the furnace to be heated seven times hotter. Nor fainting, for that excludeth God's comforts. God hath the whole guiding and ordering the affliction, and while the rod is in his hand there is no danger. He is a wise God, and cannot be overseen; a God of judgment, by whom all things are weighed, 1 Sam. 2:3; every drachm and scruple of the cross; a just God, and will punish no more than is deserved: Job 34:23, 'He will not lay upon man more than is right.' As well no more than is meet, as no more than is right. He is a good God, does only what our need and profit requireth: 'For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men,' Lam. 3:33.

Doct. That it is the property of a gracious soul to delight in God's commandments.

It was David's practice, and it is the mark of a blessed man: Ps. 1:2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord;' and Rom. 7:22, 'I delight in the law after the inward man;' and Ps. 112:1, 'Blessed is the man that delighteth greatly in his commandments.' Delight in moral things, saith Aquinas, is the rule by which we may judge of men's goodness or badness—*Delectatio est quies voluntatis in bono*; men are good and bad as the objects of their delight are; they are good who delight in good things, and they evil who delight in evil things.

We shall consider the nature of delight—

1. In the causes.
2. In the effects of it.

First, The causes are—

1. Proportion and suitableness. Sensitive creatures delight much in such food as is agreeable to their nature. Now the commandments are suitable to the renewed heart: 'The law is in their heart,' Ps. 40:8; and Ps. 37:31, 'The law of his God is in his heart.' Divine qualities are planted there, which suit with the rule of holiness and righteousness, Eph. 4:24. And this is the sum of the law or commandments of God.

2. A second cause is possession of it and communion with it. Oritur, saith Aquinas, ex præsentia connaturalis boni. Now one may be said to possess the law or enjoy the law in regard of the knowledge of it or obedience to it: John 14:21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.' The knowledge of the law, so it be not superficial and fleshly, but full and thorough and savoury, is very comfortable, and goeth toward a good note; but obedience to the law is the cause of delight therein. God's servants rejoice when they can bring on their hearts with any life and power in the way of God's testimonies: Ps. 119:14, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches.' Thence cometh their comfort and obedience.

3. A third cause of delight is a precedent love of the object. Love is a complacency in and propension towards that which is good, absolutely considered both in the presence and absence of it. Desire noteth the absence of a good, delight the presence and fruition of it. Therefore a love of the object delighted in is essentially pre-supposed to delight. So that it is impossible for anything to be delighted in but it is first loved. We have experience that many things are delightful in themselves, and known to be such, which yet do not actually delight if they be hated. A man may taste of the sweetness of honey, yet if he hath an antipathy against it he may loathe it. David in this psalm pre-supposeth love as antecedent to delight: Ps. 119:47, 'I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.' Carnal men

cannot say so; 'For every one that doeth evil hateth the light,' John 3:20. The renewed only love the commandments. Yea, it doth not only pre-suppose a love of simple complacency, but also a love of desire; for all things are first desired before delighted in. None can truly delight in obedience but such as desire it. Such as can say with David, ver. 40, 'Behold, I have longed after thy precepts;' and ver. 131, 'I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed after thy commandments.' Now all such are blessed, Mat. 5:5.

Secondly, Let us consider the effects.

1. The first is dilatatio cordis, the enlarging of the heart; it openeth and wideneth the heart towards the reception of the law, and maketh it more capacious and comprehensive thereof than otherwise it would be: Ps. 119:32, 'I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt have enlarged my heart.' The heart is at ease and in a commodious condition, as a body that is in a large and fit place, where it is not straitened; and this is as oil to the wheels.

2. Delectatio causat sui sitim et desiderium. Delight in an object causeth a thirst of itself, and more of itself. Even the angels and blessed spirits feel this effect of delight, that it never cloyeth, but they desire more of their own happiness. Much more doth it work so in us, who are in such an imperfect state of enjoyment, upon a twofold account:—

[1.] The objects of spiritual delight are perfect, but the acts whereby we enjoy and possess those objects are imperfect. God is an infinite and all-satisfying good, but the acts whereby we enjoy him here in this life, whereby we have union and communion with him, are imperfect. We know, believe, love, hope but in part, 1 Cor. 13:9. Hereupon that delight which ariseth from the imperfect fruition of God here in this life stirreth up to an eager desire after fuller fruition,

and unto a further enlargement and intension of those acts whereby such fruition is attained, or wherein it consisteth; still thirsting after more when tasted, 1 Peter 2:3, 4.

[2.] Spiritual delights may be said to create a desire, as desire importeth a denial or exclusion of loathing; for the objects of spiritual delight and the acts whereby they are enjoyed can never exceed the degree and measure required in them, unless by accident, by reason of some bodily act concurrent therewith, and subservient unto the spiritual operation. The desire can never be too great; the expression of it may be burdensome. We may easily exceed the bounds of moderation in carnal things, but not in spiritual; they can never be too high and intense. Therefore fresh desires and earnest longings are still kindled and quickened in us; it never dulls the appetite, but draweth out the soul further and further, and cannot be too eager and zealous after holiness.

3. Another effect of delight is *perficit operationem*, it makes the operation to its object more perfect than otherwise it would be. As a motive or means, it exciteth to a greater care and diligence in promoting the end which we pursue. The delight in the law helpeth to perfect our meditation therein and observation thereof; by its sweetness it quickeneth, provoketh, and allureth to a greater zeal in both. Delight maketh all things easy: 1 John 5:3, 'All her ways are ways of pleasantness,' Prov. 3:17; 'The Sabbath is a delight,' Isa. 58:13. It facilitates duties, and removes difficulties in working.

Now this delight must be sincere, otherwise they are but like the carnal Jews who did delight to know his ways, Isa. 58:2. It must not be on foreign reasons. And then it must be universal, otherwise it is but like Herod, who 'heard John gladly, and did many things,' &c., Mark 6:20. It must be deeply rooted, otherwise it is but like the seed



which fell on the stony ground, 'which received the word with joy, but dureth but for a while,' Mat. 13:20.

Use 1. To show how far they are from the temper of God's children whose delight is in sin or the pleasures of the flesh. These have dreggy, muddy souls; their hearts are on sports, plays, merry-meetings. These desires are soon cloyed, leave a bitterness in the soul; till we contemn them, we are never fit for a holy life. See Gregory de Valentia.

Use 2. Have we this delight? The sincerity may be discerned—

1. By the extent. It is extended to all parts of the word, delight in the promises and precepts. To be partial in the law, hypocrites can well allow, Mal. 2:9.

2. It will be discerned by the effects of it. You will often consult with it: Ps. 119:24, 'Thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors.'

3. It will be a perpetual delight: Job 27:10, 'Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?' You will own it in affliction, as in the text. Many will delight in God's word when prosperity accompanieth it, but not in trouble and anguish. You will delight in obedience, and in the way of his testimonies; not talk of it, but do it. The young man's delight in Dinah made him circumcise himself, Gen. 34:19.

Lastly, compare it with your delight in things sensible, temporal, and corporeal. If it be sincere and cordial, it will not only equal, but surmount these: ver. 72, 'The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver;' and ver. 162, 'I rejoice in thy word as one that findeth great spoil.' Spiritual good is greater than corporal, our conjunction with it is more intimate, greater and firmer. The part

gratified is more noble, the soul than the body; it will make these die that the other may live.

Use 3. Let us be exhorted to do what we can for the begetting, increasing, and cherishing this delight in our hearts. If you love God, you cannot but love his word, which is so perfect a representation of him. If you love holiness, you must needs delight in the word; this is the rule of it. If you love life and happiness, you must needs delight in the word; this is the way that leadeth us to so blessed and glorious an estate. If you love Christ, you will love the word, which offereth him to you. If you love the new nature, you will delight in the word, which is the seed of it. If you would speed in prayer: ver. 77, 'Let thy tender mercies come unto me, for thy law is my delight.' If you would be supported in affliction: ver. 92, 'Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in mine affliction.'

Doct. In the days of our trouble and anguish God's word will be a great delight and comfort to us.

Such a comfort as will overcome the bitterness of our affliction. So saith David here. When all comforts have spent their virtue, then God's word will be a comfort to us.

Here I shall show—

1. What comfort the word holds out to us.
2. Why afflictions do not diminish it.

First, What comforts it holds forth.

1. The privileges of the afflicted: Rom. 5:1, 2, 'We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience.' Such may rejoice in tribulations; miseries are unstinged, his rods are not signs

of his anger. They are in the favour of God, and his heart is with them, however his hand be smart upon them. The habitude and nature of afflictions is altered in themselves; they are the punishments of sin, and so their natural tendency is to despair and bondage. God seemeth to put the old covenant in suit against unbelieving sinners; but now they are trials, preventions, medicines to believers, that proceed from love, and are designed for their good.

2. The word holdeth forth the blessedness of another world: 2 Cor. 4:17, 18, 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' Hope is not affrighted by affliction, but worketh. Before corn be ripened it needeth all kinds of weather. The husbandman is glad of showers as well as sunshine; rainy weather is troublesome, but the season requireth it.

3. It assureth us of what is acceptable to God: Micah 6:8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?' So it yieldeth comfort through the conscience of our duty, and cheerful reflections on afflicted innocency. Are not these God's ways which we desire to walk in, and for which we are troubled?

4. The word hath notable precepts that ease the heart: Phil. 4:6, 'Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God: 1 Peter 5:7, 'Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you;' Prov. 16:3, 'Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.' It biddeth us cast all our cares upon God, and commit ourselves to the guidance of his providence.

5. It giveth us many promises of God's being with us, and strengthening and delivering us, and giving us a gracious issue out of

all our troubles: 1 Cor. 10:13, 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.' Now it is a great ease to the soul to fly to these promises which are made to his afflicted servants.

6. It breedeth faith, which fixeth the heart: Ps. 112:7, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' It breedeth fortitude, or cleaving to God under the greatest trials, 2 Sam. 6:22; and Ps. 44:17, 18. Now this becometh a testimony and proof of our love to God, and so bringeth comfort. It breedeth obedience, and the doing of good leaveth a pleasure behind it. After sin a sting remaineth, Rom. 2:14, 15. It breedeth waiting and patience when all hope is cut off: Micah 7:7, 'Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation;' when such trouble is on us as no end appeareth of it. Most men's comfort holdeth out but whilst there is hope of turning the stream of things. They are not satisfied in their duty nor comforted with promises, but borne up with hopes of success.

Secondly, Why afflictions do rather increase than diminish this?

1. They drive us to these comforts. Man liveth by sense more than by faith when he hath anything about him, but his sorrows drive him to God. Indeed, men that wholly forget God in prosperity will not find his word a delight in adversity: Ps. 30:6–8, 'In my prosperity I said I shall never be moved: Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled: I cried unto thee, O Lord,' &c.

2. They prepare us for them; the sweetness of the word is best perceived under the bitterness of the cross. God and his word are never so sweet to the saints as in adversity: Ps. 94:19, 'In the

multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul;' and 2 Cor. 1:5, 'As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.'

Use. Let no calamity drive you from the commandments, for there you will find more delight than trouble can take from you, 1 John 3:1, 2. Shall the reproach of men have more power to make us sad than the honour of being God's children hath power to make us joyful? Let us be ashamed that we can delight no more: James 1:2, 'My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;' Mat. 5:12, 'Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven;' for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you;' and 1 Thes. 1:6, 'Ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.'

## **SERMON CLXI**

# **The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.—VER. 144**

IN these words—

1. The excellency of the word is again acknowledged, the righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting.
2. A prayer is thereupon grounded, give me understanding.
3. The fruit and benefit of being heard in that prayer, and I shall live.

Because the righteousness of the word is everlasting, therefore we should beg understanding, and this sound understanding maketh way for life.

First, He beginneth with the praise of the word, 'The righteousness of thy testimonies.' The word of God is contemned by none but such as know not the excellency of it, both in its own nature and the fruits of it. The sum of the whole octonary is here repeated.

Doct. That the righteousness and everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies should be deeply imprinted on our minds, and often thought of by us.

This stuck so in David's mind that he could hardly get off from the meditation. Here I shall show you—

1. Wherein the everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies consisteth.

2. What it is to have them deeply imprinted upon our minds, and when they are so.
3. Why they should be deeply imprinted upon our minds.

First, Wherein the everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies consisteth.

Ans. In two things—in the tenor of them, and in the effects.

1. In the tenor, and in that those terms which God dealeth with us are never repealed, but stand in force to all eternity. It is an everlasting truth that he that believeth in Christ shall be saved, and that without holiness no man shall see God. The moral part of the word is unchangeable, and shall never be altered; the same duties and the same privileges do always continue. Our Lord telleth us, Mat. 5:18, 'Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.' The truth of the doctrine of the law and prophets is more firm and stable than the frame of heaven and earth. Heaven and earth may be dissolved and made void, but his law shall never be made void; both in that part wherein he comforts us by his promises, and that part wherein he sets down our duty; we are eternally obliged to obedience, and God hath eternally obliged himself to reward and bless. There is an everlasting and unchangeable ordinance, by which we are bound to God, and he hath bound himself to us. We should not change, and God will not, having passed his word to us. The everlasting obligation on us dependeth on God's authority; the everlasting obligation on God's part dependeth on his own truth and veracity. And though we are poor changeable creatures, God hath interposed his authority: Mal. 3:6, 'I am the Lord; I change not;' James 1:17, 'In him there is no change or shadow of turning.' God would change if his truth was changed, but that is everlasting. It is not in the power of men to annihilate and change

the law; they may break the law, but they cannot annihilate and change the law. Though it be not fulfilled by them, yet it shall be fulfilled in them and upon them. And God will not annihilate the law, for God cannot change or deny himself; in those things wherein he hath engaged his truth to the creature, he is immutable and infallible. Another expression is, Jer. 33:20, 21, 'If you can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, that there shall not be day and night in their seasons, then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant.' The one shall not fail any more than the other. God compareth the firmness of his covenant with those things that are most unalterable, the standing of heaven and earth, the constant course of night and day. The ceremonial law was not abrogated till fulfilled in Christ. This is God's last will; the terms of life and salvation are still the same, other conditions are not to be expected.

2. In regard of the effects. These testimonies endure for ever, both in a way of grace and glory. In a way of grace, the word worketh in the heart an eternal principle, and carries us beyond temporal things, 2 Cor. 4:18; 1 Peter 1:23, 'Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.' The word worketh in us an eternal principle, which will abide with us as the root of everlasting blessedness. They that have served God faithfully shall not be deprived of eternal glory. Now, in glory the word abideth for ever, for though the souls of men are immortal, yet they have not in them a principle of blessed immortality. Sin is the root of eternal perdition, but grace of incorruption and eternal happiness. The wicked, though the substance of their soul and body shall not be annihilated, but upheld unto all eternity by the mighty power of God in the midst of eternal torments, yet all their glory and pleasure shall be consumed, and they themselves shall ever languish under the wrath of a highly provoked and then irreconcilable God: 1



John 2:17, 'He that doth the will of God abideth for ever.' The wicked shall endure by the word of God; it is a living death in regard of the execution of eternal wrath upon them that reject it, and the performance of everlasting blessings which are promised to them that receive and obey it; this will abide when other things fade. The word of God keepeth the godly and wicked alive in some sense.

Secondly, When is the word deeply imprinted upon our minds? That is discovered by two things—sound belief and serious consideration; when it is strongly believed, and often duly considered.

1. When it is strongly believed, or else it worketh not: for all things work according to the faith we exercise about them: 1 Thes. 2:13, 'The word of God, which worketh effectually also in you that believe.' Did we believe that our eternal condition depended upon the observance or non-observance of this rule, we would regard it more: Ps. 119:66, 'Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I have believed thy commandments.' Lord, I believe I must stand or fall by this rule, and therefore let me know all my duty. So Heb. 11:13, 'Being persuaded of these things, they embraced them.' We have not a thorough persuasion about these things; our persuasions about eternal things are very weak, when God's expressions about it are very clear and strong. Most men guess at a world to come, but are not thoroughly persuaded. They have a loose or general opinion that the scripture is the word of God, the rule by which they shall be tried; but do not soundly assent to it, and receive it as the word by which they shall be judged at the last day, John 12:48. Christ pronounceth as the word pronounceth. There is a non-contradiction, but not an active and lively faith; this and nothing but this bindeth the will and conscience to obedience.

2. Often considered. David still insists upon this, the everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies. It is as if he had said, I have said it already, and I will repeat it again and again. It is constant thoughts are operative, and musing maketh the fire burn. Green wood is kindled not by a flash or spark, but by constant blowing. Deep, frequent, and ponderous thoughts leave some impression upon the heart; the greatest matters in the world will not work much upon him that will not think upon them; all the efficacy is lost for want of these ponderous thoughts. Why are all the offers and invitations of God's grace of so little effect? Mat. 22:5, οἱ δὲ ἀμελήσαντες, they made light of it, they would not take it into their care and thoughts. Why do all the injunctions and precepts of God work no more? Men will not consider in their hearts, Deut. 4:39, 40, all the comminations of God; and therefore he calls upon them, 'Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver,' Ps. 50:22. It is for want of this that all the promises of God, of heaven and happiness work so little upon us: 2 Tim. 2:7, 'Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.' The truth lieth by, neglected, unimproved, till consideration take it up, and lay it in the view of conscience, and then it worketh. Till we take it into our thoughts, we have no use of any truth; therefore set your hearts seriously to consider of these things.

Thirdly, Why the everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies should be deeply imprinted in our minds.

1. It establisheth our judgments against vain fancies, and the humour of other gosselling. The apostle saith, Gal. 1:8, 'Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed;' 1 Tim. 6:3, 'If any man teach otherwise,' &c. There are some that expect speculum spiritus sancti, a greater measure of light beyond what the Spirit now affordeth, new

nuncios from heaven, to assoil the doubts of the preplexed world. No; the present rule leadeth a believer all along in his way to heaven; other and better institution shall not be, cannot be. Christ promised to bless this doctrine to the world's end: Mat. 28:20, 'I will be with you to the end of the world;' to guide and succour them. Christ prayed for no others but those that believe through their word, John 17:20; this word which the apostles have consigned to the use of the church. An angel is accursed if he should bring any other doctrine, Gal. 1:8. There is no other way of salvation given or to be given, Acts. 4:12. If an angel should hold out another way, believe it not. The apostle propounds an impossible case to show the certainty of this way; it is good to be sure of our rule; now this consideration helpeth that.

2. Because it bindeth and helpeth to obedience, partly as it showeth the absolute necessity of obedience, because the terms of salvation are indispensably fixed, and will everlastingly stand in force; therefore I must yield to God or perish. The soul cometh off most kindly to the ways of God when it is shut up unavoidably, without all hope of escape and evasion but by yielding to God's terms. The Lord will have the world know that there is no hope of a dispensation: Mark 16:16, 'He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.' The terms are peremptorily fixed; there is no relaxation in the gospel covenant. Now this doth bind the heart exceedingly to consider, ver. 152 of this psalm, 'Concerning thy testimonies, I have known them of old; thou hast founded them for ever.' And partly as it urgeth to speediness of obedience. You will not get better terms, for the righteousness of God's terms is everlasting; as good yield at first as at last. The laws of Christianity are always the same, and your heart is not likely to be better by delay. Your standing out were more justifiable in the account of reason if you could get better terms. Partly as it engageth to seriousness whilst it carrieth the

mind off from the vanities of the world into the midst of the world to come. I am not to mind what will content me for the present, but what will profit me for ever: holiness will abide when other things fade. My ways are to be scanned by an eternal rule. Some distinctions will not outlive time, as rich and poor, high and low; but the distinction of holy or unholy, sanctified or unsanctified, these abide: 1 Peter 1:24, 'All flesh is grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass; the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever.' Nothing stirreth us up more to provide for a better life than to consider the uncertainty of the world's glory, and the everlastingness of God's approbation according to the rule of his word. When all things are dissolved, we are to be tried by a rule that will never fail. Our pomp, and honour, and credit, and all things that we hunt after in the world, are soon blasted, but the gospel tells us of things that are everlasting—everlasting torments and everlasting bliss; and therefore our thoughts should be more about them: Isa. 55:2, 'Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?' and John 6:27, 'Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth to everlasting life.' And partly as it engageth to constancy in obedience; for it must last as long as our rule lasteth. You are eternally bound to love God, and fear him and obey him. We must not only begin well, or serve him now and then in a good mood, but so love God as to love him for ever, so cleave to him as never to depart from him. For his law is an eternal obligation; you must never cease your work till you receive your wages, and that is when you enter into eternity. Yea, much of our work is wages, loving, praising God; all duties that do not imply weakness are a part of our happiness. Thus it hath a greater influence upon our obedience than we were at first aware of.

3. Because it conduceth much to our comfort. The apostle telleth us that the comfort of believers is built upon two immutable grounds, therefore it is so strong, Heb. 6:18. Now this everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies is a comfort to us—

[1.] In all the changes of men's affections towards us. Sometimes they smile and sometimes they frown, but the promises ever remain the same. There is Yea and Nay with men, but not with the promises; they are all Yea and Amen in Christ, 2 Cor. 1:20. Times alter and change, but the tenor of the covenant is always the same.

[2.] It comforts us in the changes of God's dispensations to us. God may change his dispensations, yet his purposes of grace stand firm, and are carried on unalterably, by various and contrary means. We must interpret providence by the covenant, not the covenant by providence. We know the meaning of his works best by going into his sanctuary. The world misconstrueth his work and dealing to his children many times. If it be rightly interpreted, you will find God's righteousness is an everlasting righteousness. Sometimes God's providence is dark, but always just: Ps. 97:2, 'Clouds and darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne;' Hab. 1:12, 'Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God?' That was the prophet's support in those sad times, when a treacherous people were exalted, when he was embrangled and lost about God's dispensations; this was his comfort and support, God's eternal immutability in the covenant. He is always the same, loveth his people as much as ever, as faithful and mindful of his covenant as ever; only a veil of sense covereth our eyes that we cannot see it.

[3.] It comforts us against the difficulties of obedience, when it groweth irksome to us. The difficulty and trouble is but for a while, but we shall everlastingly have the comfort of it: 2 Cor. 4:17, 'For our

light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' Then it will be no grief of heart to us to have watched, prayed, striven against sin, suffered, continued with him notwithstanding all temptations: Rom. 2:7, 'To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life.'

[4.] It is a comfort in death. We change and are changed, but God is always the same, the righteousness of Christ will bear weight for ever: Dan. 9:24, 'To bring in an everlasting righteousness.' The fruits of obedience last for ever: Ps. 112:7, 'His righteousness endureth for ever.' How comfortable is this to remember, that we may appear before God with this confidence, which he hath wrought in us, that the covenant of grace is an everlasting charter, that shall never be out of date nor wax old.

Use. Let it be thus with us; let it be so deeply imprinted upon our minds that it may leave an everlastingness there upon the frame of our spirits; for then we are transformed by the word, and cast into the mould of it. Now, who are they that have an everlasting righteous frame of heart?

1. Such as act out of an everlasting principle, or the new nature which worketh above the world. The word ingrafted is called an incorruptible seed, or the seed of God, 1 Peter 1:23, 'that abideth in us,' 1 John 3:9; when there is a divine principle in us, such a principle as is the seed and beginning of eternal life; when the word hath rooted itself in our hearts.

2. Such as by their constant progress towards an everlasting estate are going from strength to strength, serving God, and cleaving to him in a uniform constant course of holiness, not by fits and starts, but unchangeably: Acts 24:16, 'To have always a conscience void of

offence.' Again, when you are in such an estate wherein you can bear the trial of those everlasting rules: Gal. 6:8, 'He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting;' Rom. 8:13, 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.' In short, if you have everlasting ends: 2 Cor. 4:18, 'While we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' Not making things temporal our scope and aim; that will not satisfy us: when we are deeply possessed with the thoughts of the other world: 1 Cor. 2:12, 'We have not received the spirit of the world,' and look upon all other things by the by, and use the world as if we used it not, 1 Cor. 7:29, 30.

Secondly, I come now to the prayer, 'Give me understanding, and I shall live.'

1. Here is the benefit asked, understanding.
2. The person asking, David, give me.
3. The person from whom it is asked, from God.

First, The benefit asked, 'Give me understanding;' that is, the saving knowledge of God's testimonies.

Doct. One great request that we have to put up to God should be for the saving knowledge of his testimonies.

The reasons why this should be our great request to God.

1. The necessity of understanding; that will appear—

[1.] Because of our ignorance and folly, which is the cause of all our sin: Titus 3:3, 'We ourselves were sometimes foolish and disobedient;' therefore disobedient because foolish. Every natural man is a fool, blind in spiritual things; whatever understanding or quickness of judgment he hath in other things, in all things that relate to God and heaven, blind and foolish, and cannot see afar off: 2 Peter 1:9, 'He that lacketh these things is blind.' And you shall find that sinners are called fools: Prov. 1:22, 'How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and scorners delight in scorning and fools hate knowledge?' Ps. 75:4, 'I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly; and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn.' They follow their own wit and will, to the ruin of bodies and souls, and all that they have. Their mirth is the mirth of fools, Eccles. 7:4, 5; their service the sacrifice of fools, Eccles. 5:1; 2 Sam. 24:10, 'I have done very foolishly;' therefore give me understanding.

[2.] Knowledge is our cure. The state of grace is called a state of light: Eph. 5:8, 'Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.' So that the new estate is described by light, a directive and a persuasive light. It is very notable in Eph. 5:14, 'Arise from the dead, and God shall give thee light;' and Acts 26:18, 'To turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.' In our natural estate we are all over darkness, slaves to the prince of darkness, doing the works of darkness, and posting on apace into utter darkness; and therefore it is light must cure us, and guide us into a better course: Col. 1:13, 'Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.'

2. Because of the excellency of understanding; therefore we should make it our request to God. Here are four considerations:—



[1.] Knowledge in the general is man's excellency. It is our privilege above the beasts; many of them excel us in beauty of colour, in strength, and nimbleness, and vivacity, and long life, and acuteness of sense; but we excel them in knowledge. And so God hath taught us more than the beasts of the field. Man is a rational creature, his life standeth in light: John 1:4, 'In him was life, and the life was the light of men.' Other creatures have life, but not such a life as is light, are not endowed with a reasonable soul and a faculty of understanding. The more of knowledge there is increased in us, the more of man there is in us.

[2.] Divine knowledge is better than all other knowledge; to know God's nature and will, to know how God will be pleased, and how we may come to enjoy him; all other knowledge doth but please the fancy, this doth us good to the heart: Jer. 9:23, 24, 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me;' as not in strength, so not in natural wisdom. Here I may take the argument of the text. Men do not properly live if they want the light of heavenly wisdom; without divine knowledge a man is little better than a beast. The endowment of reason was not given us merely to shift for ourselves, or provide for the animal life; other creatures do that better by instinct and natural sagacity, and are contented with less. No; man's life was given him for some other end, to know and serve his Maker.

[3.] Of all the knowledge of God, practical knowledge is better than speculative; not so much subtly to be able to discourse of his nature as to obey his will: Jer. 22:16, 'He judged the cause of the poor and needy; was not this to know me? saith the Lord.' The knowledge of God is not measured by sharpness of wit, but by serious ready practice; not strength of parts, but a good and honest heart; so to

understand as to keep them: Ps. 111:10, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.' They understand best, not who can discourse most subtly, but who live most holily. When our faith is more strong, our reverence of God increased, our obedience more ready, then is our knowledge sound; when we follow those courses which we know God delighteth in, Jer. 9:24, and study to please him in all things: 1 John 2:4, 'He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.' He that doth not make conscience of his duty, he knoweth no such sovereign being as God is, that hath power to command, to save, and to destroy: Titus 1:16, 'They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him.' So 1 John 3:6, 'Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him nor known him.' Well, then, in giving his word, God's end was not to make trial of their wits, who could most sharply conceive; nor of their memories, who could most firmly retain; nor of their eloquence, who could most neatly discourse; but of their hearts, who would most obediently submit to him: that is knowledge indeed which tendeth to use and practice. Look, as scire malum non est malum—to know evil is not evil, for God knoweth evil, yet his knowledge is not evil; so scire bonum, non est bonum, to know that which is good doth not make a man good. This is the distinction between understanding and will; the understanding draweth the object to itself, but the will is drawn by the object to it. If I understand anything, I am not in a moral sense that which I understand; but if I will anything, or love anything, I am what I will and love. This is the difference between the two faculties.

[4.] Transforming, regenerating, saving knowledge is the best part of practical knowledge. I add this because general knowledge may produce good life, or some outward conformity in the unregenerate: 2 Peter 2:20, 'For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the

world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' Those that are destitute of the saving knowledge of Christ, they may cleanse their external conversation by that rational conviction, though not spiritual illumination, though strangers to inward mortification, and unrenewed in heart; yea, avoid gross sins, perform external duties. Oh! but the lively saving light, such as subdueth the heart to God, such as maketh a thorough change in us, that is the best: 2 Cor. 3:18, 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' When we so know Christ as to be like him, this is like heaven's knowledge: 1 John 3:2, 'And when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.' Common truths have another efficacy, when they understand them by the lively light of the Spirit; when men know the torments of hell so as to flee from them: Mat. 3:7, 'Flee from wrath to come;' as a man would out of a ship that is sinking or a house falling. So when we see heaven so as it maketh us seek after it, Heb. 4:1, so to know Christ as to be made like him, this will do us good, and this is one of God's best gifts.

Use. Oh! then, beg this gift of God. Lord, give me understanding eyes. Do not beg riches, and honours, and great things in the world, but beg for understanding; it is pleasing to God, 2 Chron. 1:12. This will bring other things with it. Be importunate, take no nay; Prov. 2:3, cry for knowledge, lift up thy voice for understanding. It will not come at the first call. Follow God as the blind man, Mark 10:5, 'Lord, that my eyes may be opened, that I may receive my sight.' So be earnest with God that the eyes of your understanding may be opened, that you may have such a sight of heaven as that your affections may be set upon things above; such a sight of hell as that ye may flee for refuge as if the avenger of blood were at your heels. Without this there can be no true piety: Ps. 14:3, 'There is none that

understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.' Nay, there can be no salvation without this: Isa. 27:11, 'It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will have no mercy upon them,' &c. Ignorant people have a saying, He that made them will save them; but it is said they have no understanding; therefore he that made them will not save them; and therefore beg of God that he would break in upon your minds with the lively light of his Spirit.

Secondly, Here is the person asking this request, David, one well acquainted with God and his ways.

Doct. None know so much of God and his ways but they still need to know more. Petitions for understanding do not only become beginners, but grown Christians.

Three reasons of this point:—

1. That we may escape the deceits of a subtle devil, who lieth in wait for us, and assaults us on every hand, and maketh great advantage of the relics of our ignorance. The devils are called, Eph. 6:12, 'Rulers of the darkness of this world.' The dark part of the world is the devil's territory; and so much of ignorance as is in the children of God, so much advantage hath Satan against us: 2 Cor. 2:11, 'Lest Satan should get an advantage; for we are not ignorant of his devices.' The more we know, the less advantage the devil hath of us; he layeth snares for us where we least suspect.

2. That we may serve a holy God with that exactness and diligence as will become his excellency. The fault of the heathen was that 'when they knew God, they glorified him not as God,' Rom. 1:21; because they knew so little, they did not improve the knowledge they had; and this is true in some degree of every Christian. God would be more loved, feared, trusted, served, did we know more of him. The

clearer our sight, the warmer our hearts will be in his service: 1 Chron. 28:9, 'Know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart and willing mind.' If we did know God, we would devote ourselves to his service.

3. That we may be prepared for our everlasting estate by degrees. Our everlasting estate is called the inheritance of the saints in light. Now we grow more meet for it by increasing in holiness: Prov. 4:18, 19, 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more to the perfect day; the way of the wicked is darkness, they know not at what they stumble.' The just man is like the light that increaseth as the day groweth; the wicked are like the night that increaseth to thick darkness, till at last they fall into utter darkness.

Use. Well, then, let not only poor ignorant creatures, or young beginners, take up David's prayer, but also grown Christians of longer standing. Go to God, and say, Give me understanding. Partly because practical knowledge is never at a stand; knowing of things as we ought to know them, it is possible for a man to see round about the compass of revealed truths. Though extensively no more truths are to be known, yet intensively we may know them better. The best are defective in their knowledge. And partly, too, because it is a very satisfactory thing to be sure we are in God's way; in some nice debates it is hard to discern God's interest, when all circumstances must be considered, and temptations hinder the sight of our duty. And partly that we may justify the ways of God against cavils, Mat. 24:24. We have to do with men that would even puzzle the very elect, if it were possible.

Thirdly, To whom is this petition made? To God.

Doct. If we would have the knowledge of divine things, we must seek to God.

I will give you some grounds of this. Partly because he is the fountain of knowledge, the first mind or intellect, called in scripture 'the Father of lights,' James 1:17. He is the sun that must not only shine on us, to make us see things, but shine through us to make us be enlightened ourselves. Ours is but a participation. Now, to show whence we receive all, God will be asked. And partly, too, because God gave the rule, and therefore he must interpret it, *ejus est interpretari cujus est condere*. He can best show his own meaning; and therefore in all doubtful cases repair to him, especially since he hath undertaken in necessary cases: Jer. 31:34, 'For they shall all know me from the least to the greatest;' and loveth to be employed by his people for that end and purpose. Once more, without his Spirit the clearest light we have hath no efficacy, Rom. 1:18. He will have it sought.

I come to the third and last thing, the fruit and benefit, 'And I shall live.' I shall explain the words in the prosecution of this point.

Doct. The saving knowledge of God's testimonies is the only way to live.

There is a threefold life:—

1. Life natural.
2. Life spiritual.
3. Life eternal.

In all these considerations may the point be made good.

First, Life is taken for the life of nature, or the life of the body, or life temporal, called 'this life' in scripture, 1 Cor. 15:19; 1 Tim. 4:8. Among outward things nothing is more precious than life; it maketh

us capable of enjoying what the world can afford to us. We give all that we have to preserve it, Job 2:9. Indeed, in competition with worldly things, we do well to value it; but not in competition with our duty and love to Christ; so we must not count our life dear to us: Acts 20:24, 'I count not my life dear to me;' and Luke 14:26, 'Whosoever hateth not father and mother,' &c., 'and his own life.' Out of the conscience of our duty to Christ, we must be willing to expose it, for he can give us a better life, John 11:24; but otherwise so far as we can preserve it with our duty, it must be precious to us, and we must seek the interests of it. Well, then, in this sense it is no unbecoming thing for a Christian to say, 'Give me understanding, that I may live.' My life present, which mine enemies seek to take from me, this life is from God, both originally and in a way of constant preservation. God gave it at first: Gen. 2:7, 'God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul;' and still this life is at God's disposing, and he will sooner continue it to us in a way of obedience than in a way of sin: Job 10:12, 'Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit;' Acts 17:28, 'In him we live and move, and have our being.' The same power that giveth us being maintaineth it as long as he pleaseth. All is at the daily dispose of God.

2. Life is better preserved in a way of obedience than by evil-doing; that provoketh God to cast us off, and exposes us to dangers. It is not in the power of the world to make us live or die a day sooner or longer than God pleaseth. If God will make us happy, they cannot make us miserable. Therefore 'Give me understanding, and I shall live;' that is, lead a comfortable and happy life for the present. Prevent sin, and you prevent danger. Obedience is the best way to preserve life temporal. As great a paradox as it seems to the world, it is a scripture truth: Prov. 4:4, 'Keep my commandments, and live;' and ver. 13, 'Take hold of instruction; let her not go, keep her, for she

is thy life;' and Prov. 3:16, 'Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left riches and honour;' and ver. 18, 'She is a tree of life.' The knowledge and practice of the word is the only means to live comfortably and happily here, as well as for ever hereafter.

Secondly, Life spiritual; that is twofold—the life of justification and the life of sanctification.

1. The life of justification: Rom. 5:18, 'The free gift came upon all men to justification of life.' He is dead not only on whom the hangman hath done his work, but also he on whom the judge hath passed sentence, and the law pronounceth him dead. In this sense we were all dead, and justification is called justification to life; there is no living in this sense without knowledge: Isa. 53:11, 'By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.' We live by faith, and faith cometh by hearing, and hearing doth no good unless the Lord giveth understanding; as meats nourish not unless received and digested.

2. The life of sanctification: Eph. 2:1, 'And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.' And men live not properly till they live the life of grace; they live a false counterfeit life, not a blessed, happy, certain, and true life. Now this life is begun and carried on by saving knowledge: Col. 3:10, 'The new man is renewed in knowledge.' Again, men are said to be 'alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them,' Eph. 4:18. They that are ignorant are dead in sin. Life spiritual cometh by knowledge hence beginneth the change of the inward man, and thenceforth we live. Give me understanding, ut vere in te vivam, that the true life begun in me may grow and increase daily, but never be quenched by sin.

Thirdly, Life everlasting, or our blessed estate in heaven. So it is said of the saints departed, they all live to God, Luke 20:38; and this is



called water of life, the tree of life, the crown of life; properly this is life. What is the present life in comparison of everlasting life? The present life, it is mors vitalis, a living death, or mortalis vita, a dying life, a kind of death; it is always in fluxu, like a stream; it runneth from us as fast as it cometh to us: Job 14:2, 'He flieth as a shadow, and continueth not.' We die as fast as we live; it differeth but as the point from the line where it terminateth. It is not one and the same, no permanent thing; it is like the shadow of a star in a flowing stream; its contentments are base and low, Isa. 57:10, called 'the life of thy hands;' it is patched up, of several creatures, fain to ransack the storehouses of nature to support a ruinous fabric. And compare it with a life of grace here; it doth not exempt us from sin, nor miseries. Our capacities are narrow, we are full of fears and doubts and dangers; but in the life of glory we shall not sin or sorrow more. This is meant here, 'The righteousness of God's testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.' It is chiefly meant of the life of glory; this is the fruit of saving knowledge, John 17:3, when we so know God and Christ as to come to God by him.

Use. Let us seek the saving knowledge of God, that we may live, first spiritually here, and gloriously here. But few mind it; all desire sharpness of wit, and to be as knowing as others; no man would be a fool, but would own a wickedness in morals rather than a weakness in intellectuals; but who thinketh of being wiser for heaven, of being seasoned with the fear of God? Most men choke all the motions and inclinations they have in that kind with worldly delights and worldly businesses, being alive to the world and dead to God, thronging their hearts with carnal vanities, but leaving no room for higher and serious thoughts.

But at length be persuaded; what do men desire but life? If you know God and Christ with a saving knowledge, you shall have it. (1.) We

were made for this end, to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved, 1 Tim. 2:4. We do not live merely to live, but to make provision for a better life; not to satisfy our bodies out of God's storehouse, but to furnish our souls with grace, and exercise ourselves in his law day and night, that we may know his will concerning us, and provide for a better life, and live according to the directions of his word. (2.) No creature is so bad as man when he degenerateth from his end for which he was created: it is not so much for the sea to break its bounds, or to have a defect in the course of nature, as the degeneration of man. (3.) You live not properly when destitute of the life of God and heavenly wisdom: he doth not live the life of a man, nor preserve the rectitude of his nature.

## **SERMON CLXII**

### **I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes.—VER. 145**

IN these words are—

1. An allegation, I cried with my whole heart.
2. A petition, hear me.
3. A promise of obedience, I will keep thy statutes.

1. In the allegation we have a description of prayer, by the two adjuncts of it:—

[1.] Intension and fervency, 'I cried.'

[2.] The sincerity and integrity of it, 'With my whole heart.'

2. The petition is for audience; only, what we translate 'hear me,' is in the Hebrew 'answer me.' Now this being a general, it is uncertain what he prayed for: it may be for deliverance out of trouble; for in the 146th verse it is 'save me,' but in the 149th verse it is 'quicken me,' which implieth the vigour of the spiritual life, or grace to keep God's statutes. Whether for the one or the other, David would be heard.

3. Here is a promise of obedience, 'I will keep thy statutes;' which is mentioned either as the end and scope of his prayer, 'That I may keep thy statutes;' or as a holy vow and promise which the saints are wont to mingle with their prayers, 'I will,' &c. He would diligently serve God if the Lord would hear him.

First, I begin with the allegation or description of David's carriage in prayer. David devoured not his grief, nor nourished his unbelief, but opened his heart unto God, and that in an affectionate manner: he did not call, but cry. Crying noteth vehemency and earnestness, and is opposite to careless formality and deadness. The note from thence is—

Doct. That there is a holy vehemency and fervour required in prayer.

Here I shall show—

1. That we may cry.
2. That we must cry.
3. Wherein it consisteth.

First, We may cry in our afflictions. David doth so for help and relief, and it is not inconsistent with patience for us to do so; for our Lord Jesus had his cries, Heb. 5:7, in the extremity of his sufferings, without any impeachment of his courage and patience. So did Job,

chap. 30:28, 'I went mourning without the sun; I stood up and I cried in the congregation.' It argues we have a sense of our condition, and are under a pinching necessity; and therefore may complain to God, though not of God. They are sullen and obstinate and senseless that have no feeling, and so no complaint to make, when God lasheth them.

Secondly, We must cry. For—

1. The spirit of grace was given for this end: Rom. 8:15, 'Ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father;' not to say, but cry. He assisteth us by groans: Rom. 8:26, 'The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.' And such a spirit of prayer should we all labour for, to come to God with affection and humble and sensible groans, if we cannot come with the pomp of gifts. There is good sense in brokenness of heart, though it be accompanied with brokenness of speech; for God knoweth what a groan meaneth, and will not refuse the work of his Spirit.

2. Because the saints have all done so. Their way of praying is crying: Ps. 18:6, 'In my distress I cried unto the Lord;' Ps. 34:6, 'This poor man cried unto the Lord;' Ps. 130:1, 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord;' and Ps. 55:17, 'At noon will I pray, and cry aloud;' and in many other places. Others can say a prayer, but they cry it out.

3. These cries are heard and answered; as in all the former places, so Ps. 22:5, 'Our fathers cried unto thee, and were delivered;' Ps. 34:17, 'The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth;' βοηθέω, the word 'to help' is εἰς βοήν θεῖν to run to the cry. An arrow drawn with full strength will pierce deep.

4. Other prayers are not comely. It doth not become God to whom we pray; dead service doth not become the living God: Mal. 1:14, 'Cursed be the deceiver which hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.' Slight dealing in God's service argueth mean thoughts of God. It doth not become the Spirit by whom we pray, as in the first reason; nor doth it become the blessings for which we pray: God will not give a mercy till it be valued. If we be indifferent, and pray for things of course, without any esteem of them, we bespeak our own denial. Then we undervalue the grace we seek if we seek it so as if we cared not whether we obtained our request or no, for form's sake we must say something. When things are prized we are earnest, and God will have us earnest, to ask, seek, and knock, Mat. 7:7. If you have good things, you must do so, and will do so, before you have them. Nor doth it become the state of want wherein you pray. Where there is real indigence and felt necessity, it will sharpen your affections and put an accent upon your prayers. You will not tell a tale or a cold story of your own wants, but cry aloud for help: Jonah 2:2, 'I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord.' And the saints cry day and night, Luke 18:18. A true sense of want will sharpen our sluggish desires; the hunger-bitten beggar will not easily be put off.

Thirdly, Wherein this crying consisteth.

1. In the earnestness of the affection, not in the loudness of the voice: Gal. 4:6, 'He hath sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba Father.' It is a cry, not of the mouth, but of the heart; it lieth not in the lifting up of the external voice, or the agitation of the bodily spirits, but the serious bent and frame of the spirit, Rom. 8:26, στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις, inward groans, and holy meltings and breathings of soul after God. Moses cried after God, Exod. 14:18; but

we hear of no words which Moses spake. We hear of Israel's crying, and have an account of their words, hot and full of impatience, ver. 10; but not a word that Moses said, yet he cried unto the Lord. Israel was in straits, the Red Sea before, the Egyptians behind. *Clamabat populus, et non audiebatur: tacebat Moses, et audiebatur*, saith Ambrose. Moses' silence was sooner heard than their cry. Our groans and tears have a language which God understands. It is said, 1 Sam. 1:13, that 'Hannah spake in her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.' That is the better crying, in sighs and groans, rather than words; as the child that cannot speak will cry and make moan for the breast. God hath heard the cry of the heart without that of the tongue, but never the cry of the tongue without that of the heart. *Quibus arteriis opus est, si pro sonitu audiamur!*—what lungs and sides must we have, if the loudness of the voice did it! A dumb beggar gets an alms at Christ's gate if he can but make signs, when his tongue cannot plead for him.

2. This spiritual crying is not the earnestness of carnal affections; that is stirred up by the flesh, but this cry is stirred up by the Spirit, who maketh request, *κατὰ Θεὸν*, Rom. 8:27. God should have work enough to do if he did answer all men's prayers. Some would set him a task to provide meat for this, others for that lust. This man prayeth heartily for his pleasures, another for honour, another for preferment, another to satisfy his revenge. A carnal spring may send forth high tides of affection, James 4:3; but few seek grace to serve God: they would make God serve with their sins. These are not the groans and breathings of the Spirit, but the eructations and belches of the flesh. Therefore the vehemency of the affection is not only to be regarded, but the regularity, that they be not stirred up by the flesh, but guided by the Spirit.

3. It is not a mere natural fervency; that is the cry of nature after ease, but not the cry of grace after God, and is but howling in God's account, Hosea 7:14. The heart is not affected with that which is the true misery, sin and the wrath of God; nor sincerely engaged to God, from whom they expect help: and then how instant and earnest soever men be to be rid of their burden, their prayers are but like the moanings of the beasts under pain, and the howling of dogs, or the gaping of hungry ravens, Ps. 147. It is lawful to ask ease, but we must ask in a spiritual manner. It is lawful to pray for temporal blessings, but not in the first place, or with the neglect of better things. Prayer properly is the vent of grace, and the desires of a renewed heart expressed to God, Zech. 12:10.

Use 1. To reprove most men for their deadness and carelessness in prayer. Prayer is a part of natural worship. All that will acknowledge God and a providence will acknowledge a necessity of praying to God, especially in their straits. The pagan mariners cried every man to his god in a tempest, Jonah 1:6; but though all will pray in one sort or other, yet few pray in good earnest. Some say a prayer, but they do not pray in prayer, James 5:17. Elijah prayed earnestly. Their prayers are conceived in a cold and customary track of devotion. Others flow in words without spirit and life; their tongue is as the pen of a ready writer, but the heart is dead and carelessly affected, for they are indifferent whether they be heard or not. Prayer is indeed the work of their invention, but not the expression of their spiritual desire. The mind conceiveth a rational prayer, but the heart is not poured out before God; and so it is discoursing rather than crying. Words are the outside of prayer, sighs and groans lie nearer the heart, and do better discover the temper of it, and are more regarded by God than all the charms of speech: Ps. 6:8, 'The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.' Tears have a language which our Father understandeth; a want of affection is more than a defect of words.

Broken words with a spiritual affection do more than a well-set speech with unbrokenness of heart. Others have a natural fervency, but not renewed affections; pray from their own interest, or pray passionately for carnal things: Num. 11:4, 'They fell a-lusting, and wept, saying, Who will give us flesh?' They may be importunate for their own ease and welfare: 'Give me children or else I die,' saith passionate Rachel. Natural desires are very passionate, yea, for spiritual things on their own terms. Would not a man desire pardon and heaven? Whose heart doth not engage him to look after them? Some that are renewed yet are too cold in prayer, do not cry. It is not enough to have the qualification of the person, but the prayer must be qualified also, James 5:16, δέησις ἐνεργουμένη; it must be a well-wrought prayer, otherwise it availeth not; yea, our earnestness must increase according to the weight and moment of what we pray for. When Peter was in prison the church made instant and earnest prayer, δέησις ἐκτενής, Acts 12:5, as in the margin it is; and Christ had his ἐκτενέστερον, Luke 22:44. But now the children of God are conscious to themselves of much deadness and drowsiness, and are so low sometimes that they are not heard, scarce breathe in prayer, so far from crying. But what is the reason of this carelessness?

1. Want of sense. They have no feeling of their wants, and therefore pray perfunctorily. The poor in spirit, the mourner, and meek, are put before the desirer, Mat. 5. Men must be affected with their wants before they be earnest after a supply. Jesus Christ was sensible of his burden, and therefore he 'offered up supplications with strong crying and tears,' Heb. 5:7. And if man were once sensible of his sins by which his Saviour suffered, he would be fervent in his prayers, and most earnestly deprecate the wrath of God, as his Saviour did. A smart sense of wants quickens prayers. If we were always alike affected, as we are in a deep distress, or fears of death, or some notable danger, we should not need many directions to teach us to



pray fervently; but because such a sense is soon worn off, our prayers grow cold and careless.

2. As they are tongue-tied through sin, and carnal liberty hath brought an indisposition upon them, 1 John 3:20, 21. He that hath wronged another will not easily repair to him, and crave his help in straits.

3. Want of spiritual desire. Prayer is but the acting of desire; as desire is more or less, so is our cry in prayer. He that asketh remission of his sins, but doth not thirst after it with an earnest and burning desire, doth but pray for it out of course, and not as it becometh a creature that hath a sense of God's anger against sin. He that asketh the mortification of sin, but doth not desire it out of true desire, flowing from the hatred of sin dwelling in him, doth but pray for form's sake. He that desireth the deliverance of the church, but doth not desire it out of a true love to the church, will never pray heartily and in good earnest for it: Isa. 62:1, 'For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace,' &c. A man whose soul truly loveth the interests of the church will be solicitous for it; as Eli trembled for the ark of God, 1 Sam. 4:13. So when at ease we ask temporal supplies for fashion's sake. God must have the name, though we eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel.

4. Want of reverence to God, and therefore they babble over words without sense and feeling; they do not see him that is invisible: Eccles. 5:1, 2, 'Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God, for God is in heaven and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.' Keep thy heart and affections when thou goest into God's presence; a little

outward lip-service is but the sacrifice of fools, an affront to the power and majesty of God: Mal. 1:8, 'Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts.'

5. Want of faith: Mat. 11:28, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' To the woman of Canaan, that would take no denial, Christ saith, 'O woman, great is thy faith.' The blind man cried after the Son of David, as we run to a rich man that is charitably disposed for an alms. If we were persuaded that we should be the better for coming to God, we should not be so slight and careless in our approaches to him.

Use 2. To press you to this crying or holy vehemency in prayer. The apostle biddeth us to 'continue instant in prayer,' προσκαρτεροῦντες, continue with all your might in prayer: Col. 4:12, ἀγωνιζόμενος, 'Labouring fervently in prayer for you.' The word signifieth to be striving in a battle, and in an agony for them: it hath life in it. But what is it?

1. When the heart worketh in prayer as before.

2. When you follow the suit, and will not give over praying: Luke 18:1, 'He spake a parable to them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;' Luke 11:8, διὰ τὴν ἀναίδειαν, 'Because of his importunity he will rise,' &c. The prophet telleth God plainly what he would do: Isa. 62:1, 'For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,' &c. So Jacob: Gen. 32:26, 'I will not let thee go unless thou bless me.' Absque te non recedam.

3. When deaf to disappointments and discouragements from without, from within, from himself, from God himself: 1 Sam. 12:23, 'God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for

you,' &c.; notwithstanding the many objections in his heart, what God would do to a rebellious people. So Elijah when the heavens were as brass and the clouds as iron; and blind Bartimeus: Mark 10:48, 'Many charged him that he should hold his peace, but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' When God seemeth to cast out prayer, to give no answer, or a contrary one. So Daniel when forbidden to pray: Dan. 6:10, 'When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house and prayed three times a day as afore-time;' he doth not make one suit the less, or abate one jot of his zeal. To cleave to God when he seemeth to thrust us from him, Job 13:15, this is a holy obstinacy, very acceptable unto God. The woman of Canaan standeth fending and proving with Christ, till he giveth her satisfaction; then 'be it unto thee as thou wilt.' When we turn discouragements into arguments and motives of believing, and draw nearer to Christ the more he seemeth to drive us from him. However God wrestle with such for a while, it is with a purpose to give faith the victory, and to yield us himself to do for us what our souls desire of him. You pray and God keepeth silence: 'He answered her not a word,' Mat. 15:23. It is not said he heard not a word, but he answered her not a word; these two differ. Christ often heareth when he doth not answer. His not answering is indeed an answer, and speaks this, Pray on, and continue your crying still; the door is kept bolted that you may knock again. Afterwards a rebuke. First, he answereth not a word, then giveth an answer to the disciples, not to the woman, 'I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,' and then 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs.' But she turned the discouragement into an argument,' and she said, 'Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.'

4. Holy fervency and vehemency will be argumentative, and plead with God; as Abraham: Gen. 18:25, 'Shall not the judge of all the

earth do right?' So Jacob: Gen. 32:9, Jacob pleadeth God's promise; Return unto thy father's house; I will deal well with thee; Lord, I undertook not this journey but upon this encouragement. The little honour God hath by the church's calamities, Ps. 44:12; Isa. 52:4, 5. The praise God will have from his people, Ps. 142:6. Do it, as David in the text, 'I will keep thy statutes.' The chief arguments are—God's covenant: Ps. 74:22, 'Arise, O God, plead thine own cause; remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. Have respect to thy covenant.' The merits of Christ: Lord, hear for the Lord's sake. Desire is witty to find out arguments and reasoning to enforce the things we sue for.

But how shall we get it?

[1.] Have a sincere desire to the things asked. We will cry for what we value and earnestly desire: Prov. 2:3–5, 'If thou criest for knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seek for her as for silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.'

[2.] Be persuaded of the Lord's willingness to hear and power to help. A rich and bountiful person, a beggar will not let him go, if he see only a rich man: Mat. 8:2, 'Lord, if thou wilt thou canst;' it is in the power of your hand to help us. But is not God willing also? Suppose it be an uncertainty, yet cry mightily unto God, 'Who can tell that he will not repent?' Jonah 3:8, 9. If there be but a possibility, yet try what importunity will do: Ps. 57:2, 'I will cry unto God most high, unto God who performeth all things for me.' He hath heard once, and will again.

[3.] Beg the assistance of the Spirit. Our necessities are not sharp enough to quicken our affections, they need the secret influence of grace; it is his work to set us a-groaning and crying to God. How well

are we provided for, with an advocate and notary: Rom. 8:26; Jude 20.

[4.] Let us rouse up ourselves: Isa. 64:7, 'There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee;' Psa. 57:8, 'Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp; I myself will awake early.' We must ἀναζωπυρεῖν 'stir up the gift of God, which is in us,' 2 Tim. 1:6.

[5.] Let us take heed we do not quench the Spirit, 1 Thes. 5:19, bring deadness on our hearts by carnal liberty. So much enlarged as we are to the flesh, so much straitened in the spirit. Where desires are after other things, there will be little delight in prayer.

[6.] The way to be fervent is to be frequent and often with God. A key seldom turned rusts in the lock. The fire of the sanctuary was never to go out. By great interruptions we lose what we have wrought: 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright, but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity,' Prov. 10:29.

I come now to the second qualification, 'With my whole heart;' which importeth his integrity and sincerity in praying.

Doct. Our prayers to God must be sincere as well as fervent.

The heart must be in them, and the whole heart. This noteth—

1. Seriousness, that we heed what we say, otherwise we do not pour out our hearts before God. It is so far from being a spiritual act that it is not a rational act, but like the parrots speaking by rote, or as children say their prayers; and we must not be always children. Surely we do not speak to God as God, as an all-seeing Spirit, if we do

not mind what we say, John 4:24; and Prov. 28:23, 'Burning lips and a wicked heart are as a potsherd covered with silver dross.'

2. A hearty desire or affectionateness. Praying from memory and invention, and praying from affection, are two distinct things; yea, praying from conscience, and praying from the heart. Many times the mind is in prayer when the heart is not in it. The mind or conscience dictates what is fit to be asked, but the heart doth not consent, or not urge it to make any such suit to God: and so the prayer is repeated in the very making: Psa. 66:18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me.' The understanding judgeth that a meet prayer, but the heart is biassed the contrary way to some known sin. Therefore as David calleth all that is within him to bless God, Ps. 103:1, so to pray to him—memory, understanding, conscience, will, affections, all that is within us must attend upon this work; that which God heareth is desire: Ps. 10:17, 'Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.' So Ps. 145:19, 'He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.'

3. The prevalency of these affections. That God and his interest be uppermost in the soul, and the heart be effectually bent towards him; for prayer is not a work barely of our natural faculties, but of grace guiding, ordering, and inclining those faculties; not only a work of understanding and will, but of faith, love, fear, zeal, hatred of sin, temperance, patience, and other virtues, which do bend the heart towards God, and draw it off from other things: and without them the understanding will not be clear, and have any deep sense of the worth of spiritual things, 2 Peter 1:19. Without these, the will is remiss, and they never pursue them in good earnest. We may wish for them, but shall not will them: As Balaam, 'Oh that I might die the

death of the righteous! But he loved the wages of iniquity,' 2 Peter 2:15, and so spake words which his heart allowed not. The affections will be diverted to other things, and we cannot have those longings and strong desires after grace, Ps. 119:36; Col. 3:2; or at best but a little passionate earnestness for the present.

4. A universal care to please God in all things, without harbouring any known sin in our hearts, Ps. 66:18; Ps. 17:3, 'Thou has proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing;' nothing contrary to the new covenant, no guile; nothing in his heart contrary to what was in his mouth. So no insincerity found: Job 11:13–14, 'If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thy hand towards him: if iniquity be in thy hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles.' If you mean to call upon God with any confidence, all that is displeasing to him must be cast out of the heart. This is the best preparation; all filth must be swept out when you come to the holy God, for he will not do us good till we are fit to receive good. Therefore if you mean to stretch out your hand in prayer, thus you must do, then may you lift up your face without spot, have boldness and confidence in prayer; but when the heart is wedded to any vanity, God will not hear: Job 35:13, 'Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it.'

Use. To persuade us to pray with our whole hearts; for—

1. God will not be mocked, Gal. 6:7; that is in vain. You may venture to mock God, put him off with vain pretences, but it will cost you dear. He knoweth the thoughts afar off, Ps. 139:2; and Heb. 4:12–13, 'The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and

intents of the heart; neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' Though man cannot find you out, yet God can.

2. God hath expressly told you, 'The prayer of the upright is his delight,' Prov. 15:8. He will pardon many defects, but he will not pardon want of sincerity, either in the person or prayer. Though you cannot bring the pomp of gifts, or exact righteousness, yet, if sincere, God will delight in you; he measureth your prayer by that.

3. Where there is a moral integrity you do not dissemble; God can find the defect of supernatural integrity: Deut. 5:29, 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee; they have well said in all that they have spoken: oh that there were such an heart in them,' &c. Therefore be sure your lips do not feign, Ps. 17:1, and pretend more grace than you have; so that for the main your hearts be upright, seriously, readily bent to please him in all things. To this end—

[1.] The tongue must not only pray, but the heart. How dare you tell God to his face that you love him, and fear him, and trust in him, when there is no such matter? No such forgery as counterfeiting the voice of God's Spirit. The heart should be first and chief in prayer, Ps. 41:1; and Lam. 3:4, 'Lift up your hearts with your hands to God in the heavens.' There is the chief voice; the hand without it is nothing.

[2.] You must make conscience of graces as well as gifts, yea, more than gifts: 1 Cor. 12:31, 'But covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet show I unto you a more excellent way;' with 1 Cor. 13:1, 2. And bewail unbrokenness of heart more than brokenness of expression; if you chatter like cranes, yet if there be a holy desire in it, God will hear.



[3.] You must pray earnestly in secret as well as in company: Mat. 6:5, 6, 'When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men: but thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret,' &c. We have more enlargement there, because we represent our own case to God. Mourn apart: Jer. 13:17, 'My soul shall weep in secret places.' We are flat, cold, loose, careless in private; strive to speak with the same power, life, holiness in private as you would in public.

[4.] What you would be in prayer, you must be out of prayer: Prov. 26:7, 'The legs of the lame are not equal, so is a parable in the mouth of a fool;' as the legs of the lame, one doth not answer another. They are devout, all of a fire in their prayers, but neglectful of God in their conversations: Eph. 6:18, 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance; Prov. 28:9, 'He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.' He doth not live his prayers. We must live in the same frame.

[5.] You must pray as affectionately for heavenly as you would for earthly things. A carnal man's mind and heart is upon worldly things, and spiritual things lie by; contrary to Mat. 6:33, where we are bid, 'First to seek the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof,' &c.; and Ps. 27:4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.' They have no savour for other requests, but can find tender affections for safety, ease, sloth: other petitions do but bear these company; there is their business with God. If God will give these things, we will give a discharge for other things; so that their prayers

do not come from grace, but nature; thanks to his natural necessities for all the affections he hath in prayer.

[6.] We must not only have our flashes and good moods. So Balaam: Num. 23:10, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.' So those, John 6:34, 'Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.' Strange strivings for the present, but it is only for privileges. It is vanishing: Job 27:10, 'Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?' They would have heaven without holiness; pardon of sin, rather than power against it, or a new heart. He will pray when he seeth his time, as men take strong waters in a pang: he hath a praying fit upon him in adversity, not in prosperity: Hosea 5:15, 'In their affliction they will seek me early.'

[7.] As you pray to God, so you must entirely trust him: James 1:6, 7, 'Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.' A carnal man wavereth; he would fain have help from God, but his heart runneth upon other things: Hosea 7:11, 'Ephraim is like a silly dove without heart; they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.' Their hearts are seeking to other refuges, however they call to God among the rest. Ahaz would not ask a sign that would engage him to depend upon God, and keep him from running to other shifts. Sometimes he thinketh prayer will do it, and by and by desponds, dareth not trust God upon his prayers; he knoweth not what course to take, whether to shift for himself, or tarry God's leisure. But one that commits all to God is fixed: Ps. 112:7, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' He is freed from anxious cares.

## **SERMON CLXIII**

## **I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord; I will keep thy statutes.—VER. 145**

SECONDLY, Here is the petition, 'Hear me;' or, as it is in the Hebrew, 'answer me;' not in words, but deeds.

Doct. God's children when they pray are earnest for an answer.

To give you some instances: Ps. 85:8, 'I will hear what God the Lord will speak.' A gracious heart doth not make prayer a vain babbling or an empty prattle, but a gracious exercise that will in time get an answer, and obtain a good return or blessing from the Lord. Therefore they are listening and hearkening after news from heaven, if they can hear anything from God, how he receiveth their prayers, and what he will do for them: Micah 7:7, 'Therefore I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.' They are not only waiting, but observing and watching what cometh in upon prayer; for they are certain it is not breath poured out in the air, but a petition commended to their God, who hath promised to hear them. So Hab. 2:1, 'I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say to me.' He compareth himself to a watchman that is spying abroad if he can get any intelligence of any approaching comfort. So Ps. 5:3, 'I will pray, and look up;' as Elijah, if he could spy a cloud, any preparation towards mercy.

Reason 1. Because they dare not take God's name in vain, as all do that pray cursorily and never regard what cometh of it; like foolish boys that knock at a door in wantonness, but have no business, and therefore will not stay till somebody cometh to open the door. It is a great sin to take God's name in vain in any act of worship, much more in prayer. Now all do so that go about this duty as a task, not as

a means to do their souls good, or to obtain blessings from God; when I hear merely that I may hear, or receive the Lord's supper, and rest in the act of receiving. Every ordinance must be gone about in faith and obedience, expecting the ends of the duty, as well as being employed in the acts of it. If you do it in good earnest, and with respect to God's institution, you must do so. All the ordinances come under a fourfold notion—as duties, as privileges, as means, as talents. As duties enjoined, and a part of our homage and obedience to God; this will breed an awe upon our conscience, to keep us to a due and constant observance of them; it is not a matter arbitrary, but our necessary duty. As privileges; this keepeth us from weariness, that we may not consider them as a burdensome task. As means of our growth and improvement, that notion is necessary that we may not rest in the work wrought, but look after the grace dispensed thereby. As talents for which we must give an account, which will quicken us to more earnest diligence in the improvement. Some do not look upon them as duties, and so neglect them; others not as privileges, and so do not prize them, are not joyful in the house of prayer; others not as means, and so rest in the bare performance, without looking after the fruits to be had thereby; others not as talents, and so are more indifferent whether they get good by them, yea or no: but when all these are regarded, we act best in any service or ordinance. Now, as this is true of ordinances in general, so especially of prayer, which is a sweet means of communion with God, not to be done as a task; herein we make an immediate address to God and come to set him a-work, and to take proof of his power and goodness, to see what he will do for his people. We put it, I say, to the trial, as in that extraordinary case Elijah puts his contest with Baal's priests upon this issue, 'that God that should answer by fire, he should be God,' 1 Kings 18:24; so ordinarily we put in prayer to trial whether God hath any respect to his people, and that with God's own leave and encouragement; for he hath said that none shall seek his

face in vain, Isa. 45:19. We put it to proof whether he will keep touch with his people, and be able and willing to perform what he hath promised. Therefore we use this duty in vain, and in a cursory way, if we be not earnest for an answer; which the saints dare not do.

Reason 2. Not looking for an answer proceedeth from an ill cause.

1. Heedlessness, not considering what they do, and then their prayers are the sacrifice of fools, Eccles. 5:1, 2. Surely attention to holy duties, and that we should consider what we are about, it is the most serious and important part of our lives. Now men that do not consider why they pray are heedless and inattentive and rash.

2. Atheism, there is a touch of it in this sin: Heb. 11:6, 'He that cometh unto God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' God's being and his bounty, that there is a God, and that he will be good to them that seek him; these they do not believe steadfastly, these primitive and supreme truths of God's being and bounty, essence, and providence, but only comply with the common custom and fashion; for were they persuaded that there is a God, and that he is good to mankind, and will reward those that worship him sincerely, they would see what cometh of their duties and prayers to him.

3. Distrust, which is next akin to atheism: Job 21:15, 'What profit have we if we pray unto him?' Mal. 3:14, 'Ye have said, It is in vain to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances?' &c. Now when you look for nothing, we do in effect say so; for you carry it as if nothing would come of your prayers and fasts. They that are persuaded that God heareth them, they will wait for the answer of their prayers: 1 John 5:14, 15, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that

we have the petitions that we desired of him.' But low and slight thoughts of God and his service beget this carelessness; something they do, but never look after what they do.

4. It argues some disesteem of God's favour and acceptance, they care not whether he hath any respect for them, yea or no; for they do not so much as inquire of it. Oh! how contrary is this to the temper of God's people! If God hide his face they are troubled, Ps. 30:7; he is the life of their lives: 'Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us,' Ps. 4:7. The seasoning of their comforts is God's accepting their works, Eccles. 9:7. How passionately do they beg for a glimpse, for a token for good, Ps. 86:17. Nothing goeth so near their hearts as when the Lord hideth himself from their prayers: Ps. 22:2, 'I cry in the daytime, and thou hearest not; in the night season, and am not silent;' Job 30:20, 'I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me; I stand up, and thou regardest me not.' A dumb oracle is a great trouble. They make a business of prayer, therefore it is very grievous to have no answer, not to see their signs, to have no token for good. The church taketh it bitterly to heart: Lam. 3:14, 'Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayers should not pass through.' That cloud is his wrath, by reason of sin. Now, to have no affection this way argueth a stupid, sottish spirit. These are two reasons of the point.

Reason 3. If we do not look after God's answer, our loss is exceeding great.

1. We lose our labour in prayer, yea, return worse than we came, with more hardness of heart and neglect of God. Yea, that is not all, the loss of a prayer with a degree of spiritual judgment; but we lose confirmation of faith, for answers of prayer are notable props to the soul to support our faith in the truth of God's being: Ps. 65:2, 'O thou

that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' Every one shall own thee for God. So many answers of prayer, so many arguments against natural atheism. We have challenged him upon his word, and find there is a God. So of the truth of the promises, Ps. 18:30. Thy word is a tried word; I will build upon it another time. You have put them in suit, and ever found them good. Now all these experiences are lost if we do not look for an answer of our prayers.

2. You lose excitements to love and obedience. Nothing so much increaseth our love to God, as when we see that he is mindful of us upon all occasions, especially in our deep necessities, Ps. 116:1, 'I will love the Lord because he hath heard the voice of my supplication.' Every experience in this kind is a new fuel laid on to increase the fire.

3. We lose encouragements to pray again: Ps. 116:2, 'Because he hath inclined his ear to me, I will call upon him so long as I live.' The throne of grace shall not be neglected and unfrequented by me: I see there is mercy to be had, help to be had. One adventure succeeding encourageth another: Ps. 32:6, 'For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee;' because David found such ready audience and despatch.

4. You lose the benefit of sensible communion with God. Taking communion for familiarity, it lieth in donatives and duties, prayers and blessings; and there is a commerce between the heavens and the earth, by vapours and showers: prayers go up, and blessings come down; as it was told Cornelius, Acts 10:4, 'Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God;' and down come the blessings upon us.

5. God loseth honour and praise and thanksgiving if we do not look for an answer. For the answer, as it is matter of comfort to us, so it should be matter of praise to God: Ps. 50:15, 'Call upon me in the day

of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me;' so Col. 4:2, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.' We are to gather up matter of praise to God. We should not be so barren in gratulation if we did observe more of these experiences. You would not only be glorifying God by way of invocation, but commemoration: you may commend him to others from your own experience: Ps. 34:8, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good.'

Use 1. To reprove them that throw away their prayers, and never look after them; that play with such a duty as this, as children that shoot away their arrows, and never look where they light. Surely this argueth great contempt and low thoughts of God, formality in prayer, and stupidity of heart. It bespeaks low thoughts of God and of his providence; for if they did believe such a particular providence reacheth to all persons and things, they would study to produce some of these experiences, to be able to say, I was in such a strait, and God delivered me: Ps. 34:6, 'This poor man cried unto the Lord, and he heard him.' Great formality in prayer; for if we pray not out of course, but in good earnest, we cannot but hearken after the speeding of our requests. Great stupidity of spirit; hearts that have any sense of life in them are observing God's dealings, and suit their carriage accordingly. Lively Christians are putting cases.

Use 2. To press us to hearken after the answer of our prayers. God's children do so, and get much comfort thereby, and evidence of his love: Ps. 66:18, 19, 'But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my cry.' It is no small favour and respect we have from God's love to us; it is a great owning of our persons; our mercies are the sweeter. There is a double lustre and beauty put upon them when they come in the way of prayer, out of the hand of God; not by a common providence, but by covenant; and by virtue of the covenant



put in suit by us, as well as granted by God, which is a pledge of God's respect to us. To this end—

1. Be persuaded that God will hear you, and answer you when you pray according to his will: 1 John 5:14, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.' This is absolutely necessary for all that will pray aright, and mind what they do; for none can come to God aright but those that are persuaded they shall be the better for coming to him: James 1:5, 'Pray in faith, nothing wavering.' There must be a relying upon God, if indeed we pray to him. He that expects little in prayer will neither be much in it nor serious about the answer of it.

2. This answer must be heedfully observed. Careless spirits will not easily discern it: Ps. 130:5, 6, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning;' as those that watched in the temple for the dawning of the day. This earnest waiting is a happy token; when we make much of prayers, they are not lost. Therefore, as they watched for the word, brethren, so must you wait upon God for some discovery of his love by a gracious answer and return unto your prayers.

3. Sometimes God giveth an answer presently; sometimes it may be after some competent space of time. (1.) Sometimes presently; as Cornelius, in the time of prayer, and while the duty is a-doing. God giveth in some tokens of acceptance; as an angel was sent to Cornelius at the ninth hour, which was the hour of prayer, to assure him that his prayers were heard, and duties accepted: Acts 10:3, 'Peter and John went up to pray at the ninth hour,' Acts 3:1. So Daniel: 'Whilst I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin; yea, whilst I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel was caused to

fly swiftly.' The Lord is ready to answer the prayers of his servants in the very instant of their praying. So Acts 4:3, 'While they prayed, they were filled with the Holy Ghost.' The cases brought are singular and extraordinary as to the token and manner of assistance, but as to the substance of the blessing, it is the common practice of God's free grace: Isa. 58:10, 'When they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear;' Acts 12:12, a company was met together in prayer when Peter in prison heard of the time of his deliverance. (2.) Sometimes a good while after: the prayers are in God's book, Mal. 3:16. Now these must be waited for: 'My God will hear me,' Micah 7:7. We cannot say, As soon as the prayer is made, for he saith, 'I will wait for the God of my salvation.' Paul prayed thrice for the removal of the messenger of Satan, 2 Cor. 12; then God said, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' We must knock again and again. God heareth as soon as the prayer is made, but he taketh his own time to despatch an answer. Abraham prayeth for a child, but many years pass over till he hath him in his arms.

4. When God giveth an answer, own it as an answer. Sometimes we will not take notice of what is before our eyes, out of deep distress of spirit. It is said, Job 9:16, 'Though I had called and he had answered, yet would I not believe that he had hearkened to my voice.' Thus we misinterpret God's dealings in our troubles, that we will not own God's work as an answer.

5. Consider the several ways how God giveth answer to his people's prayers.

[1.] Extraordinarily, as in ancient time; so an angel was sent to Cornelius to tell him his prayers were heard; so to Daniel; so to Abel, Heb. 11:4, probably by fire from heaven; by vision to Abraham; by voice or visible token to Moses, and the high priest in the tabernacle

of the congregation from above the mercy-seat. But these returns were proper to those times.

[2.] Ordinary, and this several ways:—

(1.) Either by granting the mercy prayed for; as to Hannah: 1 Sam. 1:27, 'For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me the petition I asked of him.' So to David: Ps. 21:2, 'Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips.' So often to his people, when they have humbly sought to him. Sometimes instantaneous, at the very praying: 1 Sam. 7:9, 10, 'And Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him, and as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel, and the Lord discomfited the Philistines.' Or by degrees, when God is preparing instruments, before he giveth consummate deliverance: Acts 7:34, 'I have heard their groanings, and I will send thee into Egypt.' Their escape was some while after.

(2.) By giving in spiritual manifestations to the soul, though he doth not give the particular mercy prayed for; as when upon the prayer he reviveth the soul of him that prayeth: Job 33:26, 'He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable to him, and he shall see his face with joy.' The Lord giveth them the light of his countenance, and special discoveries of his love or support till the mercy come: Ps. 138:3, 'In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.' Support is an answer; such an answer had Paul: 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' Or when the heart is quieted; though we do not know what God will do with our requests, yet satisfied in the discharge of our duty, and that we have commended the matter to God. So it is said of Hannah, 'When she had prayed, her countenance was no more sad,' 1 Sam. 1:18; and Phil. 4:6, 7, 'Be

careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Jesus Christ.' Sometimes by a secret impression of confidence, or a strong inclination to hope well of the thing prayed for: Ps. 6:8, 'The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.' Or experiences; as they that travelled to Jerusalem, passing through the valley Baca, they met with a well by the way, Ps. 84:6; a sweet refreshing thought, or some help in the spiritual life, by serious dealing with God; some consideration to set you a-work, or some new engagement of the soul to God, as the recompense of the duty; some principles of faith drawn forth in the view of conscience, not showed before. Some truth or other presented with fresh life and vigour upon the heart.

(3.) Sometimes by way of commutation and exchange; and so God doth answer the prayer, though he doth not give the mercy prayed for, when he giveth another thing that is as good, or better for the party that prayeth; though not in kind the same, yet in worth and value as good. This commutation may be three ways—(1.) In regard of the person praying. David fasts, and humbleth and melteth his soul for his persecutors, Ps. 35:13, 'And it returned into his own bosom,' was converted to his own benefit. His fasting had no effect upon them, but his charity did not lose its reward. David prayeth for his first child by Bathsheba, but that child dieth, and God giveth Solomon instead thereof, 2 Sam. 12:15. Noah, Daniel, Job shall save their own souls, Ezek. 14:14. Your peace shall return to you again, Luke 10:5–6; the comfort of discharging their duty. (2.) In regard of the matter, carnal things are begged, and spiritual things are given: Acts 1:6, 7, 'The apostles asked him, Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' They did not receive the kingdom to Israel, but received the promise of the Spirit. Moses would fain enter into

Caanan with the people: Deut. 3:23, 24, 'And God said, Let it suffice thee; speak no more of this matter;' but God gave him a Pisgah sight, and ease of the trouble of wars. We would have speedy riddance of trouble, but God thinketh not fit; as showers that come by drops soak into the earth better than those that come in a tempest and hurricane. We ask for ease in troubles, and God will give courage under troubles: Lam. 3:55–57, 'I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon: thou hast heard my voice; hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry: thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee; thou saidst, Fear not.' His gracious and powerful presence in trouble was enough. Christ 'was heard in that he feared,' Heb. 5:7; not saved from that hour, but supported and strengthened in it. Job sacrificed, prayed for his children when they were feasting, Job 1:5; and though they were all destroyed, God gave him patience, ver. 22; for in all that befell him 'he sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.' (3.) In regard of means. We pray such, means may not miscarry; God will use others. As Abraham would fain have Ishmael the child of the promise, but God intended Isaac: Gen. 17:18, 'O that Ishmael might live before thee!' Thus doth God often blast instruments we most expect good from, and make use of others to be instruments for our good which we did least expect it from. God may give us our will in anger, when the mercy turneth to our hurt. Therefore the kind of God's answer must be referred to his own will, in all things for which we are not to pray absolutely; and when we have discharged our duty, endeavoured to approve our hearts to God, take what answer he will give.

Doct. From the manner of praying, with the whole heart, the saints have the more confidence of being heard in prayer. David allegeth his crying with the whole heart as a hopeful intimation of a gracious answer.

1. Because a Prayer rightly made hath the assurance of a promise. The promise is, John 16:24, 'Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.' Now this beareth no exception, but that we ask according to his will, 1 John 5:14. Si bona petant, boni, bene, ad bonum. Good men, asking good things, in the name of Christ, for a good end, thou canst not miss.

2. Where there is sincerity and fervency, we have two witnesses to establish our comfort and hope—the Spirit of God, that knoweth the deep things of God; and the spirit of man, that knoweth the things of man. God's Spirit, who stirreth up these groans in us: Rom. 8:26, 27, 'He that searcheth the heart knoweth the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.' And the testimony of our own spirits, that we have done our part and discharged our duty, and so have true joy and confidence: Job 16:19, 20, 'My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high: my friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears to God.'

3. God doth not use to send them away comfortless that call upon him in spirit and in truth, because by one grace he maketh way for another; by the grace of assistance for the grace of acceptance: Ps. 10:17, 'Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou hast prepared their heart; thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.' Where God hath given a heart to speak, he will afford an ear to hear; for God will not lose his own work: he cannot refuse those requests which are according to the direction of his word and the motions of his Holy Spirit, when they are brought to him.

Use. This exhorteth us to look more after the manner of praying. An earnest and sincere prayer cannot miscarry; judge by this and you cannot want success. You cannot judge of your prayers by the wit, by the length, by the kind of words; but by the faith, the sincerity, the

obedience, the holy desires expressed in them. Cry with your whole hearts, and God will hear you. (1.) Look to the fervency of the prayer; set yourselves in good earnest to seek God, and good will come of it: Dan. 9:3, 'I set my face to seek the Lord God by prayer and supplications.' I seriously minded the work: 2 Sam. 7:27, 'Thy servant hath found in his heart to make this prayer unto thee;' he found his heart disposed to call upon God. There is many a prayer we force upon ourselves, we do not find it there. What encouragements from the word, what motions from the Spirit? Resolve to seek after it till you have found it: Ps. 27:2, 'When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' Wrestle with God: Hosea 12:3, 'He had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto him.' Such as wrestle with God, and have their hearts broken and melted before the Lord, will prevail. (2.) Look to the sincerity of your prayers; see that you do not feign and pretend to pray for a thing you desire not. Is your confidence wholly in the Lord? When your heart is divided, and you hanker after carnal lusts, you cannot pray aright. (3.) Look that you ask more for his glory than for your own ease: James 4:3, 'Ye ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, to consume it on your lust.' The less by-ends in prayer, the more hope of success.

Thirdly, The promise of duty, 'I will keep thy statutes.'

Doct. God's children, when they think of mercy, are at the same time thinking of duty and obedience.

1. Because they are ingenuous and thankful. Now obedience is the best expression of gratitude: and therefore, when they ask mercy, they mingle resolutions of duty with expectations of mercy: Rom. 12:1, 'I beseech you by the mercies of God, that ye present your

bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.'

2. They are supernaturally or spiritually sincere, and so propose this as their scope in all conditions, to live unto God: all their desires and resolutions are to this purpose. They have a sense of their own benefit, but still in subordination; their purpose is to serve him diligently: Phil. 1:21, 'To me to live is Christ;' Rom. 14:7, 8, 'For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth unto himself: for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live or die, therefore, we are the Lord's.'

3. This is God's end in giving mercy, temporal or spiritual, to bring them to obedience: Luke 1:74, 75, 'That we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.' Save me, quicken me, and I will keep thy statutes. God's end in giving, and the end of gracious souls in seeking mercies and blessings, is much the same—that God may have the glory, as well as they the benefit and comfort of what he bestows upon them.

Use. Mind your service more; engage yourselves to God anew, in every prayer: upon every mercy and answer of prayer: Lord, I desire this only in order to obedience.

## **SERMON CLXIV**

**I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall  
keep thy testimonies.—VER. 146**



THIS verse is the same with the former, only these differences may be observed:—

1. There the qualification of the prayer is expressed, 'I cried with my whole heart.' Here the person to whom he prayed, 'I cried to thee, O Lord.' He had told us before how he cried, now to whom he cried; to thee have I sought, and to thee only.

2. The request was general, that God would hear him; now particular, that he would deliver him; there it was 'hear me,' now 'save me.'

3. The notion which implieth the word of God is diversified; there 'statutes,' here 'testimonies.'

4. Our translation expresseth another difference; there it is, 'I will keep thy statutes,' as making it his vow and purpose; here, 'I shall keep thy testimonies,' as making it the effect and fruit of his deliverance; or, as it is in the marginal reading, 'that I may keep thy testimonies,' as making it his scope and aim.

In the words observe—

1. An intimation of prayer, I cried unto thee.

2. The matter of his prayer, save me, or deliver me out of trouble.

3. The end and scope of his prayer, not for the satisfaction of his natural desire, but that he might have a heart and opportunity to serve God, and obey his word: that I may, or then I shall, keep thy testimonies.

Observations from the text.

Doct. 1. We should not lightly give over our suits to God.

Here is a repetition of the same prayer: I cried, yea, again I cried, and a third time: ver. 147, 'I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried.' Si ter pulsanti nemo respondet, abito; we use to knock at a door thrice, and then depart. Our Lord Jesus, Mat. 26:44, 'prayed the third time the same words, saying, Father, if it be possible, let this cup depart from me.' So the apostle Paul: 2 Cor. 2:8, 'For this I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.' So 1 Kings 17:21, 'And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee let this child's soul come into him again.' This it seemeth was the time in which they expected an answer in weighty cases, and yet I will not confine it to that number, for we are to reiterate our petitions for one and the same thing, so often as occasion requireth, till it be granted.

Now the reasons are:—

1. Because the force of importunity is very great: the two parables evidence that, Luke 11 and Luke 18; if to obtain the Spirit, or right upon our enemies or oppressors. In both these parables there is a condescension to the suppositions of our unbelief; if we suppose God tenacious and hard-hearted, or if we suppose him regardless and mindless of the affairs of the church; or, to put it in milder terms, if we think nothing due to us: Luke 11:8, 'If he will not rise and give him because he is his friend;' or if our condition be so hard that we think it is past all relief; whatever be our secret and misgiving thoughts, we ought always to pray, καὶ μὴ ἐκκακεῖν, not to be overcome with evil: Luke 18:1, 'He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;' for importunity is of great prevalence with God and men.

2. A deliverance is never so sweet, nor so thankfully improved, if it come at the first call.

[1.] It is not so sweet, *nolo nimis facilem*. We disdain things that come too easily, but that which costs us much pains and long crying is more prized. The reason is because delay and difficulty sharpen our desires, and the sharper our desire in the absence of a blessing, the greater gust and sweetness we find in it when it cometh at last. A sack that is stretched out is more capacious, and holdeth the more; so is the soul more widened by enlarged desires, to entertain the blessing, for always our delight is according to the proportion of our desires; as a hungry man, or one long kept from meat, relisheth his food better than another that hath it always at hand: Isa. 25:9, 'And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation.' We that know blessings more by the want than the worth of them, in waiting we are acquainted with the difficulties and inconveniences that attend the want of things, and so are more fitted to prize them than ever we should have been if we had not so long waited.

[2.] It is more thankfully improved; this follows upon the former, and may be further made good, because when we know the difficulty of getting a blessing, we will not easily part with it; as they that get an estate are usually more careful how they spend it than they that are born to one: therefore God holdeth his people long at prayer, to prepare and season their hearts, that when they have it, they may know better how to employ it for his glory and his own good. Questionless Hannah would never have devoted her child to God had she not continued so long without him, and prayed for him with such bitterness of heart; but that wrought on her: 1 Sam. 1:11, 'And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man-child; then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor

shall come upon his head.' Compare this with ver. 27, 28, 'For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him; therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent unto the Lord.' The same effect you may observe in any spiritual comfort you obtain for your souls, or any temporal mercy or comfort of the present life, which you get by prayer. If God had answered you at first, it had been reckoned among the ordinary effects of his goodness, and so passed by; but what is won by prayer is usually worn with thankfulness. You would not have been so sensible of the hand of providence, the graciousness of the answer, or your obligation to God, or indeed that it had been an answer of prayer at all.

3. Things often and earnestly asked of God come with the greater fulness of blessing when they come; and so, as one saith, God payeth them use for forbearance; the mercy is the more ample, and so every prayer hath its reward. Christ denied the woman of Canaan long, but at length yieldeth up himself to her importunity: Mat. 15:26, 'O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee as thou wilt.' She lost nothing by the delay. Hannah was long without a child, but at length the child proved the more eminent; she gets both a child and a prophet too. Let God alone, and do you continue praying, and he will recompense you abundantly for all his delay. Peter was in prison, and the church made prayers without ceasing, Acts 12:5, and God doth not only bring him out, but brings him out with a miracle, so that they were astonished, ver. 16. God delayed for a while, and seemed to refuse their prayers; but when Herod was just about to bring him forth to execution, God brought him forth to deliverance. Every prayer is upon the file, and contributeth to make the mercy the more complete; it remaineth day and night before the Lord: 1 Kings 8:59, 'And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night, as a

memorial;' Acts 10:4, 'Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.'

4. It argueth an ill spirit when we will not continue praying, though we have not presently that which we pray for. To be sure—

[1.] There is disobedience in it, for it is contrary to God's injunctions: Luke 18:1, 'Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.' We ought not to surcease our suits so: Eph. 6:18, 'Praying always, and with all perseverance;' always relateth to the constant exercise of this duty upon all occasions; with all perseverance, to particular suits we put up to God. Now our duty must not be omitted, whatever the discouragements be; as Moses was to hold up his hands till the going down of the sun, so are we to continue our suits, and press hard for an answer, till God give us the thing we pray for.

[2.] There is weakness of faith to yield to the temptation, and to go off upon every repulse; yea, sometimes too too plain unbelief and atheism, as if there were no mercy to be expected from God, or no good to be obtained by spiritual means. Faith is to believe what we see not. The woman of Canaan cometh to Christ; at first she gets not a word from him, and afterwards his speech is more discouraging than his silence; she is put out of the compass of his commission: 'I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;' but still she is importunate; afterwards a rough answer: 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs.' She turneth his rebuke into an encouragement; then, 'O woman, great is thy faith,' Mat. 15:26. Many times we pray for blessings, and the oracle is dumb and silent; though God love the supplicant, yet he will not seem to take notice of his desires: yea, the more they pray, the more they may go away with a sense of their unworthiness and revived guilt; yet the work of faith

is to make an answer out of God's silence, a gracious answer out of his rebukes, and to increase our importunity the more.

[3.] Want of love to God, or coldness of love. It is the property of love to adhere to God, though we be not feasted with felt comforts and present benefits; yea, though he appear an enemy; for so will God try the affection and deportment of his children: Isa. 26:8, 'Yea, in the way of thy judgments have we waited for thee; the desire of our souls is to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name;' Job 13:15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' Not only when our affections are bribed: a child of God should love God for his judgments, as well as fear him for his mercies; as lime, the more water you sprinkle upon it, the more it burneth. It was a high expression of Bernard's affection to those that he took to be the people of God, *Adhœrebo vobis etiamsi velitis etiamsi nolitis*; so should we adhere to God now. When you can only wait on him in the way of his mercies, not in the way of his judgments, your waiting and praying is discouraged upon every difficulty and disappointment, you have little love to him.

[4.] Want of patience, or tarrying God's leisure till the promise bring forth. Some are hot and hasty; if God will appear presently they can be content to observe him; but to be crying and crying till their throat be hoarse and weary of crying, and no good come on it, they cannot away with this: 2 Kings 6:33, 'This evil is of the Lord; why should I wait on the Lord any longer?' They are discontented that God maketh them stay so long. Though God wait long upon them, and had reason enough to take the discouragement and be gone, yet they cannot tarry a little for God, and think prayer a useless work, unless it yield them a quick return, and that it is better to shift for themselves.

Use. Reproof to two sorts:—

1. To those that cease praying or crying to God, if they have not a present answer, especially if they meet with a contrary rebuke in the course of his providence. You must cry, and cry again, not imagine that God will be at your beck; but foolish men suddenly conclude, Mal. 3:14, 'It is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?' Oh no! Consider something is due to the sovereignty of God, that we should wait his leisure; for he is supreme, and will govern the world according to his own will, not ours. And therefore we must stay his time for the mercies we expect: Ps. 106:13, 14, 'They soon forgot his word, they waited not for his counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert.' And something is due to the stated course of his providence. We cannot expect that God should turn all things upside-down for our sakes, and invert the beautiful order of his dispensations: Job 18:4, 'Shall the earth be forsaken for thee, and the rock removed out of his place?' shall God alter the course of nature, or change the order of governing the world for us, or to please our humour? Something is due to the present estate of mankind, who are not to live by sense, but by faith: Hab. 2:3, 4, 'For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.' And that appointed time is for our trial, to see if we out of duty and principles of faith, can keep up our respects unto God, though his providence doth not presently gratify our desires or satisfy our necessities. Besides, it concerneth us to suspect ourselves rather than to blemish God's dispensations. Those always complain most of God's not hearing prayer who least deserve to be heard: Isa. 58:3-5, 'Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exact all your labour:

behold, you fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness, ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?'

2. That though they do not cease praying, yet do they not pray with any life and hope, because of his delays and seeming denials. There are certain general blessings which we are always praying for, because though we have them, yet we ought daily to ask them of God; the continuance of them, the sense of them, the increase of them; here never cease praying, There are other particular blessings, that either concern ourselves, or the church of God, which we are to ask with earnestness, and yet submission: in these we put it to the most sensible trial whether God will hear us or no. Now for these things we must seek the face of God with hope and zeal.

[1.] Because it is not enough to keep up the duty, unless we keep up the affections that must accompany the duty: Rom. 12:12, 'Continuing instant in prayer,' προσκαρτεροῦντες. In long afflictions men will pray, but they pray as men out of heart, for fashion's sake, or with little and weak affection; rather satisfying their consciences than setting a-work the power of God.

[2.] A seeming repulse or denial should make us more vehement; as blind Bartimeus, 'the more they rebuked him, he cried so much the more,' Mark 10:48. God suffereth the faith of his servants to be tried with great discouragements; but the more it is opposed, the more should it grow, and the more powerfully and effectually should it work in our hearts; as the palm-tree shooteth up the faster the more weight is hung upon it; or as fire, the more it is pent up, the more it



striveth to break out; therefore we should not only have fresh affections at first, but in every new prayer we should act over our faith again, and put forth spiritual desires anew.

[3.] God's dearest children are not admitted at the first knock: Mat. 7:7, 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' It may be we have not at first asking; we need seek and knock. Mercy doth not come to us all in haste; we have not at first what we lack; delays are no denials; therefore we must not take the first or second answer, but continue with instance: 'Give the Lord no rest,' Isa. 62:7. Be importunate with him, to hasten the deliverance of his people.

[4.] We must not only continue praying when Christ seemeth to neglect us, or to give no answer, but when he giveth a contrary answer; when he, to appearance, rejecteth our persons and prayers, and seemeth to forbid us to pray. Sometimes he seemeth to neglect us, and pass us by as if he took no notice; but yet he heareth when he doth not answer; yea, his not answering is an answer. Pray, or continue your prayer. It is said, Mark 6:48, 'He saw them toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary to them; and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.' But he came with an intent to appease the storm and help them. Christ taketh notice of the distresses of his people, but they shall not know so much, but delayeth to help till all their patience be spent, and yet then seemeth to pass by, for their thorough trial and exercise, and to move them more earnestly to pray. Sometimes he giveth them a seeming contrary answer and rebuke; instead of an expression of favour, he seemeth to pursue us in anger. God is the main party against us, we have to do with an offended God; but yet we should not quit him, but follow him when he seemeth to forsake us, and fly to him when he is pursuing us in

hot displeasure. Such is the admirable power of faith that it dares call on an angry God, and follow him when he goeth away from us, and lay hold on him when he smiteth, and cast itself into his arms in the midst of his rebukes and frowns: Jonah 2:4, 'Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet will I look again towards thy holy temple.' God seemeth to cast us off, as those he will not favour or care for, which is a great trouble to a child of God, who liveth by his favour, and valueth that above all things else: now for such a one to be rejected by God in his own sense and feeling, it goeth near his heart; yet in such a case we should not cast away our confidence, nor give over all addresses to God, but yet look to him and wait upon him.

[5.] Whether God answereth or no, it is the duty of faith to answer itself. The answer of his providence is not so sure as the answer of his word, and that faith hath to do with. See Ps. 6:4, 'Return, O Lord; deliver my soul; save me, for thy mercies' sake.' Compare ver. 8, 9, 'The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping: the Lord hath heard the voice of my supplications; the Lord will receive my prayer.' When trembling for fear of wrath, yet in prayer his heart groweth confident as if it had received news of an answer from heaven: Ps. 55:2, 'Attend unto me, and hear me;' compared with ver. 19, 'My God shall hear, and afflict them.' He is confident of it that the prayer should not miscarry. So Ps. 53:1, 2, 'Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God; defend me from them that rise up against me; deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men;' ver. 10, 'The God of my mercy shall prevent me; God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies.' Faith sees its own deliverance in the promise and all-sufficiency of God. When we have prayed according to God's will, we should take our prayer for granted, and leave it lying at God's feet: 1 John 5:14, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.' God's delay is not always an argument of his hatred, but some more glorious purpose

which is to be helped on by prayer: John 11:5, 6, 'When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.'

I observe again, that he not only repeateth his prayer, but reneweth the promise of obedience, to show that it was no vanishing notion, but a settled conclusion; as Christ maketh Peter profess his love thrice to engage him the more, John 21. So David, 'I will keep thy statutes;' and again, 'I will keep thy testimonies;' as if he had said, Indeed Lord, I will; it is the settled purpose of my heart to return to thee in the sincere obedience of my whole life. The note is—

Doct. That purposes and promises of obedience should not be slightly made, but with the greatest advertency and seriousness of mind.

1. Because we are usually too slight in devoting ourselves to God: Deut. 5:27–29, 'Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee, and we will hear it, and do it. And the Lord heard the voice of your words when you spake unto me, and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee; they have well said, all that they have spoken. Oh, that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever.' The Israelites again, when Joshua puts them to the question whether they would serve the Lord or other gods, Joshua 24:18, 19, 'We will serve the Lord, for he is our God. Joshua said unto them. Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is an holy God.' What is the reason men are so slight? Partly because they measure their strength by the present pang of devotion that is upon them, not considering the latent principle of sin, and that

proneness to transgress that is in their hearts. Partly they take up duty by the lump, and the general bulk and view of it, without sitting down and counting the charges, as Christ advises, Luke 14; whether they can be content to bear difficulties, renounce lusts, crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof. A foolish builder doth not think of storms, Mat. 7; if his building stand for the present, he is satisfied. Partly because men will promise God fair to be rid of the present anguish and troubles, yield to anything to be out of the present danger; but when they are out, they seldom regard the vows of their distress; as those, Ps. 78:34–37, made great promises, 'but their heart was not right with God, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.' Partly too when they are out of a temptation, and lusts are not stirring, they are other men than when in temptation, and so think all will be easy.

2. Because the nature of the work calleth for advertency and seriousness, because it is a work of the greatest moment, and so must be done with the greatest deliberation. This devoting ourselves to God both entitleth us to all the comforts of Christianity, and engageth us to all the duties of it. It entitleth us to all the comforts; you enter yourselves heirs to the covenant of grace when you enter into the bond of the holy oath, or give your hand to the Lord to be his people: 1 Cor. 3:22, 'All things are yours, because you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' If you have owned Christ as your dearest Saviour and sovereign Lord, with love, thankfulness, and subjection, and given him the supreme command of your souls, then you are Christ's, and God is yours, and all things yours: glory and salvation shall be yours in the world to come; grace, help, maintenance, ordinances, and providences shall be yours in the present world; and death, as the connection between the two worlds, as the passage out of the one into the other, shall be yours also. It is also the beginning and foundation of all obedience, and if this were once seriously and

heartily done, other things would succeed the more easily. He that is indeed God's will use himself for God's glory and service, and God shall have a share in all that he hath and doth: Rom. 14:7, 8, 'None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.' They came off so freely: 2 Cor. 8:5, 'And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.' This enliveneth our whole work. It is no hard matter to persuade them that have given up themselves to God to part with anything for God's use.

3. Because of the danger both in regard of sin and judgment, if we do it not aright.

[1.] In regard of sin, rash and sudden engagements are seldom sound: Mat. 13:20, 21, the stony ground received the word with joy, and forthwith the good seed sprang up, but the blade soon withered. Usually sudden undertakings are accompanied with faint and feeble prosecutions; and though men are warm and passionate for the present, within a while it cometh to nothing; all their promises are broken, as tow is burnt in the fire.

[2.] In regard of judgment, every consecration implieth an execration. If you break with God after you have engaged yourselves to him, your condition is worse; it aggravateth every deliberate sin, and hastens judgment, for God will avenge the quarrel of his covenant, Lev. 26:25. Better never begin, or the word pass out of your mouths, or thought enter into your heart, unless you be sincere, mean as you say. It is dangerous to alienate things once consecrated; this is the worst kind of sacrilege, that shall not go unpunished.

Use. You see, then, what seriousness we should use in devoting ourselves to God, or promising obedience to him.

1. Remember the weakness of a creature, that you may resolve in God's strength.
2. Consider incident temptations, whether anything be like to shake you in your covenanted course, that you may arm yourselves against it.
3. Consider your more particular affections; where the business is like to stick most, there are tender parts.
4. Consider the weight and importance of subjection. He will not be content with a little religiousness by the by, but you must love him with all your heart and all your soul, and serve him with all your might.
5. Consider the strength of your resolution, that you be irrevocably, everlastingly put under the sovereignty and command of God. Thus do, and you will find success and comfort in your deed.

Now to the words themselves. There is first an intimation of a prayer; where—

1. The vehemency, I cried.
2. The object or person to whom, to thee.

'I cried.' David keepeth up his fervour. What crying in prayer is I have showed in the former verse. I shall observe now—

Doct. That great trouble and sense of danger puts an edge upon prayer, and kindleth our affection in it.

When Israel was under sore bondage, God saith, *Exod. 3:6* 'I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt, and have heard their cry.' Afflictions make us cry in prayer, not only speak. An ordinary affection is *vox orationis*; it speaketh to God in prayer; but a vehement affection is *clamor orationis*, the cry of prayer. Ordinary prayers speak to God, but earnest prayers cry to God; and though remiss and cold wishes vanish in the air, yet strong cries pierce the heavens. They have a shrill accent, and cannot be kept out from God: *Judges 4:3*, 'The children of Israel cried unto the Lord; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron.' So *Judges 6:5–7*, 'They cried to the Lord because of the Midianites, who came up as grasshoppers.' David: *Ps. 18:6*, 'In my distress I called to the Lord, and cried to my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.' He prayed not seldom, but often and frequently; not slackly, but with fervency and earnestness.

1. Affliction will teach men to pray that never prayed before. The rude mariners in a storm called every man upon his god: *Qui nescit orare, discat navigare, Jonah 1:5*. Those that neglect God at other times, as if they had no need of him, or pray faintly, are then glad to seek to him for succour and safety: *Ps. 78:34*, 'When he slew them, then they sought him, and inquired early after God.' The natural principle of fear of death and love of self-preservation puts them upon it. So *Jer. 2:27*, 'In their affliction they will say, Arise and save us;' *Judges 10:10*, 'And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, saying, We have sinned against thee;' and *ver. 14*, 'Go, and cry unto the gods that ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.'

2. Good ones that prayed before will pray better and oftener, and with greater seriousness. Therefore God puts his own in straits to quicken their affections: *Isa. 26:16*, 'Lord, in trouble have they visited

thee; they poured out a prayer, when thy chastening was upon them.' So Hosea 5:15, 'I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face, in their affliction they will seek me early.' When we are pressed hard on all sides, then the throne of grace is more frequented; we are driven to it. Joab would not come at Absalom's call till he set his barley-field on fire.

Use 1. Be content to be east into such an estate that you may learn to pray; for, alas! we are but cursory at other times, but then our necessities whip us to the throne of grace, that was set up for a time of need; then is a time to put promises in suit, to make use of our interest in God. We mis-expound the voice of God's providence; we expound trouble to be his casting off, putting us from him; they are his voice calling, his hand pulling us to him: it is a time of drawing nigh we are allowed: Ps. 50:15, 'Call upon me in a day of trouble.' The day of trouble is the fruit of sin, a part of the old curse. When we think him, feel him an enemy, he is drawing us nearer to him. Blessed season to bring God and you together, when our troubles chase us to the throne of grace. God is not wholly gone, he hath left somewhat behind him to draw us to himself.

Use 2. It reproveth them that neglect God in their troubles: Dan. 9:13, 'All this is come upon us, yet we have not made our prayer unto thee.' You defer the dispensation; now you should make up your former negligence. Unprofitableness under the rod is an ill presage, when God sends a tempest after us. Oh, how frequent and earnest should we be in the practice of this duty!

1. This is a time proper for it. Prayer is a duty never out of season, though some seasons are proper and solemn to it. God is always to be prayed unto, Job 27:11. When freed from trouble and inconvenience we are not freed from prayer; still we must profess dependence,



subjection, and maintain our communion. But this is a special season: James 5:13, 'Is any one afflicted? let him pray.'

2. Though afflictions drive us to the throne of grace, yet if we come seriously and heartily, we are not unwelcome to him. Those very prayers which necessity doth extort from us are accepted by God, and valued by him as an acceptable piece of worship. Therefore such as look toward God ought not to be discouraged though afflictions drive them to it, though they sought him not before, or not in good earnest before; provided that always they find other errands, and be careful to maintain a constant communion with him. Most that are acquainted with God are taken in the briars. Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh had never heard of many, if their necessities had not brought them to him—their palsies, and possessions, and fevers, deafness, dumbness; thanks to these as their awakening occasions. A man will say, You come to me in your necessity. God is willing to receive us upon any terms.

3. How desperate in appearance soever our condition seem to be, yet crying will bring relief, or help may be found in God for them that cry to him: Judges 3:9, 'When they cried, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz:' Judges 3:15, 'And when the children of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera.' So Psalm 107; frequently.

From that unto thee.

Doct. In our troubles we must have recourse to God, and sue to him by prayer and supplication for help and deliverance in due time.

1. Because he is the author of our trouble. In miseries and afflictions our business lieth not with men, but God; by humble dealing with

him we stop wrath at the fountain-head. He that bindeth us must loose us; he is at the upper end of causes, and whoever be the instruments of our trouble, and how malicious soever, God is the party with whom we are to make our peace; for he hath the absolute disposal of all creatures, and will have us to acknowledge the dominion of his providence, and our dependence upon him. In treaties of peace between two warring parties, the address is not made to private soldiers, but to their chief: 'The Lord hath taken away,' saith Job, chap. 34:29; 'when he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?'

2. He challengeth this prerogative to be the God of salvation: Ps. 3:8, 'Salvation belongeth unto the Lord;' and therefore, if we would be saved, we must seek it of him. Others cannot help if he help not, for he hath all means and creatures and second causes at his command. If we lean to means, they may fail, but if we rely upon God, he will never fail. Therefore, whatever means God offereth for our help, prayer to God is the best means, and first to be used.

3. There is comfort in dealing with God, whatever our case be. (1.) Because of his all-sufficient power. (2.) Because of his good-will and readiness to help.

[1.] Because of his power and all-sufficiency, so that he hath ways of deliverance more than we know of, and can save his own when men do count their case desperate: Dan. 3:29, 'There is no other God that can deliver after this sort.' Let the strait be never so great, the burden heavy, and the creature weak, and at a desperate loss, yet God can find out ways and means to do his people good.

[2.] For his good-will and readiness to hear: Ps. 65:2, 'Oh, thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' The readiness of God to hear prayer doth open a door of access to all people who are

sensible of their burdens and necessities. He hath ever showed himself ready to hear the cries and groans of his people, and woe be to them against whom they cry: Ps. 22:5, 'They cried unto thee, and were delivered.' Their cries and groans are not hid from him, and cannot be shut out: Ps. 106:44, 'Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, and he heard their cry.'

Use. 1. To reprove divers sorts.

1. Some seek to help themselves by impatience, fretting, unquiet behaviour in their troubles; this doth increase their misery. Go, pour out your hearts before the Lord, that giveth ease: Phil. 4:6, 7, 'Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.' Your wrestling with trouble within yourselves doth but embroil you the more.

2. Some trust in outward helps, seek to men and means; as Asa to the physicians, not to the Lord, 2 Chron. 16:12. It is not unlawful to use means, but we must depend upon the Lord for the blessing. Seek to him first, otherwise looking to man proveth a snare many ways, as it tempts us to comply with their lusts, to neglect God, maketh way for the greater sorrow in disappointment. The creature is vain in itself, made more vain by our confidence: Ps. 60:11, 'Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man.' You will be brought to it at last. The more earnestly we seek God, the more confidence we may have of the creature.

Use 2. To inform us of the privilege and duty of the godly.

1. Their privilege; they have a God to go to. The worldly man sigheth and crieth he knoweth not to whom; but the godly man presenteth

himself in his lamentations to God: 'My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God,' Job 16:20. He hath a Father in secret, a Friend in a corner; they need not go to men, nor to saints and angels; they have God himself, and can challenge him by his office, as the judge of the world, to help poor creatures: Ps. 94:2, 'Lift up thyself, thou judge of the world; render a reward to the proud.' Yea, by his peculiar relation to them: Ps. 5:2, 'Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my king and my God; for unto thee will I pray.' They do not cry unto him as a stranger, but one in covenant relation with them.

2. Their duty to make God their guardian and saviour in all their distress, when in their own sense they are near perishing: Mark 8:26, 'Arise, save us, we perish;' 2 Kings 19:19, 'Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save us out of his hand; that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only.' When they have a good cause and a good conscience, this they may do and this they ought to do, and they will have comfort in it.

The last thing which I shall observe is—

Doct. That prayer for deliverance should be accompanied with serious purposes of obedience. 'Then,' saith David, 'I will keep thy testimonies.'

1. Because this is the best expression of gratitude and thankfulness. I take it for granted that every mercy from God deserveth a thankful return on the creature's part; as we expect a return of our prayers, so God expecteth a return of his mercies; and therefore we should be as careful to give him what he requireth, as we are careful to seek of him that which we need; for even in our commerce with God there is ratio dati et accepti. I presume, again, that there is no such expression of thankfulness as obedience. Verbal thanks are but a cold return;

thanks-doing is the best thanksgiving: Ps. 50:23, 'He that offereth praise glorifieth me, and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God.' Yea, once more, that we should think of this aforehand; while we are asking the mercy in our distress, we should engage ourselves to glorify God both in word and deed. Again, the time that we have our mercies for; in affliction we consider and are more serious, and afterwards we should keep the conscience of our obligation.

2. It is a sign the rod hath done its work, and then it will be gone, when it hath convinced you of former failings, and put you upon serious purposes: Job 34:31, 32, 'Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will offend no more. That which I see not, teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.' Otherwise what we ask of temporal mercy is either denied us or we get it in wrath.

3. You have a true notion of deliverance; you look upon it as an engaging mercy; therefore if God alter your condition you are bound to serve him. The end of our great deliverance is service: Luke 1:74, 75, 'That he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.' All deliverances out of straits are branches and appendices of the great redemption of our souls unto eternal life, and have the same end and use: Ps. 105:45, 'That they might observe his statutes and keep his laws.' That is the end of all deliverance out of trouble, to engage the hearts of his people to obedience, heart to serve him, opportunity to serve him.

4. A gracious heart desireth nothing to himself alone, and cannot be content to have the use of any benefit to himself only, but eyes God in all his enjoyments and all his requests; therefore his great aim is

that he may be in the better condition to keep God's commandments, for they 'live unto God;' Rom. 14:7, 8, 'For none of us liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's.' In every state they would be unto God what they are when they seek to be delivered; it is that they may be in the better condition and capacity to serve God, and have more opportunities to glorify his name.

Use. To persuade us to seek deliverance with these aims.

1. This is the temper of the people of God; that which urgeth to prayer is his glory; that which is their scope is his service. It is seen partly by the secret workings and purposes of their souls, what they do with their mercies when they have them; what they please themselves with in the supposition of obtaining them. What is it with? The satisfying of their revenge, providing for their families, living in pomp and ease, or that they may serve God? Ps. 75:2, 'When I shall receive the congregation, I will judge uprightly;' if ever God give an opportunity again. And partly by the preparations; they are afraid of a treacherous heart, therefore fitting themselves to enjoy the mercy before they have it, as the apostle learned to abound, Phil. 4:11, 12. Partly by the arguments they urge in prayer: Ps. 88:10–12, 'Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave, or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark, and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?' So Ps. 106:47, 'Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise.' A true believer would have comfort, not for his own satisfaction, but to glorify God.

2. Then we are sure to speed when our end is right: James 4:3, 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.' We may speak it with confidence, our prayers miscarry for want of a right end.

3. The equity of this; God hears us that we should hear him.

## SERMON CLXV

### **I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.—VER. 147**

DAVID still goeth on to give us an account of his fervour in prayer, 'I cried.' That which we have new in this verse is—

1. His vigilancy and diligence, I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried.

2. The reason and encouragement of this instant and assiduous praying, I hoped in thy word.

First, His vigilancy and diligence, 'I prevented,' &c. He rose betimes to meditate and pray; the Septuagint, ἐν ἄωριᾷ. Hesychius defineth that time to be ὥραν ἄπρακτον, a time of no business; when others were sleeping David was praying. The word 'prevented' is emphatical. David lived as it were in a strife with time, being careful it should not overrun him; he pressed to get before it, by doing some good in it, and to get beforehand with the day.

Doct. Those that make a business of prayer will use great vigilancy and diligence therein.

I say, that make a business of prayer; others that use it as a compliment and customary formality will not be thus affected, or do it as a thing by the by, or a work that might well be spared, do not look upon it as a necessary duty; but if a man's heart be in it, he will be early at work, and follow it close morning and night. His business is to maintain communion with God; his desires will not let him sleep, and he gets up early to be calling upon God: Ps. 88:13, 'But unto thee have I cried, O Lord, and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee.' Thus will good men even break their sleep to give themselves to prayer and calling upon the name of God. So Isa. 26:9, 'With my soul have I desired thee in the night, and with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.' A man that hath an earnest desire after God, he will be at it night and day, when others are taking their rest. Their seeking of God is early and earnest; but where such strong desires are not, God is little minded and regarded; and of all businesses prayer seemeth that which may be best spared.

That I may fully commend David's practice to you, I shall observe in this his diligence:—

1. That it was a personal, closet, or secret prayer, 'I cried,' I alone, with thee in secret.
2. That it was an early morning prayer, 'I prevented the dawning of the morning.'
3. That it was a vehement and earnest prayer, for it is expressed by crying, which, as Chrysostom saith, noteth οὐ τόνον τῆς φωνῆς ἀλλὰ τῆς διανοίας τὴν διάθεσιν—Chrys. in Ps. 5. He proveth it by that of God to Moses, 'Wherefore criest thou unto me?' Exod. 14:15. And when Moses was silent, yet he crieth; for crying noteth the affection of the mind, not extension of the voice. Where I shall note, that it



was an earnest prayer, though private; and earnest, though as yet he could get no answer.

4. That it was the prayer of a public person, of a king, and a king entangled in wars, whose calling exposed him to a multitude of business and distractions; yet he had his times of converse with God. Take all this together, and the pattern will be more fit to be commended to your imitation.

First, It was a personal or secret prayer, 'I cried,' I alone, and without company. Our Saviour doth in Mat. 18:19, 20, encourage us to public prayer, by the blessed effect of such petitions, where two or three do agree to ask anything of God in the name of Christ. He doth suppose that his disciples will make conscience of personal and solitary prayer, and therefore giveth directions and encouragement about it: Mat. 6:6, 'But when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which seeth in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret will reward thee openly.' He taketh it for granted that every one of his disciples is sufficiently convinced of being often with God in private, and pouring out his heart to God alone. It is not if, but when, as supposing they will be careful of this; it is not plurally and collectively, 'when ye pray,' but ὅταν προσεύχη 'when thou prayest.' Elsewhere the context speaketh of public prayer, or the assemblies of saints and of family worship; but here he speaketh of personal prayer. Church prayer hath a special blessing, when with a combined force we besiege heaven; as the petition of a shire and county is more than a private man's supplication; but yet this is not without its blessing. God is with you in private. Pray to thy Father in secret, and he that seeth in secret observeth the carriage and posture and frame of thy spirit; all thy fervour and uprightness of heart is known to him. That which is the hypocrite's fear, that God seeth in secret, is the saint's comfort, that God seeth in secret: it

bindeth condemnation upon the thoughts of wicked men, 1 John 3:21, but is their support, John 21:17; Rom. 8:17, 'He that searcheth the heart knoweth the mind of the spirit.' He knoweth the brokenness or unbrokenness of the heart; he can pick out the very language of thy sighs and groans, know where thou art, and how thou art employed: Acts 9:11, 'Arise and go into the street which is called Strait, and inquire in the house of Judas for one Saul of Tarsus, for behold he prayeth.' In such a street, in such a house, in such a chamber of the house, there is one a-praying: a notable place to express God's seeing in secret, where we are, what we do, and how affected. And then his reward is another encouragement; he will reward thee openly, grant thee what thou prayest for, or bless thee for the conscionable performance of this duty. Openly, either by a sensible answer of thy prayers, as Dan. 9:20–22; or with an evident blessing, as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the eyes of the world; God highly favoured them. A secret prayer hath an open blessing; or in convincing the consciences of men; Pharaoh sendeth for Moses and Aaron when in distress. The consciences of wicked men are convinced that God's praying children have special audience with him; no magicians sent for then, but Moses and Aaron. Thus God may reward them openly: 1 Sam. 2:30, 'Those that honour me I will honour.' But chiefly at the day of judgment: Luke 14:14, 'He shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.' Then is the great reward of Christians, and most public: 'Then shall every man have praise of God,' 1 Cor. 4:5. Thus you see how our Lord encourageth us to closet prayer. But let us see other arguments to engage us to this duty.

1. All the precepts of prayer do include closet prayer: 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving,' Col. 4:2; 'Pray without ceasing,' 1 Thes. 5:17. First God's precepts fall upon single persons before it falleth upon families and churches; for God considereth us first as persons apart, and then in our several

combinations and societies in joining with others. The duty is rather imposed upon us than taken up by voluntary choice; and that only at stated times, when they can conveniently meet. If we are to continue in prayer, and to pray without ceasing, we are to make conscience ourselves of being often with God. Every person that acknowledgeth a God, that hath a Father in heaven, must come and profess his dependence upon him.

2. The example of Christ, which beareth the force of a law in things moral. We read often of Christ's praying: Mark 1:35, 'He went out into a solitary place to pray;' and Mat. 14:23, and Luke 6:12, we read he prayed a whole night to God. Now let us improve this instance. Christ had no such need of prayer as we have; the Godhead dwelt in him bodily; nor such need of retirement; his affections were always in frame; yet he went out from the company of his disciples to pray alone to God. This pattern is very engaging, for if we have the spirit of Christ, we will do as Christ did; and very encouraging, for by submitting to this duty he sanctifieth it for all: his steps drop fatness, and leave a blessing and virtue behind him. And it assureth us of his sympathising with us; he is acquainted with the heart of an earnest supplicant; and it is some comfort against our imperfections; when we are with God, and our hearts are as heavy as a log, it is a comfort to think of this particular part of his righteousness by which our defects are covered.

3. I shall urge it from God's end in pouring out the Spirit, that we may pray apart, and mourn apart over our distempers and personal necessities, Zech. 12:10–14. Many will say they have no gifts; certainly they that feel their necessities will speak of them in one fashion or another. But this cuts off the objection. The Spirit is given to help thee: I will pour upon them the Spirit of grace and supplication, and they shall mourn apart. Such is God's

condescension to the saints, that he hath provided for them not only an advocate but a notary; a notary to draw up their petitions, and an advocate to present them in court. And surely the gifts of the Spirit should not lie by idle and useless.

4. I might urge you too from the practice of the saints, who are called God's suppliants, Zeph. 3:10; the generation that seek him, Ps. 24:6. They delight in God's company, and cannot be content to stay away long from him. Daniel had his three times a day, Dan. 6:10. So David: Ps. 55:17, 'Evening and morning and noon will I pray and cry aloud, and he shall hear my voice.' And 'Seven times a day will I praise thee,' Ps. 119:164. And Cornelius prayed to God always, Acts 10:2; not only with his family, but sometimes alone for his family. They that have a habit of prayer will be thus affected. Now, to be altogether unlike the people of God giveth just cause of suspicion.

5. Shall I add our own private necessities, which cannot be so feelingly spoken to by others, do challenge such a duty at our hands, or it may be are not so fit to be divulged and communicated to them: 1 Kings 8:38, 'There is the plague of our own hearts.' Paul had his thorn in the flesh: 1 Cor. 12:7, 'I sought the Lord thrice.' No nurse like the mother; none so fit feelingly to lay forth our case to God as ourselves. Private prayer it is a help to enlargement of heart, for the more earnest men are, the more they desire to be alone: Jer. 13:17, 'My soul shall weep sore in secret places.' Christ went from his disciples in his agony, when he would pray more earnestly, Luke 22:41, 42. Strong affections are loath to be disturbed, and seek retirement. Jacob sent away his company when he wrestled with God, Gen. 23:24. Oh! then, let all this be considered by you. If you neglect closet addresses to God, you wrong God and yourselves. You wrong God, because it is a necessary part of the creature's homage to God; and you wrong yourselves, because such duties bring in a great

deal of comfort and peace to the soul, and many sweet and gracious experiences, which are not vouchsafed elsewhere. Bernard saith, The church's spouse is bashful, and Christ will not communicate his loves in company. You are to use acquaintance with God, and so peace shall come to us, Job 22:21. It argueth little friendship to God when we seldom come at him, and maintain no personal commerce with him. When we pray with others, we cannot so well tell who is heard as when we pray alone, and see what God will do for our souls: Ps. 116:1, 'I will love the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of my supplication.' You sought earnestly for such a thing, and the Lord heard you. To conclude all, a man will not pray with any savour and delight in public that doth not pray in secret. I observe in Ezekiel's vision the Lord removed from the temple by degrees; first from the holy place to the altar of burnt-offerings, then to the threshold of the house, then to the mountain on the east side of the city; there it stood hovering as loath to be gone. So first God is cast out of the closet, private intercourses are neglected, then out of the family, and then out of the congregation, and then public ordinances are laid aside as useless; then are men given up to a strange giddy and vertiginous spirit, and all manner of profaneness. As a tree dies by degrees, first bears no fruit, then no leaves, then no bark; so carnal Christians die by degrees.

Secondly, It was an early morning prayer, 'I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried.' I would not lay a burden upon any one's conscience; so God have his due at any time of the day, it is enough. In colder climates, those of a weaker constitution may not be able to rise so soon, and therefore if any other time of the day be fittest for commerce, all circumstances considered, it cometh to the same issue. Yet that the morning is our golden time, and should not be neglected out of sluggishness, whatever dispensation there be for weakness, these considerations may evince.

1. The example of Christ and his saints. We read of our Lord Jesus Christ, Mark 1:35, 'That in the morning, rising a great while before day, he went out and prayed.' This example bindeth those to receive it that can receive it. If you would take the opportunity of the morning, it deserves to be considered by us how willing Christ was to deny his natural rest to be with God in private. And have not we more need? And accordingly the saints have practised this: Ps. 5:3, 'My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct my prayer to thee, and look up.' Upon which Chrysostom saith, Before thou washest thy hands, wash thy soul by prayer. So again, Ps. 59:16, 'I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning.' So would David begin his day with praises of God and prayers to him. So 1 Sam. 1:19, 'And they rose up early, and worshipped before the Lord.' That was their first work, and they were betimes at it. So the primitive Christians had their hymnos antelucanos, they sung psalms to God and Christ in the morning early, as their persecutors informed against them. See Tertul. Apol. Euseb., &c. Now this is of some signifiante to Christians.

2. Because whenever we have strong affections to anything, we make it our morning work, be it good or bad. Good; so Mary and Mary Magdalene came early to the sepulchre of Christ, Mat. 28. The disciples, when they came to wait for the promise of the Spirit, they met betimes, for the Holy Ghost fell upon them in the morning: Acts 2:15, 'For these men are not drunk, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day,' which was about nine of the clock; and some good time had been spent before, as appears by this speech that was uttered. So Hosea 5:15, 'In their afflictions they will seek me early.' This is their first and chiefest work: that which urgeth the heart most, we shall think of in the morning. The objects that have made deepest impression upon our spirits will present themselves before any images be received from abroad: Prov. 6:22, 'Bind my law upon

thy heart; when thou walkest, it shall talk with thee,' &c. Abraham, when he went about the work of offering his son Isaac, he rose early in the morning, Gen. 22. So, for bad things: if a man be worldly, his worldly desires and affections compel him to rise early for their satisfaction, Ps. 127:3, the drunkard is thinking early of his morning draught, to be filled with wine! Isa. 5:11, 'Woe to them that rise up early to follow strong drink.' The people, when they were mad upon the calf, Exod. 36:6, 'They rose up early in the morning and offered burnt-offerings to it.' Whatsoever hath secured its interest in the soul will first urge us. So if prayer be our chief pleasure, it will urge us to be up betimes with God: our delights and affections solicit us in the morning.

3. It is the choicest time of the day, and therefore should be allotted to the most serious and necessary employment. It is the choicest time, partly with respect to the body, because the body is then best refreshed, and our vigour repaired, which is lessened and spent with the business of the day; our memories quickest, senses readiest, natural faculties most acute. And partly with respect to the mind; our morning thoughts are our virgin thoughts, more pure, sublime, and defecate, usually free from worldly cares, which would distract us in prayer, and will more encroach upon us by our worldly business, and the baser objects which the necessity of our life engages us to converse with, and be employed about. Certainly the best time should be taken up about the best business; not in recreations to be sure, for this is to knit pleasure to pleasure, and to wear away the scythe in whetting, not in working. They are brutish epicures that rise up from sleep, not to service, but to their sensual delights and vanities; as the scripture brandeth them that eat in the morning, not for strength, but excess, Eccles. 10:16–17. The morning is the fittest time for business. Now what business should we do but the most

weighty, and that which requireth the greatest heedfulness of soul, which is our communion with God?

4. Consider, it is profitable to begin the day with God, and to season the heart with some gracious exercise; as David, Ps. 139:18, 'When I awake, I am still with thee.' It sanctifieth all our other business, as the offering the first-fruits did sanctify the whole lump. And to whom should the first-fruits of our reason and sense restored be consecrated, but to him that gave us all, and is the author and preserver of them? When the world gets the start of religion, it can hardly overtake it all the day: the first thoughts leave a powerful impression upon it: Micah 2:1, 'They devise evil upon their beds, and when the morning is come they practise it.' With carnal men sin beginneth in the morning, stayeth in the heart all day, playeth in the fancy all night. But if you begin with God in the morning, you take God along with you all the day to your business and employment.

5. This will be some recompense for the time lost in sleeping: half our lives are consumed in it; our time is parted between work and sleep. It is the misery and necessity we are subject unto, whilst we are in the body, that so much of our time should be spent without doing anything for God, or showing any act of love and thankfulness to him. None of the other creatures ever stand still, but are always executing and accomplishing the end for which they were made. And in heaven the blessed spirits are always beholding the face of God, and lauding and blessing his name, and need not those intermissions which we bodily creatures do. Now, though this be our necessity, and so no sin to need the refreshings of sleep, yet because so much of our time is lost, by way of recompense, the least that we should do is to take the next season; and if health and bodily constitution will permit, to prevent the dawning of the morning, and to be as early with God as we can. All the time we can well spare should be given to



God. Do but consider, since thou wentest to bed the sun hath travelled many thousand miles to give thee light this morning, and therefore what a shame it is that the sun, being continually in so swift motion, should return and find him turning and tossing in his bed, like a door upon the hinges, Prov. 20:14, after nature is satisfied with sleep; and that we should not rise, and own God's mercy in the rest of the night, and sanctify the labours of the day by some serious address to him. This meditation is enforced by Augustine, *indecus est Christiano, si radius solis eum inveniat in lecto, posset enim dicere sol, si potestatem loquendi haberet, Amplius laboravi heri, quam tu: et tamen cum jam surrexerim, tu adhuc dormis.* So Ambrose on this text, *grave est si te otiosum radius solis orientis in verecundo pudore conveniat, et lux clara inveniat oculos somnolento adhuc corpore depressos.*

Thirdly, It was a vehement and earnest prayer; for saith David, 'I cried.' Observe—

Doct. It was earnest, though private; and it was earnest, though he could get no satisfactory answer.

1. Earnest though private. In all our addresses to God we must be serious; whether men see or hear or no, God seeth and heareth. A hypocrite hath a great flash of gifts in company, but is strait when alone; but God's children are most earnest in private, when they do more particularly open their hearts to God, without taking in the necessities of others. Christ when he was withdrawn from his disciples, then he prayed *ἐκτενέστερον*, 'more earnestly,' Luke 22:44. Jacob sent away his company to deal with God in good earnest, and then wrestled with him: *ille dolet vere qui sine teste dolet.* Peter went out and wept bitterly. So a Christian trieth it out between God and him, when he hath a mind to plead for his own soul or for the

church; therefore hath no outward reason to move him but conscience and spiritual affection. The pharisees would pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets; but Christ saith, 'Go into thy closet, and shut the door, and pray to thy Father in secret,' Mat. 6:7. This is the love and confidence we express to our Father in secret. A man may put forth himself with great warmth and vigour before others, that is slight and careless in secret addresses to God. In these secret intercourses we most taste our spirits, and discern the pure workings of affection towards God. A woman that only bemoaneth the loss of her husband in company, but banisheth all thoughts of him when alone, might justly be suspected to act a tragical part, and to pretend sorrow rather than feel it. Some will pray in secret, but customarily utter a few cold words; but David saith, 'I cried.' Remember there is one seeth in secret; as Christ saith, 'I am not alone,' John 16:32; and Mal. 1:14, he is a God of great majesty; he will not be put off with anything, with a short good-morrow or a hasty sigh. Consider, if you pray in good earnest, the prayer will not be lost; there is a register kept in heaven: Acts 10:4, 'Thy prayer is come up as a memorial before God.' Surely a man that believeth and consulteth these things dareth not be slight, though there be none present but God and his own soul.

2. It was earnest though the answer was delayed: I cried, I cried; I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried. The Lord cannot away with cold asking and a ceasing upon every repulse. You must continue to pray when God continueth to deny, otherwise you do not pray in faith; for when the word warrants you to pray, either by way of command or promise, you must not give over. David saith here, 'I cried, for I hoped in thy word.' When providence giveth no answer, you must take your answer out of the covenant or promise, and so answer yourself when God doth not answer you: 1 Sam. 12:23, 'God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.'

You cannot dispense with your duty, whatever the success be. Sometimes duty keepeth up prayer, sometimes the promise, and so hope of the mercy prayed for; there is no way to bring the promise and the providence of God together but by prayer or putting the promise in suit. Your obedience will be assaulted by the ingratitude of those whom you pray for, and your confidence by God's seeming denials; therefore, as long as God commandeth, and he promiseth encouragement, you are not to give way, but hold up the suit still, whatever discouragements there be without. A good dog hunts by sight as long as he can see his game, but when that is lost, he hunts by scent. Visible probabilities be a good encouragement to give a lift to the mercy, when it seemeth to be coming on; but though it be out of sight, faith keepeth the scent of the promise, keeps crying still; he heareth though he doth not answer, and the prayer will not be lost: but of this before.

Fourthly, It is the prayer of a public person, who had his distractions, and more occasions than we can possibly pretend unto, yet he would not lose his praying hours. This consideration will yield us two notes:

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1. That David had his times of converse with God.
  2. That rather than fail of them, he would take them from his sleep.
1. That he had his times of converse with God: Eccles. 3:1, 'There is a time for all things,' much more for the best things; therefore, if you have a time for other things, to eat and drink, and follow your worldly business, surely you should have a time for prayer. Shall we have a time for everything, and no time for God? Certainly we could not want time if we did not want a heart. Many complain they have no time, and many distractions; if you have no time to pray, you have no time to be saved, no time to maintain the life and comfort and

peace of your souls. David had as many employments as thou hast or canst have, therefore it is but a vain excuse. He that will regard what his own sluggish heart will allege, will never pray, never retire or be alone with God: a willing mind will find time in the midst of the greatest distractions; whomsoever he compounds with and payeth short, he will not make bold with God, and serve him by halves. Look, as David speaks in 1 Chron. 22:14, 'Behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold and a thousand thousand talents of silver.' He was involved in wars, his exchequer impoverished and diminished, yet he kept vast sums for the temple. Surely the lean kine should not devour the fat, nor religion only be thrust out of doors. It is a more happy thing that Martha should complain of Mary than Mary neglect her duty. Holy privacy and closet work should not be neglected. It would be no loss to our other occasions if we did more prudently divide and allot out our time, and give God a good allowance rather than straiten him. Indeed, what part you should give to God is another question.

In the general, it is good to dedicate a certain part and portion of our time to the Lord of time. Idle servants must be tasked, and required to bring in their tale of bricks. A prudent allotment, such as is consistent with our occasions and course of life, would be no burden to you. I am sure it will make your duties more seasonable and orderly. It is an expression of love to give him somewhat that is our own. In the general, we are not tied to the seasons of eating and drinking, yet for conveniency we have our stated hours. The most necessary work should have a turn, and not be taken up by chance, and not left to a mere haphazard; it will make you more careful and watchful how you spend your other hours, that you may not be unfit for duty when your time of worship cometh, 1 Peter 3:7.

Again, though we cannot bind you absolutely to a time, they that are most holy will be most frequent with God. Love will direct. They that love one another cannot be strange to each other: he that loveth God cannot be long out of his company. God trusts love; that grace is liberal and open-hearted. Christ resorted often to Bethany, because he loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, John 11. The Spirit of God will direct you by his motions, Ps. 27:8. Sometimes he sendeth you into the closet; your own necessities will put you in mind; he hath left many wants upon us to bring us into his presence: James 1:5, 'If any man want wisdom,' &c.; Heb. 4:16, 'Let us come with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in a time of need.' The interest of the spiritual life directs you; you cannot maintain it in any vigour but by some recourse to God; some time God must have.

2. Rather than fail, he would take it from his sleep. Other business must give way to the great work and interest, especially the most inconsiderable interests of recreation. We are bidden to redeem time, Eph. 5:16, rescue it from meat, sleep, company, and recreation. Surely this is an equitable proposal, let God have as much time every day as thou spendest unprofitably. Do but observe the spending of thy time, and be ashamed that God should have such a little share.

Use. Now you see David's instance, let this persuade you to this assiduity and diligence, to be ardent and instant in prayer, taking hold of all opportunities to pursue after God, without whom you cannot live: Ps. 69:32, 'Your hearts shall live, that seek God.' We cannot preserve any vitality without this. To press this—

1. Retire often from company to be alone with God. Public duties are of little profit with us because we neglect private. God complaineth of his people, Jer. 2:32, 'That they have forgotten him days without

number.' How many days have gone over your heads, and God never heard from you! You should no more forget him every day than a bride would forget her ornaments on the wedding-day.

2. Let me lay this before you; you should be betimes with God, that you may not encroach upon your other occasions; yea, that you may sanctify your other occasions, and be the fitter for it all the day after. Let not the soft enemy of sleep steal away your golden hours, and the flower and choicest part of time. A Christian that makes conscience of his time should not inure himself to a sluggish course, and turn in his bed like a door upon the hinges, if your constitution will bear it, otherwise we lay no blame upon you. The scriptures have many dissuasives from immoderate sleep, Prov. 5:9, 13:4, 26:14, 6:6. To be sure a Christian is to make conscience of time, and how he spendeth it; and we may sin and surfeit in sleeping as well as in eating and drinking; and therefore we must watch against the encroachments of ease and sloth, lest a sluggish humour grow natural to us, and a morbid custom that cannot be shaken off.

3. It presseth you to fervency, though in private. As much fervency, sense, and zeal as you would express before men, so much should we express when alone. The name of God must be sanctified in all that draw near to him, in private as well as in public, otherwise he is scorned rather than honoured; that it may appear you were sincere in prayer, and have not mean and low thoughts of God, otherwise you bring a suspicion upon all your public duties. There may be sometimes more assistance in public, more order and method for edification, but not more ardour and zeal. Pray with fervency, as to an all-seeing spirit. Though the Lord delayeth, yet he intendeth the enlargement of our desires: Lam. 3:49, 50, 'Mine eye trickleth down and ceaseth not, without any intermission; till the Lord looks down

from heaven and beholds.' If you are soon discouraged you will get nothing.

4. Be sure that God hath his share. If business take up more time than prayer, because of the urgency of bodily necessities, yet ordinarily a man should not spend more time in any pastime and recreations than in religious exercises. It is most equal we should first seek the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, Mat. 6:33. The most needful duty should have most time bestowed upon it. It is an ill character to be 'lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God,' 2 Tim. 4:3. It is reasonable to give an equal time to God and religion as to sports and delights. Most men have no other thing to do than to eat, drink, and sleep; if they should compare their religion and their recreations, they would soon see what a large share of time one hath above the other.

Secondly, We come to the reason and encouragement of his diligence, I hoped in thy word; that is, because I have thy word for it, I do not doubt but in time I shall reap the fruit of my prayers.

Doct. A lively hope, grounded upon the word of God, will put us upon this vigilancy and diligence in prayer.

The reasons are taken—(1.) From the word of God, which is the ground of hope: Ps. 130:5, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.' And (2.) From the nature of hope, which is the fountain of prayer.

First, From the word of God, which serveth for two uses—invitation and assurance.

1. For invitation, to give us leave to come to the throne of grace. David did not come unbidden or uninvited into God's presence; he

had his word for it; the promises of the gospel give us liberty, otherwise we should not assume the boldness to appear before him: Ps. 50:15. The word is our warrant, it is as it were the holding out of the golden sceptre: 2 Sam. 7:27, 'Therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.'

2. For assurance and firm confidence; before the thing promised be obtained, God pawneth his word with us, which we must hold till the performance come. Now they that can thus hold it, and believe the promise, will be often in prayer, that the word may be both established to them, 2 Sam. 7:25, and fulfilled: Ps. 116:10, 'I have believed, and therefore have I spoken.'

Secondly, From the nature of hope, which implieth two things, both which have an influence upon prayer—earnest expectation, and patient tarrying the Lord's leisure.

1. Earnest expectation: Phil. 1:20, 'According to my earnest expectation and my hope.' This exciteth the soul by all means to pursue after the thing hoped for. When Daniel understood by books that the time was come, then was he vehement and earnest, Dan. 9:2, 3. Elijah, when he saw a cloud but as big as a man's hand, he saith, 1 Kings 18:43, 'Go bid Ahab prepare his chariot; get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.' What we look for, we will pray for.

2. Patient tarrying. We read of 'the patience of hope,' 1 Thes. 1:3; and so, though they seem long delayed, yet hope in the promise will make us wait, and abide the performance of them; because they are assured they shall find the fruit of them at last.

Use. You see how we pray; the occasion of prayer is necessity, our necessities lead us to the promise; that inviteth us, and giveth us assurance, and yields matter for faith and hope; that puts us upon



looking and waiting; these two make us pray. When we can join *patientiam spei cum ardore desiderii*; the earnestness of expectation, that keepeth us from sloth or negligence in the use of the means, or excites us to call upon God; and patience, that keeps us from fainting or discouragement: hence cometh that earnest diligence and constant unceasing importunity, so as to give God no rest. The belief of God's promises do not make us neglect means, but to be more diligent in the use of them.

## SERMON CLXVI

### **Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.—VER. 148**

WE hear before of David's diligence in prayer, now in meditation. His prayer was encouraged by his hope, his hope was fed by the word, and the word improved by meditation; for he saith, 'I hope in thy word,' and then, 'Mine eyes prevent the night watches,' &c.

In the words we have—

1. An account of his vigilancy and diligence, mine eyes prevent the night watches.
2. The duty wherein he was exercised, that I might meditate in thy word.

The first branch needeth a little illustration—what is meant by 'night watches,' and what by preventing these night watches.

1. What is meant by 'night watches'? Drusius telleth us that the night among the Hebrews was divided into three watches. The first watch

was called the head or beginning of the watches: Lam. 3:19, 'Arise, cry out in the night, in the beginning of the watches; pour out thine heart like water before the Lord.' The second was called the middle watch: Judges 7:19, 'Gideon came to the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch.' The third and last was called the morning watch: Exod. 14:24, 'In the morning watch the Lord troubled the host of the Egyptians.' This was the first division of the night among the Hebrews into three watches; but it seemeth afterwards, when they were acquainted with the Romans, they had four watches; as Mat. 14:21, 'In the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.' For every three hours they had a new watch, and according to this latter division they were called, the evening, and the midnight, and the cock-crowing, and the dawning, Mark 13:35. Now whether we reckon by the first or second division, it cannot be imagined that David should be wholly without sleep. Rabbi David Kimchi thinketh he gave the first watch to sleep, and the other two to the meditation of the word, and that he did this often when the nights were long. I think it is meant of the third and last watch, and so it agreeth with the dawning of the morning mentioned in the former verse; and this watch, which is called the morning watch, did David prevent, getting up early to entertain himself with delightful meditations on the word of God. The Septuagint reads it, 'Early in the morning.'

2. What is meant by preventing the night watches? Either that he was more careful to awake at several times of the night to meditate on God's word than they to keep their watches who were appointed thereunto, or that he did not need to be called upon by them; for the watchmen were wont to tell them the seasons and watches of the night, but he needed not that help, his own desires and delights awakened him; so that in effect he saith, When others are so fast asleep that either they do not wake in the night, or if they do, it is

because they are interrupted in their sleep by the noises of the watch or guard, I need no such excitation, 'for my eyes prevent the night watches;' sleep flieth from them of its own accord, that my mind may be delighted with the meditation of God's word. The points are:—

1. From the duty wherein David was exercised,

Doct. That meditation on the word of God is one duty that Christians should take care to perform.

2. From the season, his eyes prevented the night watches,

Doct. A gracious heart will take all occasions to set itself a-work on holy things, and sometimes in the night.

3. From the condition wherein he was; in some distress, for he saith, 'Save me;' and his prayers not yet heard, 'I cried, I cried, I cried,'

Doct. That it is needful to meditate on God's promises at such a time as our suit hangeth at the throne of grace without grant and effect.

The first will give us occasion to speak of the duty of meditation, and the necessity and profit of it. What the duty of meditation is, see sermon upon the 15th verse of this psalm.

Secondly, It is a necessary duty, because it is recommended to us by God, among other things enjoined in his word. He complaineth of the neglect of it: Isa. 1:3, 'Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider;' they will not think upon God, nor consider what great things he hath done for them. It is recommended to us in the practice of the saints, they sometimes meditate upon God: Ps. 63:3, 'I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate of thee in the night watches.' When David could not sleep, and had his night rest broken, his thoughts run upon God presently. Sometimes upon the works of

God: Ps. 143:5, 'I meditate on all thy works, I muse on the work of thine hands.' On his creation and providence. Sometimes on the word of God, that part which sets forth their duty: Ps. 1:2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.' To make the Christian's life more orderly and comely; the apostle commands us: Phil. 4:8, 'To think on these things.' Sometimes on the promises and grounds of faith, for the support of their souls in a fainting time, as in the text; especially that part of the word which is brought unto them by the providence of God, and so we meditate upon what we read and hear: Luke 2:19, 'Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.' We ponder things when we consider the weight and moment of them, that our hearts may be affected with them. So Moses: Deut. 32:46, 'And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day;' Luke 4:44, 'Let these sayings sink into your ears;' be seriously considered and thought of by you, not be lost or vanish into the air, or stay in the brain.

Thirdly, It is a profitable duty; it is a help—

1. To our natural faculties.

2. To our graces.

3. To our duties.

1. To our natural faculties. To our memories: we complain of weak memories, but we do not take a right course to cure them. Good things slip from us as water doth through a sieve; and why? Because we do not weigh them, and meditate upon them by deep and serious thought. Truths would stay with us longer if we did oftener think on them. So many a conviction is lost: James 1:23, 24, 'For if any man be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man

beholding his natural face in a glass, for he beholdeth himself, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.' Many a comfort is lost by neglect: Heb. 12:5, 'And have you forgotten the exhortation which speaketh to you as children?' A weak impression is soon defaced. Many a pressing motion is lost for want of a little diligence to fasten it upon the heart: Heb. 2:1, 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.' Meditation and serious consideration fasten a truth upon the mind and memory. Deliberate thoughts stick by us, as a lesson well conned is not easily forgotten. Civet long kept in a box, the scent remaineth when the civet is taken out. Sermons meditated upon are remembered long after they are delivered. So for understanding. We have weak understandings, slow to conceive of anything that is spiritual and heavenly; why? Because we are so little exercised in the study and contemplation of these things; whereas our judgments would ripen, and we would grow more skilful in the word of righteousness, if we did often meditate on it: Ps. 119:99, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation. We see things in transitu, and know them only by hearsay, without meditation. To move the will we had need deal seriously with our own hearts ere we can gain them to a consent. Thoughts are the spokesmen that make up the match between the soul and the temptation: they were given for the like office in good things; they are the first acts of the soul to set a-work all the rest. Things lie by till we take them into our thoughts and consideration at leisure, that we may know what is their tendency, and how they concern us. You cannot imagine the gospel should work as a charm, and convert us we know not how, before consent and choice. There is a propounding and debating of terms; the greatest matters will not work on him that doth not think of them. God and Christ, and heaven and salvation, are looked upon in a cold and remiss manner without this serious consideration. And to excite, and quicken, and

stir our affections, meditation is useful. We complain of deadness, and we ourselves are the cause, because we do not rouse up ourselves, excite and compel ourselves, expostulate with ourselves: Isa. 64:7, 'And there is none that calleth upon thy name, and stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.' Man hath a power to whet truths upon his own heart, and if we will not make use of it, and reason for God with ourselves, we are justly left under the power of deadness and stupidity of spirit.

2. It is a great help to our graces. (1.) Faith takes root by meditation: Mat. 13:5, 'The seed forthwith sprang up, because it had no deepness of earth.' A careless slight heart is no fit soil for faith to grow in. (2.) Hope is made lively by consideration of the thing hoped for. (3.) Charity is inflamed by the sight and frequent view of divine objects in their beauty and amiableness.

3. The duties of religion, reading and hearing, are effectual by meditation.

The use is for exhortation, to press you to meditation; it is the mother and nurse of knowledge and godliness, the great instrument in all the offices of grace, otherwise we take up things by hearsay; this digests them, and maketh them our own.

1. It preventeth vain thoughts, both as it stoeketh the heart with truth, for good seed thick set and well rooted destroyeth the weeds, and as it seasoneth the heart with a gracious disposition, and inureth it more to holy thoughts; whereas those that do not use to meditate, how are their minds pestered with swarms of vain thoughts, which wholly divert it and turn it aside from God? Man is mindless of holy things, and if they turn into the heart by accident, their entertainment is cold and careless, as a man would be used that cometh into a house full of enemies.

2. How great an affront is it to God to omit this part of communion with him; it is irksome to think of him. Saints find it otherwise: Ps. 104:34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet.' Some, God is said to be near in their mouth, and far from their reins, Jer 12:2; frequently spoken of, but seldom considered by them. That soul that hath a sincere and unfeigned love to him will take some time to solace itself with him alone; to be sure God taketh it kindly at our hand: Mal. 3:16, 'A book of remembrance was written for them that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name;' that have frequent and high thoughts of God in their hearts, without which, love will presently languish and grow cold.

3. What a neglect it is of God's messages of love that you will not consider them: Mat. 21:5, 'And they made light of it;' and Heb. 2:3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation.' He hath laid out all his eternal thoughts upon a way of salvation, and manifested it to you, and you entertain it with so much scorn that you will not set your minds to it, and think it worthy a few sad and sober thoughts. What? Is it so tedious to think a thought of your own greatest concernments? Surely man is strangely depraved to refuse this.

4. What a likely means meditation is to do you good. I know it is the Lord inclineth the heart, and our thoughts work no further than God is in them, yea, he giveth us to think, 2 Cor. 3:5. But as it is our duty, so it is a very proper means to improve our graces and our comfort; for a constant, steady, continued view of truth surely will work more than a glance. A transient view cannot leave such an impression upon us as a steady view. We taste things better when they are chewed than when they are swallowed whole. Meditation goeth over things again and again, and prieth into every part. And as it is a constant light, so it is an argumentative consideration of things.

When one scale is not heavy enough, we put in weight after weight till we gain our point; bring off the heart from such a vanity, engage it to such a pursuit by our own arguings with ourselves: Prov. 12:14, 'A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his own mouth;' Acts 17:11, 12, 'And these were more noble than they of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.' Therefore many believed, because they had searched with all readiness of mind.

5. This is an argument should prevail with God's children, that we may know our growth in grace, by the frequency, continuance, and efficacy of holy thoughts. At first good thoughts are few and rare, the heart is so crowded with vanity, that there is no room for God or his word; for these things keep their interest in the heart and draw the mind after them, so that days pass over our heads and we forget God, Ps. 10:11; or if they arise in our minds, they find little entertainment there, but are gone as soon as they come. It is the policy of the enemy of our salvation to draw our minds from one thing to another, that good thoughts may pass over without fruit and benefit; or if we force ourselves to continue, they do not warm the heart, only weary the brain. But now when truths are ever with us, they improve us: Ps. 119:98, 'Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me;' Prov. 6:22, 'When thou goest it shall lead thee, when thou sleepest it shall keep thee, and when thou walkest it shall talk with thee.' We have them always ready and at hand. They that are sound at heart can pause with delight on heavenly things. It is a good note of some progress, it is a sign the heart is heavenly, carried out with a strong and prevailing love to heavenly things, that earthly profits and vain pleasures have not such a hand over us as they were wont to have. You have gotten the mastery over your thoughts, that the best and dearest of them you



can employ for God, with great fervency and continuance: other matters do not find better welcome, nor so easily jostle them out of doors. By all this it appears it is a most profitable duty.

Doct. That a gracious heart will take all occasions to set itself a-work on holy things, and sometimes in the night.

David did frequently rouse up himself in the night to solace his soul with thoughts of God; this was a frequent and cheerful exercise and employment to him.

1. I shall prove this argueth a gracious frame of spirit.
2. Show you some reasons why we should meditate sometimes in the night.

1. It argueth a gracious frame of heart to take all occasions to set our minds a-work on holy things; for there are three things in it:—

[1.] Plenty of divine knowledge; the heart is well stocked, and can entertain itself without help from abroad: Ps. 16:7, 'I will bless the Lord who hath given me counsel; my reins also instruct me in the night season.' He had laid up a great deal of truth in his reins or inward parts, and when sleep fled from his eyes, out it came. So Prov. 6:21, 'Bind them continually upon thy heart, and tie them about thy neck;' to be always ready and present with us. It is an excellent thing to have a good treasure in our hearts: Mat. 12:35, 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things.' Many a man's heart is stuffed with vanity, and then he is vain in his thoughts, and vain in his discourses, and vain in his actions; yea, 'the word of God doth not dwell in him richly,' Col. 3:16; then your thoughts are very scant and barren; as he that hath more brass farthings in his pocket than gold or silver, will more easily pull them out at every

turn. Our leanness of soul and difficulty to meditate cometh from the want of a stock of knowledge.

[2.] It argueth spiritual delight and strong love: Ps. 1:2, 'But his delight is in the law of God, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.' Did we find such comfort as David did, we would break our sleep for that end. He that delights in the word is much conversant in it, for *ubi amor ibi animus*. All the time his necessities can spare, he will spend it in these private and spiritual exercises. Many men's time hangs upon their hands; they do not know how to spend the summer day nor the winter night; but one that hath a strong affection to holy things, he rather wants time, such is his solace and delight in God. He beginneth his heaven upon earth, and all the time he can get he is spending this way. But if we find no such comfort and repose of soul in meditation, no wonder that we are so averse from it. Our thoughts follow our affections, delight will set the mind a-work; when others are sleeping securely, he mindeth his salvation.

[3.] It argueth sincerity: Ps. 17:3, 'Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing.' In the night when darkness concealeth me from the eyes of men, then I exercise myself in spiritual thoughts. Many put on religion as a disguise in the day; in public actions they personate a zeal, and act a devout part; but that is to be sincere when God hath a great share in our closest privacies and retirement.

2. Sometimes take the night as a special occasion: Ps. 63:6, 'When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches;' Ps. 77:6, 'I call to remembrance my song in the night.' There is a double help for meditation in the night—

[1.] Solitude, then we are alone, and therefore fittest to meditate, when nobody disturbs us.

[2.] The silence of the night is also a help, when nothing is heard or seen to distract attention.

Use. What use shall we make of this? We cannot lay a burden upon your consciences, and by way of absolute necessity exact these nocturnal meditations from you; only in the general—

1. As much as our strength and natural necessities will permit, we should be meditating night and day. It may be a shame to us that many tradesmen are up afore day to follow their callings, and that they should excel us. The Christians had their morning hymns to Christ in the times of persecution.

2. We may press you to the affection, though not to the season; to be stored with good matter, and to have a strong delight in this work, and sincerity to make conscience of private duties.

3. If we wake in the night and our rest is broken off, then to exercise ourselves in holy thoughts. Many times it falleth out that we cannot sleep; now we should spend the time in meditation and prayer, not in vain thoughts, or entertaining ourselves with carnal musings, or perplexing and anxious thoughts about the troubles that we are under.

4. If David waked in the night, how much are they to blame that snort and sleep in the day, even in the time of worship, when others are entertaining communion with God. Surely if they had earnest affections this could not always be. The example of Eutychus should deter these; Acts 20:9, 'And there sat in the window a young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep; and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead;' Mat. 26:40, 'What! could not ye watch with me one hour?'

Doct. That meditation of the promises is very seasonable when the answer of our prayers is denied.

For this is very powerful to support our fainting hopes, and to cheer and revive our drooping spirits. There is support in the word, and comfort in the word; therefore we should much meditate on the promises at such a time. The best holdfast that we have of God is by his promise. Whatsoever his dispensations be, this will give satisfaction enough. Though you cannot find what you would, his word is certain; though no appearance of performance, his word is sure enough to fasten upon. The grounds of faith are more sweet and satisfactory the more they are examined and looked upon.

## **SERMON CLXVII**

## **Hear my voice, according to thy loving-kindness: O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment.—VER. 149**

IN these words you have—(1.) David's prayer; (2.) The grounds of his support, or his encouragements in asking.

1. His prayer is double—(1.) General, for audience, 'Hear my voice;' (2.) Particular, for quickening, 'Quicken me.'

2. His encouragements and grounds of confidence in asking are also two—(1.) God's loving-kindness; (2.) His judgment. Both together imply the loving-kindness of God manifested in the word or expressed and engaged in the promises. The points are three:—

Doct. 1. One blessing which the children of God do see a need often and earnestly to ask of God is quickening. David ever and anon reneweth his request, and he is loath to be denied; and therefore, before he saith, 'Quicken me,' he saith, 'Hear my voice.'

Doct. 2. The main argument which God's children have to plead in prayer is his own favour and loving-kindness. That is David's argument in the text, 'Hear my voice, according to thy loving-kindness.'

Doct. 3. The mercy and loving-kindness of God, manifested and impledged in the promises of the gospel, doth notably encourage us to ask help from him; for David doth not only say, 'According to thy loving-kindness,' but, 'According to thy judgment.'

Doct. 1. For the first point, one blessing which the children of God do see a need often and earnestly to ask of God is quickening. Here I shall inquire—

1. What is quickening.
2. Give you some reasons why the children of God do see a need so often and earnestly to ask it of God.

First, What is quickening?

1. By quickening some understand restitution to happiness; for a calamitous man is as one dead and buried under deep and heavy troubles, and his recovery is a life from the dead, or a reviving from the grave. So quickening seemeth to be taken, Ps. 71:20, 'Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles shalt quicken me again, and bring me up from the depths of the earth.'
2. Others understand by quickening the renewing and increasing in him the vigour of his spiritual life. That he beggeth that God would revive, increase, and preserve that life which he had already given, that it might be perfected and consummated in glory, that he might be ever ready to bring forth the habits of grace into acts.

The use which we should make of it is to press you—

1. To be sensible of the temper of your hearts, and see whether you want quickening, yea or no. The feeling of spiritual deadness argueth some life and sense yet left. You have attained to so much of life, and do retain it in such a measure, as to be able to bemoan yourselves to God. Most observe their bodies, but very few their souls: if their bodies be ill at ease or out of order, they complain. Men that go on in a track of customary duties see no need of quickening; therefore this

humble sense is a good sign. Matins and vespers coldly run over never put us upon the feeling of indispositions, but only duties done with some spirit and life, as a smith blows not the bellows on cold iron or a dead coal. Who would seek quickening when not serious in the work? They that go on in the cold wont of duties never regard the frame of their hearts.

2. When you want quickening, ask it of God. He brought us into the state of life at first, and therefore every moment we must beg of him that he would quicken us, that he would continue it, and perfect his own work: Cant. 1:4, 'Draw me; we will run after thee.' There is no running, no preserving the vitality of grace, without his renewed influence: Ps. 22:29, 'None can keep alive his own soul.' Therefore, when we find this deadness or decay of life, to whom should we go but to the fountain of life to repair it? No creature doth subsist of itself, or act of itself.

3. Ask it earnestly. David prefaceth a general prayer before this request, and saith, 'Hear my voice,' as loath to be denied. Many ask it of course, rather use it as a mannerly form when they are entering upon holy duties, than a broken-hearted request. See you desire it heartily: Ps. 119:40, 'Behold, I have longed after thy precepts; quicken thou me in thy righteousness.' A man's heart is set upon it, and will not sit down with the distemper, as contented and satisfied with a dead frame of heart: quickening is for longing souls, that would fain do the work of God with a more perfect heart.

4. Expect this grace in and through Jesus Christ, who came down from heaven for this end: John 10:10, 'I am come that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly.' That was his end in coming into the world, to procure life for his people, and not only bare life, but liveliness and comfort, yea, glory hereafter: he died to

purchase it for us: John 6:51, 'This is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world.' His incarnation and taking on him our nature is the channel and conduit through which the quickening virtue that is in the Godhead is conveyed to us; and his offering up himself in that nature by his eternal Spirit doth purchase and merit the application and annunciation of this his quickening virtue to our souls, and prepareth him to be fit meat for souls. That same flesh and human nature of Christ that is offered up a ransom to justice, is also the bread of life for souls to feed upon. Souls are fed with meditations upon his death and sufferings. The bread which he giveth by way of application is his flesh, which he gave by way of ransom; every renewed act of faith draweth an increase of life from him.

5. Consider how God worketh it in us. The Father of spirits loveth to work with his own tools. These three agree in one—the Spirit, the word, and the renewed heart. The one is the author, the other the instrument, and the last the object. There is the Spirit acting, and the habit of grace acted upon, and the word and sacraments are the instruments and means. For God will do it rationally, and by a lively light. God forceth not the nature of second causes against their own inclination. It is pleasing to him when we desire him to renew his work, and to bring forth the actings of grace out of his own seed, and to blow with the wind, the breath of his Spirit, on the gardens, that the spices may flow out, Cant. 4:15. If one of these be wanting, there can be no quickening. Not the Spirit, for he applieth all and doth all in the hearts of believers. It is from him that we have the new life of grace and all the activity of it: Gal. 5:25, 'If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.' Then there must be a renewed heart; for God doth first infuse the principles of the new life, and gracious habits and power into the soul, next he doth actuate those powers, or stir them up to do what is good; otherwise we do but blow to a dead coal. Then the word and sacraments come as God's means which are fitted



to work upon the new creature. These are full of spiritual reason, and suited to the sanctified understandings of men and women.

6. Consider God's loving-kindness, how ready he is to grant this. He will not deny the gift of the Holy Ghost to them that ask him, Luke 11:13. It is an argument not a pari, but a minore ad majus. God is more able and willing to give than earthly parents, who are but half fathers. This is a spiritual and necessary blessing, and God is too fatherly to deny it to his children. You may deny an apple to a wanton child, but you will not deny bread to a fainting child, the bowels of a father will not permit you to do that; you may deny them superfluities in wisdom, but your love will not permit you to deny them necessaries. Meat is not so necessary to revive and refresh the body, as grace for the soul, and his holy inspirations to act and guide you. And will God deny these requests?

7. Know when you have received quickening. Many Christians look for rapt and ecstatic motions, and so do not own the work of God when it hath passed upon them; they underrate their own experiences, and so cannot take notice of God's faithfulness. Sense, appetite, and activity are the fruits of life and quickening.

[1.] We have the more sense of indwelling sin as a heavy burden, Rom. 7:24. None groan so sorely as those that are made partakers of a new life. *Elementa non gravitant in suis locis.* A delicate constitution is more sensible of pain. Wicked men scarce feel deep wounds given to their conscience, nor have any remorse for gross sins; God's children, their hearts smite them for the smallest disorders and irregularities.

[2.] Appetite after Christ, his graces and comforts, 1 Peter 2:2; the more life any have, the more craving of food to maintain it in being; they are always hungering and thirsting after God, Mat. 5:6; our

appetite will be after the things that conduce to the maintaining and preserving that being which they have. If a man lose his appetite, the body pineth and languisheth, and strength decayeth: desire prepareth the soul to take in its supplies. Your life is in good plight when that is desired, τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα, and it will be a means of spiritual growth, a kindly appetite after this milk. They are under a great decay who have lost their appetite after the gospel.

[3.] Activity in duties. That we may honour Christ: 1 Peter 2:4, 5, 'To whom coming as a living stone, ye also as lively stones are built up into a spiritual house.' Christ liveth, and we live by him, as the stones in the building carry a proportion with the corner-stone; so Christians as the body with the head. It must needs be so, because of God's Spirit dwelling in us, Ezek. 36:27; John 7:37; and because of the graces in a Christian—faith and love. Faith working by love is the great evidence of the new creature. If faith and love be strong, it will quicken us to do much for God; the apprehension of faith doth enliven our notions of God, Christ, heaven, and hell; faith puts life into our thoughts of him. Love is a notable pleader and urger: 2 Cor. 5:14, 'The love of Christ constraineth us,' &c.

Secondly, The reasons why, &c.

1. They that have so much to do with God do see a need of it; for he is a living God, and will be served in a lively manner: Rom. 12:11, 'Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' They that serve the Lord; negatively, must not be slothful in business; affirmatively, fervent in spirit. God will not be served negligently, coldly, but with life and earnestness: 'The twelve tribes served God ἐν ἐκτενείῃ, instantly,' Acts 26:7; instantly serving God with the uttermost of their strength. He that hath a right to our all must have our best; surely he will not be put off with every slight thing. Now the

children of God, that are sensible of this, are earnest for quickening, that they may serve God in such a way as becometh him, with life and power and zeal; for the manner in every duty is to be regarded as well as the matter. A man may do many things that are good, but there is no life in what he doth. He prayeth, but without any life in prayer, dead in prayer; heareth, but no life in hearing, dull of hearing. All things in a Christian may be counterfeited, but life cannot be counterfeited, that cannot be painted.

2. They are acquainted with themselves, and observe the frame and posture of their own spirits. Now they that know themselves will see a need of quickening—

[1.] Because of the instability and changeable frame of man's heart; it hardly stayeth long in the same state; now it is up, and anon it is down, as the constant experience of the saints witnesseth. Sometimes they have a forwardness and strong propension of heart to that which is good, at other times a loathness and dulness or unfitness to perform any spiritual service, when their will is more remiss and their affections unbent. It is not indeed the constant frame of their hearts, yet it is a disease incident to the saints; even good men may feel a slowness of heart to comply with the will of God, and some hanging off from duty. *Spontaneæ lassitudines sunt signa imminentis morbi.* So is this laziness and backwardness of spirit a sign of some great spiritual distemper. Sometimes they are carried with great largeness of heart, and full sail of affections; at other times they are in bonds and straits, that they cannot pour out their hearts before God: Ps. 77:4, 'I am so troubled that I cannot speak.' Sometimes they have great life and vigour, at other times no such lively stirrings, but are flat and cold and dead; when, with Samson, they think to go forth and shake themselves as at other times, Judges 16:20, by sad experience they find that their locks are

gone, that their understandings are lean, sapless, and their affections cold, and their delight and vigour lost. Man is a sinful, weak, inconstant creature; his heart is as unstable as water: and much of this levity and instability remaineth with us after grace, as is seen in the various postures of spirit that we are under.

[2.] Because of the constant opposition of the flesh. There is an opposite principle in our hearts, Gal. 5:17; the body of death that dwelleth in us doth always resist the life of the spirit in us; and therefore God must renew the influences of his grace to preserve life. There are desires against desires, and delights against delights; this must needs abate our vigour. The spirit draweth one way, the flesh another. It is drawing: James 1:14, 'Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.' It is depressing: Heb. 12:1, 'Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.' Carnal affections hang as a weight, retarding us in our heavenly flight and motions. It is warring: Rom. 7:23, 'I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin.' And therefore the Lord had need to cherish the new creature and good seed, which cannot but be weakened with this opposition.

[3.] Because our outward condition doth work a great change in us. A Christian should, and in some measure doth, carry an equal mind in all conditions, and keep the same pace whether he goeth up-hill or down-hill, and have his heart fixed in God whatever falleth out: Ps. 112:7, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' But, alas! we are much discomposed oftentimes, especially at the first onset, by our outward estate; when under great afflictions, it puts a damp upon our spirits, and we cannot serve God so cheerfully: Lev. 10:19, 'And Aaron said unto Moses, Behold, this

day have they offered their sin-offering and their burnt-offering before the Lord, and such things have befallen me; and if I had eaten the sin-offering to-day, should it have been accepted in the sight of the Lord.' So Hezekiah, it is said of him 2 Chron. 32:25, when Hezekiah was sick unto death, and he prayed unto the Lord, and he gave him a sign, that Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him, for his heart was lifted up. We are too apt to be dejected and cast down with worldly troubles, or exalted and puffed up with worldly comforts, and both bring on deadness upon the heart, both worldly sorrow and carnal complacency. It is not requisite that a child of God should be without all sense of his condition, and it cannot be supposed that this sense should always be kept within bounds, and under the coercion and government of grace, considering our weakness; and therefore a Christian receiveth some taint from the changes he passes through, as the water doth from the soil through which it runneth. He is sometimes in credit, sometimes in disgrace; sometimes rich, sometimes poor; sometimes sick and in pain, at other times in health and firm constitution of body. Now, though it argueth small strength to faint in ordinary afflictions, Prov. 24:10, and a light spirit to be puffed up like a bubble with every slight blast, yet when troubles are heavy and pressing, God's best servants have been ready to die and faint, and in a full estate it is hard to keep down carnal rejoicing. By both, the freedom of following God's service cheerfully may often be interrupted.

[4.] Because we sin away our life and strength, and by our careless walking contract deadness and hardness of heart. The mind, like the eye, is soon offended and out of temper: we forfeit the quickening influences of his Spirit, upon which the activity of grace dependeth. To correct our sinful rashness, and to teach us more watchfulness and caution, God withdraweth, Phil. 2:12, 13. Be the sin a sin of commission, especially if grievous and heinous; as David found a

shrewd abatement of life and vigour after his foul sin, Ps. 51:11, 12; or a sin of omission, when we neglect God or serve him slightly. If we give way to deadness, Isa. 64:6, rest in the work wrought, and are more willing to get a duty over than to perform it with any life and vigour, God suspends his quickening. If you do not mind the work, why should God quicken you in it?

3. The third reason is taken from the nature of God's dispensations. They do often and earnestly ask quickening, because God giveth out by degrees, and would keep us in constant dependence: 'In him we live, move' (κινούμεθα), 'and have our being,' Acts 17:28, both as creatures and new creatures. There is a constant concurrence of his motions and influences by their beings and operations. God will endear his grace to us by bringing us daily under new debt; and therefore he doth not give us all our stock and portion in our hands, lest we neglect him, as the prodigal did his father. By multiplied and renewed acts of grace he doth more commend his love to us; every day he must quicken us, and in every duty. If so much rain fell in a day as would suffice the earth for seven years, the commerce between the air and the earth would cease; or if a man could eat so much at one meal as to go in the strength of it all his life, there would be no ground to pray for daily bread; therefore God doth dispense his assistances so as you must still wait upon him and be calling to him. He keepeth grace in his own hand that he may often hear from us.

Doct. 2. The main argument which God's children have to plead in prayer is his own favour and loving-kindness. I shall show—

1. That this is a modest, humble, and pious argument.
2. This is a comfortable and encouraging argument.

First, It is a modest argument, and it were good if we could learn this modesty of David. He was one much in prayer, diligent in keeping God's statutes, abundant in all acts of devotion, spent nights in meditation, and yet after all this placeth all his hopes in the mercy and loving-kindness of God, and desireth only to be heard according to mercy. But in us there is a secret carnal notion of God as if he were our debtor. If we act for him, or suffer anything for him, we carry it as if God were obliged to us: Isa. 58:3, 'Wherefore have we fasted?' &c. We cannot be at a fast, give a little alms, or make a prayer, but we think we have merited much at God's hands. Oh! this is against all reason. Alas! what profit can we be to God? Job 35:6–8. God is above the injuries and benefits of the creature; what miss had he of angels and men in those innumerable ages of duration that went before any created being? And as it is against reason, so it is against all the declarations God hath made of himself to us: Ezek. 36:32, 'Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord of hosts: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways.' So Titus 3:4–6, 'But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.' In short, no worth in us, or righteousness of ours, is that merit and righteousness by virtue of which we are accepted with God. Our works and righteousness are not that condition by which we receive and apply this merit; that is faith. No works or merit are a motive, or the first inducing cause to move God to give us that faith, but all is from his loving-kindness and readiness to do good to the creatures. Again, it is contrary to the practice of the saints and children of God, who, though never so holy and never so good, yet still they plead mercy, and this by direction from him who knoweth what plea is fittest for creatures to use to God, Luke 17:10. As it is not the merit of one part of the earth that it lieth nearer the

sun than another, only the Creator would have it so, so still the scripture crieth down works and merits in the creature in all these gracious influences; they all come from God's bowels of compassion to his creatures labouring under difficulties. He loveth to act as a free agent in giving, continuing, and actuating the life of his creatures, whether natural or spiritual. Yea, lastly, any other principle would be against our profit, as well as God's glory. Our profit, both as to duty and success, we should never carry it dutifully to God if we did not acknowledge that all came from grace. Whence cometh impatience, murmurings, contempt of things afforded, but from a secret opinion of our merit and deserving? They that prescribe to God ascribe too much to themselves; that prescribe to God for time, measure, and kind, are hasty, and murmur under delays and suspensions of grace. And as to success, without this modest and humble claim, God rejecteth the request: 'For he resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble,' 1 Peter 5:5. Spiritual pride is the worst of all pride. The humble supplicant may expect increase of grace which is denied to others: Ps. 147:11, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.' Such as fear God, and serve him diligently, and yet put all their confidence in his mercy, these are those whom the Lord delights in, to keep communion with them, and pour out his blessings upon them. This is enough to show you it is a humble, modest plea.

Secondly, It is a comfortable, encouraging argument; which that it may appear to you, let us consider—

1. The nature of it.
2. The kinds of it.
3. The proofs and demonstrations of it.



#### 4. The end of if.

1. The nature of it. The loving-kindness of God noteth his disposition to do good upon his own motives, or his self-inclination to do good to his creatures, especially to his people: 2 Sam. 7:21, 'According to thine heart hast thou done this;' his native willingness to employ what goodness is in him for the good of his creatures. Now this doth much encourage poor sinners to draw nigh to God for such mercy as they stand in need of. Justice giveth what is due, but mercy what is needed; justice seeks a fit object, mercy and loving-kindness a fit occasion. His justice will not hinder his mercy to be bountiful.

2. The kinds of it. God's loving-kindness is twofold—general and special.

[1.] There is a general kindness and good-will from God as creator to all his creatures, especially to mankind. The effects and fruits of this general kindness flow in the channel of common providence. So it is said, Ps. 145:9, 'The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.' God is good to all things, to all persons; he bestoweth many common blessings upon the wicked, as natural life and being, health and wealth, &c. So Ps. 147:9, 'He giveth to the beasts his food, to the young ravens which cry.' To wicked men, Mat. 5:45. Common blessings do not always argue a good people, but they always argue a good God. God giveth the beasts their food in due season, Ps. 104:27, 28. Now this is some ground of hope, and so improved, Ps. 145:15, 16. If he heareth the cries of the creatures, he will hear the prayers of the saints; if a kite, much more a child. You see the Lord doth not cast off the care of any living creature which he hath made, but hath a constant eye of providence upon them, that their hunger may be satisfied, and they may have that sort of good which is fitting for them, and that in time and season, before they are

spent with wants; and will he not answer the longings and expectations and cries of his people, and pity their faintings, and give that grace which they so earnestly seek?

[2.] Over and above this common kindness, there is a more entire special love and kindness towards believers in Christ. This may be admired rather than expressed: Ps. 36:7, 'How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God!' This is unto admiration, his common kindness, his preservation of man and beast. This is the fruit of his eternal love: Jer. 31:3, 'With everlasting love have I loved thee, and therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee;' and this is expressed in blessing them with special and saving benefits in Christ. The effects of his special kindness do all relate to life and godliness, and are conveyed to us through the conduit of Christ's merit and intercession, in and by whom he doth fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his goodness, 2 Thes. 1:11, 12. Now this special kindness must needs be a mighty encouragement to the saints to come to him (since he loveth them with such a free and special love) for all that mercy they stand in need of. The former speaketh the goodness of God to all his creatures; this to themselves in particular; both together a notable support; yea, though we have not yet any experience of the goodness of God, yet since there is such a thing as self-inclination in God to do good to his people, and, besides this, a readiness to express his love to all his creatures, more especially to every one, without respect of persons, that cometh to him: Ps. 86:5, 'For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon thee.' Take the cause, and you do not know what you may find. It may be your portion and lot.

3. The proofs and demonstrations of this loving-kindness.

[1.] He hath given evident proof and infallible demonstration of it in Christ: 1 John 4:12, 'In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through him.' The cause or first motive was love; his means was the sending of Christ to be a propitiation; his end, life spiritual and eternal. This is such a glorious instance and manifestation of the love of God, that poor creatures are encouraged to draw nigh to God for such mercy as they stand in need of. It is a hidden love; here is a convincing proof and real demonstration by so glorious an effect and fruit of it. It was not a well-wishing love only, nor a love concealed, but manifested, and that by a signal proof.

[2.] The instances of God's loving-kindness to others; so that 'according to thy loving-kindness,' will be according to that grace and mercy which thou art wont to show to others of thy servants. All that have had to do with God will assure you that he is a gracious God, full of kindness and mercy. There are examples of it, 1 Tim. 1:16; and Eph. 2:7, 'That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.' Instances of God's loving-kindness towards others have a peculiar fitness and efficacy to convince us how exceedingly gracious God is, and so to draw us to the same fountain of grace for pardon and life to ourselves. These examples do more than the doctrinal declaration, because they do not only show that mercy and grace may be had, but that it hath been attained unto by those who in all respects did judge themselves, and were really unworthy of it, as unable to lay hold of it, and to make good use of it afterwards, as we ourselves. The ice is broken, the ford ridden before us; therefore we may venture our salvation and acceptance with God upon the same grace.

[3.] His former love to ourselves. At first he took us with all our faults, and betrothed us unto himself, in loving-kindness and tender

mercy, Hosea 2:19; and therefore he will still do us good, freely and bountifully, and so we may answer all objections from God's wonted goodness towards us. When he hath entered into covenant with us out of his love and bounty, we may well expect that upon the same terms he should keep covenant. The continuance is more easily believed and asked than the beginning and first grant: Ps. 36:10, 'O continue thy loving-kindness unto them that know thee, and thy righteousness to the upright in heart.' When by experience we have found what it can do for unworthy creatures, we may the better expect it should help us on all occasions.

4. The end why God exerciseth it; which is his glory, even the glory of his grace and loving-kindness; that that might be acknowledged and exemplified by those that are partakers of it even to be altogether glorious: Eph. 1:6, 'To the praise of his glorious grace, wherein he hath accepted us in the beloved;' that it may be owned and esteemed as free and liberal, and working of its own accord. We only cross God's end when we do not plead it, admire it, and esteem it highly, and improve it for our comfort; for this is God's end in the whole business of our salvation from first to last, that men and angels might be excited to set forth the praises of his rich mercy and free grace. And here is a new encouragement to ask gracious supplies of God, according to his loving-kindness, or upon the account of that attribute, even that his grace may be more esteemed and exalted in our hearts: Ps. 109:21, 'But do thou for me, O God the Lord, for thy name's sake; because thy mercy is good, deliver thou me.' It concerneth him in point of his chief honour and glory to do good to his people; that he may be known, and owned to be a good and a gracious or loving God.

Use. Well, then, if this be the great plea of the saints—

1. Let us meditate often of the loving-kindness of God, of his pitying, and pardoning, and lovingly entreating poor sinful and broken-hearted creatures that come to him. This should be our daily meditation; *bonum est primum et potentissimum nomen Dei*, saith Damascene—it is the first-born and chiefest name of God. We cannot conceive of God by anything that concerneth us so much as his goodness; by that we know him, and for that we love him. We admire him with reverence for his other titles, but this doth first insinuate with us, and command our respect to him. The first temptation that ever was in the world was to weaken the conceit of his goodness in the heart of the creature; as if God were envious, harsh, and sour in his restraints; still it is a great temptation, yet 'God is good to Israel,' Ps. 73:1. Oh! let us fortify our hearts with frequent thoughts of his goodness and loving-kindness! As we should do this every day, so especially upon the sabbath-day: Ps. 92:2, 'I will show forth thy loving-kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night.' We should do this with all the advantage we can use, more especially when we are in his presence, conversing with him and ministering before him: Ps. 48:9, 'We have thought of thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.' We should often and seriously think when we come to God: Surely now we have to do with a loving and gracious God, whether we wait upon him in prayer, or the word, or sacraments; if any prayer to make or comfort to expect.

2. Observe the fruits and effects of it, and value them. They that are students in providence, shall not seek long before they find God to be a God full of loving-kindness and tender mercy: Ps. 107:43, 'Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.' Few regard it, or look after it; but they that do pry into the course of his dealings shall not be without many instances of God's love and free favour to them. Now, when you have found it out, value it: Ps. 63:3, 'Because thy loving-kindness is better

than life, my lips shall praise thee.' You shall have rich experiences, such as will fill you with joy unspeakable and glorious, to be esteemed above all comforts whatsoever.

3. Praise God for it. This should be a lively motive to praise him: Ps. 138:2, 'I will worship towards thy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth.' These two are the cause of all we have; it is without any deserving of ours, only because we have to do with a gracious and faithful God: Isa. 63:7, 'I will mention the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness towards the house of Israel which he hath bestowed on them, according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindness.' The prophet speaketh as if he could never find words enough, or pregnant enough, to express his sense of God's gracious dealing, so bountifully had he dealt with his people.

4. Let us improve this loving-kindness and readiness of God's mercy to help penitent supplicants.

[1.] In a way of trust, the least degree of which is enough to keep the sinner from running away from him; how grievous soever his offences and demerits be, yet come to him; say, as David, Ps. 51:1, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.' Yea, make it a ground of confidence and support: Ps. 69:16, 'Hear me, O Lord, for thy loving-kindness is good; turn unto me, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies.'

[2.] In a way of fear, that we may not interrupt the sense of it, or stop the current of his good-will: Ps. 26:3, 'Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes, and I have walked in thy truth.' It is the ground of all our confidence; lose not that: the Lord taketh notice of them that trust in

his goodness: Nahum 1:7, 'The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth them that trust in him.'

There is one word yet undiscussed, 'According to thy judgment.' Some by judgment understand wisdom and prudence. The word will sometimes bear that sense: Micah 3:8, 'But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord and of judgment,' &c.; as we say a man of judgment, for an understanding person. In this sense, 'According to thy judgment,' will be, as thou thinkest fit; but surely 'judgment' here is to be understood in the notion of his covenant, or the rule according to which he judgeth of men, for it is one of the terms by which the word is expressed. 'Judgment' is sometimes put for the covenant of works, or his strict remunerative justice. David declineth it under this notion: Ps. 143:2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord.' And this is called by the apostle, 'judgment without mercy,' James 2:13. Sometimes for the covenant of grace, and free promises of God, or that merciful right which he hath established between him and his people, wherein God acteth as an absolving and pardoning judge. Of this, see ver. 132. And of this the prophet speaketh, Isa. 1:27, 'Zion shall be redeemed with judgment;' that is, by his mercy promised according to his judgment. David desireth to be quickened. From thence observe—

Doct. 3. That God's mercy and loving-kindness, manifested and impledged in the promises of the gospel, doth notably encourage us to ask help from him.

You have heard what encouragement we have by the loving-kindness of God; now what we have over and above that by his judgment.

First, Quickening and enlivening grace is promised in the new covenant.

1. In general, from the general undertaking of the covenant. The covenant of grace differeth from all other covenants in the world, because everything that is required therein is also promised; and therefore it is called, 'The promise,' Gal. 3:18, because God hath promised both the reward and the condition—faith and perseverance therein, as well as righteousness, pardon, and life; the new heart to bring us into the covenant, and the continual assistance of grace to keep us in that covenant. And so it differs from the usual covenants that pass between man and man. Among men, each party undertaketh for and looketh after his own part of the covenant; but leaveth the other to look to his duty and his part of the engagement. But here the duties required of us are undertaken for by him that requireth them. No man filleth his neighbour's hand with anything to pay his rent to him, or enableth him to do what he hath covenanted to do; but God filleth our hand with a stock, yea more than a stock, of habitual grace, with actual influences, to draw forth habits into act; and doth with strength so far enable us to perform every commanded duty, that in the performance thereof we may be accepted. Ezek. 36:26, 27, God owneth there not only the principles of acting, but also the excitement of these principles; yea, the very act itself. He hath undertaken to infuse the principle, and stir up the acts and exercise of it: 'I will cause you to walk in my statutes.' So Jer. 32:39, 40, 'And I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them and of their children after them, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good, but I will put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me.' Besides converting grace, superadded influences. It differeth from the covenant of works, that had more of a law, and less of a promise: there was a promise of reward to the obeyer, but no promise of giving obedience. God indeed gave Adam a stock of habitual grace, but no promise of assisting grace. There man was to keep the covenant; here, in effect,



the covenant keepeth us, Jer. 32:40. And indeed therein lieth the exceeding graciousness of the covenant of grace, that God undertaketh for both parties, and worketh in his people all that is required for entering into and keeping this covenant with him.

2. In particular, this part of actual influence, which is more especially called quickening, is promised in the covenant of grace; for the covenant concerneth mainly the life of grace, the care of which he hath taken into his own hands, not to lay it down till it be perfected in the life of glory; and therefore alloweth his children to repair to him when their life is any way enfeebled or decayed: so that besides that the general undertaking of his covenant will warrant such a plea, his particular promises of preserving and restoring our life will embolden us to ask quickening; for with respect to his judgment or covenant engagement, God is called, 'The God of our life,' Ps. 42:8, and 'The strength of our life,' Ps. 27:1. The care of life, bodily, spiritual, and everlasting, lieth upon him; by virtue of the covenant he hath undertaken to keep it, feed it, renew it in all the decays of it, till we be possessed of the life of glory.

Secondly, The advantage we have from this promise. We have a double argument, not only from God's mercy, but his truth; both which do assure us that God is not only easy to be entreated, but bound and tied by his own free condescension. His loving-kindness showeth that he may do it for us; his judgment, that in some part he will do it. He is not only inclined, but obliged, which is a new ground of hope. His promise in the new covenant inferreth a debt of favour, though not of justice; when God hath bound himself by promise, both his mercy and fidelity are concerned to do us good. We have not only the freeness of God's love to encourage us, but the certainty of his help engaged in the promise. God inviteth men to him by his grace, and engageth his truth to do them good. The nature of God is

one encouragement, he is wonderful ready to do good; but in his covenant he hath established a right to believers to seek his mercy, so that all is made more sure and comfortable to us.

Use. To encourage the people of God, when they miss his help in the spiritual life, to lay open their case to God. The thought of strict justice striketh us dumb, there is no claiming by that covenant; but the remembrance of this merciful right or judgment should open our mouths in prayer, and loosen our tongues in acquainting God with our case: Lord, I want that life and quickening which thy promises seem to speak of. You may do it with the more confidence for these reasons:—

1. Consider the tenor of this judgment, or the terms thereof, the mildness of the court in which you plead; it is not a covenant of justice, but of favour; in it grace taketh the throne, not justice; the judge is Christ; the law according to which judgment is given is the gospel; our plea is grace, not merit; the persons allowed to plead are penitent sinners; yea, they are not only allowed to plead for themselves, but they have an advocate to plead for them: the very judge is their advocate! Oh! let us hold God to this latter covenant, and judgment of grace, mercy, and goodness: Lord, upon these terms we dare come unto thee.

2. Consider the blessing offered in this covenant: Heb. 4:16, 'Mercy and grace to help.' It offereth mercy for pardon of sins, a blessing which the law knew not; and grace to help, that is for our purpose. It is a covenant which alloweth you expenses to run the way of God's commandments, gives you straw to make your brick, filleth your hand to pay the master's rent. It is not a hard master, to reap where it soweth not, but will cause you to walk and run whither it sends you.

3. Consider, there is nothing in God contrary to us, or standeth in our way, for it is all removed by this judgment or covenant. If anything, it is the justice of God; but that doth not stand in our way, being satisfied by Christ.

[1.] If you take justice, as it implieth his remunerative and vindictive justice, we have the merit of Christ to plead: there is a ransom paid by him, to whom the sinner is fled for refuge. So that God may do us good without any blemish or imputation of defect to his righteousness and justice against sin, Rom. 3:24, 25; 1 John 1:9.

[2.] As righteousness implieth the rectitude of his nature: 'In thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness,' Ps. 143:1. These things, that terrify others, comfort the godly; the righteousness and truth of God are their support. His veracity is a part of his righteousness, as it becometh every just man to make good his promises.

## SERMON CLXVIII

**They draw nigh that follow after mischief:  
they are far from thy law.—VER. 150**

HERE in this verse he giveth an account what was the cause of his frequent and earnest crying unto God, of his hope, meditation, begging for quickening; because he was ready to be destroyed by those who every day went off further and further from God's law; they were ready to accomplish their wicked and malicious purpose upon him, and prepared for it, and even now at his heels to do him harm and mischief: 'They draw nigh,' &c.

In the words we have—

1. An intimation of approaching danger, they draw nigh that follow after mischief.
2. A description of those from whom the danger was feared, they are far from thy law.

First, 'They draw nigh,' &c. The enemy is at hand, even at the doors; the prophet speaketh as if he did hear the sound of his feet, yet they are as far from thy law as near to destroy me.

Doct. Extreme danger may sometimes draw nigh unto, and even tread upon the heels of God's people.

Reasons.

1. From the implacable malice of their enemies.

[1.] They seek the destruction of the people of God, nothing less will content them; this is implied in the word mischief in the text: τὸ μὴ εἶναι, Ps. 83:4, 'Come let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may no more be in remembrance.' That is their aim, that not one of that denomination be left: Ps. 137:7, 'Rase, rase it, even to the foundation thereof,' Nothing will satisfy them but utter ruin and extirpation: they that expect milder terms from the seed of the serpent, flatter themselves with a vain hope.

[2.] They follow this end with all industry and diligence; this is implied in the phrase that follow after mischief. They watch all occasions, pursue every advantage to bring their purpose to pass. Some in scripture are said to follow after righteousness, Isa. 51:1. It noteth their constant trade and study. It may be rendered pursuers of righteousness, as in the text, pursuers of mischief. They that follow

after righteousness are such as continue constant in the serious and sedulous practice of holiness; and they that follow after mischief are such as are unwearied in the prosecution of their malicious designs. It implieth a metaphor taken from the vehemency of huntsmen in the pursuit of their foe or prey. So Prov. 21:21, 'He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life;' and Heb. 12:14, διώκετε τὴν εἰρήνην, 'Follow peace and holiness;' as Asahel pursued Abner, 2 Sam. 2:19, 'And turned not to the right hand or to the left from following after Abner.' The Septuagint renders here καταδιώκοντές με ἀνομία, 'They earnestly seek to undo me.'

2. From the providence of God, who permitteth malicious enemies to draw nigh to his people, and to have many advantages against his people for holy and righteous ends.

[1.] That this is the usual course of God's providence, to suffer his people to be reduced to great dangers and extremities, that there is not a hair-breadth between them and ruin. Paul was in the very mouth of the lion, 2 Tim. 4:17, before God delivered him; by the lion he meaneth Nero, a bitter enemy to the Christians, and the lamb was brought bound to him: the prey was in the lion's mouth before God delivered him, 2 Cor. 1:10, compared with 1 Cor. 15:32, and both with Acts. 14:19: I gave my self for dead; it was a thousand to one he had not been sacrificed to the fury of the multitude. So was David often near taking dangers, which he did or could hardly escape: Ps. 54, the title, 'When the Ziphims discovered him to Saul.' So Ps. 57, the title, 'When he fled from Saul in the cave;' the army of Saul at the mouth of the cave, and Saul cometh into it, and yet God blinded him so that he escaped. So the church: Ps. 124:1–3, 'If it had not been the Lord that was on our side, now may Israel say, if it had not been the Lord who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they had

swallowed us up quick when their wrath was kindled against us.' They were in the midst of their fears.

[2.] Why is this his usual course?

(1.) To exercise their trust and dependence. Graces are seldom exercised to the life till we are near the point of death. Now rather than God will suffer his people to live by sense, without manifesting grace, and bringing honour to their profession and the truth of his promises, he will cast them into great dangers. The skill of a pilot is seen in a storm, so is faith put to it in great conflicts; as it is in cares, so in fears: many are reduced to great straits in the family, no meal in the barrel, no oil in the cruse: John 6:4–6, 'When Jesus then lift up his eyes and saw a great multitude come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat? And this he said to prove him, for he himself knew what he would do.' A poor believer is put to it: children increase, trading seemeth dead; what shall we do? When danger is danger indeed, then is a believer tried and exercised: 2 Cor. 1:9, 'But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.' We are much given to self-confidence; while our mountain standeth strong, and we are entrenched within the security of worldly advantages and props, we scarce know what faith and dependence upon God mean. Now, saith God, I will make you trust in me ere I have done, and to live alone upon my all-sufficiency: you may think your reputation will bear you out, but I will load you with censures that you may trust in me; you think friends shall help you, but friend and lover shall be afar off; you think to shelter yourselves under common refuges, but they shall all fail and cease, that I may see whether you trust in me; or that the common justice and equity of your cause shall bear you out, but I will send against you those that are maliciously resolved (contrary to all justice and gratitude),

that shall approach and endeavour to mischief you. Who would think that Paul should be in danger of self-confidence, a man so exercised as he was, so tossed to and fro, so often whipped, scourged, exposed to danger? Alas! we can hardly see with other eyes than nature hath, or depend upon invisible help; we look at present things, and laugh at danger upon the confidence of outward probabilities. If we can get a carnal pillow and bolster under our heads, we sleep and dream many a golden dream of ease and safety. Now God, that is jealous of our trust, will not let us alone, and therefore will put us upon sharp trials. It is not faith but sense we live upon before: that is faith if we can depend upon God when they draw near that follow after mischief: Ps. 3:6, 'I will not be afraid of ten thousands of the people that set themselves against me round about.' A danger at a distance is but imagined; it worketh otherwise when it is at hand: Christ himself had other thoughts of approaching danger than danger at a distance: John 12:27, 'Now is my soul troubled;' this vessel of pure water was shaken, though he discovered no dregs.

(2.) To quicken to prayer. Jonah, that slept in the ship, falls a-praying in the whale's belly. A drowsy soul is awakened in case of extreme danger: Ps. 130:1, 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee.' Now an ordinary prayer will not serve the turn; not to speak a prayer, but to cry a prayer: we do but act devotion before, and personate the part of the supplicant; then we exercise it. Now rather than God's children shall neglect prayer, he exposeth them to great hazards: Mat. 8:25, 'Master, carest thou not that we perish?' What careless, dead, and drowsy prayers do we perform when all things go on fairly, and we are well at ease! Moses cried when Israel was at a loss, Exod. 14:15, the sea before, the Egyptians behind ready to tread upon their heels, mountains on each side.

(3.) That the deliverance of his people may be more glorious; partly because there is more of his power and care discovered when our straits are great: 'Israel may now say, We had been swallowed up quick,' Ps. 124. Rescues in extremity of dangers are more glorious: Ps. 118:13, 'Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall, but the Lord helped me.' So Ps. 27:2, 'When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.' In great dangers to be overtaken by his enemies. God doth some way suffer his people to be brought near destruction, but he doth always prove their friend and helper. David's strength and courage was seen in that he plucked a lamb out of the lion's mouth, 1 Sam. 17:34, 35. And partly because these great straits and troubles are a means to open our eyes, and waken our stupid senses. Deliverance is all one to God, whether from great exigencies or in ordinary cases, but is more endeared by extremity of danger. It is as easy to save a hundred or a thousand, but it maketh a fuller sound: we are more sensible of our weakness to help ourselves, to be sure, without his assistance.

Use 1. Be not offended if God cast you into great dangers; it is no argument of God's hatred to destroy you, but of his love to try you, and to prepare you for the greater comfort, that we may have a more glorious sight of his salvation. Many, after confidence expressed, have been put to great trials. The three children were delivered, but put into the fire first, and the furnace made seven times hotter. Paul's company suffered shipwreck before the promise of their safety could be fulfilled. Moses and the Israelites were delivered, yet pursued and shut up, the Egyptians behind, and the seas before, and steep mountains on each side: Ps. 118:18, 'The Lord hath chastened me sore, but he hath not given me over to death.' Things at the worst begin to change; though it come to such a desperate pass as it must be speedy help or speedy ruin, such exigencies do mightily conduce to the glory of God, and the bettering of his people. Whatever



weakeneth our confidence, the greatness of danger should not, for in such cases God is there.

Use 2. Let us use the more prayer; it is a time to put promises in suit: 2 Chron. 20:12, 'O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are unto thee.' The fittest season to treat with God about help; for when the creatures are at a loss, that is the time for God to help. When danger is near, call upon God for help, acquaint him with it, it is time for him to be near also. Ver. 151 of this psalm, 'Thou art near, O Lord.' The less help of man's mercy, the more hope of God's help.

Use 3. The greater the danger, the more thankfully should we acknowledge the deliverance. The woman of Sarepta, when her son was restored to life, 1 Kings from the 17th verse to the end, said, 'By this I know thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.' So 'Israel may now say, If the Lord had not been on our side, men had swallowed us quick.'

Secondly, A description of those from whom this danger was feared, 'They are far from thy law;' that is, they do not regard it. This clause may be added—

1. To amplify or aggravate the danger. As if he had said, Lord, having oppressed them, they contemn thy law, and all restraints of conscience and duty. The farther the enemies of the godly are from God's law, the nearer to do mischief. So Ps. 54:3, 'Oppressors seek after my soul; they have not set God before them.' So Ps. 86:1, 'Violent men have sought after my soul, they have not set thee before them.' They are likely to be cruel, because profane. When the fear of God is laid aside, and all respect to his word, there is nothing to be

expected but the worst of evils. They mind not thy law, therefore care not what mischief they do me.

2. To increase his confidence of help; for God will not favour a corrupt party: Ps. 139:19, 'Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God;' Ps. 94:10, 'The throne of wickedness hath no fellowship with thee.'

Doct. The iniquity of persecutors is some matter of confidence to the oppressed; as David, from those that drew near to mischief him, conceiveth some encouragement because they were far from God's law. There are several considerations:—

1. Usually the servants of God have been most hated and troubled by the worst of men; so it usually falls out that the worst and most virulent enemies of religion are those that are infamous for other crimes. They have the greatest pique against them because they cannot endure the righteousness of God's image on them: Ps. 38:20, 'They are my adversaries, because I follow the thing that good is.' So John 7:7, 'The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil.'

2. You may take notice of this wickedness, and represent it so to God; for he is the judge of the world, and it concerneth him to cut short their power to do mischief that have such a ready principle to act it, and are likely to have no other restraints than God layeth upon them by his providence and the interest of their affairs. But of this before, about aggravating the danger.

3. When we do so, be sure the thing be true, that they are not only injurious to us, but open enemies to God and godliness, before we speak thus of those that hate us, or work any trouble to us in the world. As long as the cause will admit of a favourable construction, we should take heed of such suggestions. I observe this the rather,

because man is so partial to himself, that whosoever are enemies to him, he presently thinketh they are enemies to godliness; and therefore, when we pass our judgment on any person and cause, it had need be conformed to truth; for otherwise it argueth great irreverence towards God to make him conscious to our revenges and private passions, Ps. 139:21–24. We had need try our cause, when God's quarrel and our interest are joined, that there be not some dregs of private spleen and rash censurings mixed therewith, and that passion doth not rule us, but duty, in these complaints, and that it is not our own interest, but God's quarrel, they being open enemies to him. And therefore we must be confident that such as we pray against are in a wicked condition, and engaged in an evil course.

4. When this is clear, there is some comfort and confidence in the badness of our enemies.

[1.] Because God and we are engaged in a common cause, for our adversaries are against God as well as against us. Now it is better to be afflicted by them than to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, or to cry up a confederacy with them that cry up a confederacy against God, Ps. 139:22.

[2.] It is a great satisfaction to us to be opposed by evil men, or common enemies of the power of godliness. Certainly it would be more grievous to us to be oppressed by them that have a show of godliness than the openly profane, Ps. 55:12, 13. The worst that a professed enemy can do is more tolerable than the injury of a friend. It importeth a dishonour to be opposed by the good, as having an ill cause in hand, or unworthy to be assisted; but it helpeth to make the cause more clear when we see what kind of persons we have to do withal, such as we cannot but count wicked, because they have no

regard to God's law. Our cause would not be so clear if it were with them that fear God.

[3.] The more wicked they are, the more ripe for judgment; especially if they be a corrupt party in the visible church; for where we perceive wickedness to reign, there we may be sure destruction will follow.

Use. Well, then, whenever this falleth out, mind God of it, and be not discouraged. An ill cause will not always prevail. Only let us be prepared for deliverance, as they are ripe for destruction, otherwise none so bad but good enough to make a rod to scourge God's children. And then have patience; such are our enemies as are God's also; they are far from obedience to God's law.

## **SERMON CLXIX**

### **Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth.—VER. 151**

IN the former verse, the enemies are represented as near, and near to do mischief, but far from the law of God. Here in the text there is somewhat put in opposition to both.

1. For their nearness to do mischief, God is near to help.
2. They are far off from the law. The man of God asserteth that God's commandments are truth. All their contempt of the law did not abate and lessen his esteem of it. So that the sum of the verse is, that the enemies cannot be so ready to hurt as God is to help and deliver; they cannot go about to defeat promises as God will go about to fulfil them. Mark, he compareth the readiness of wicked men to hurt with the readiness of God, their contempt of the word with the truth of the

word, or God's justification of it. In short, in the verse we may observe two branches:—

1. Something spoken of God.

2. Something of his law.

1. That which is spoken of God is, that he is near, a present help to those that persist in the obedience of his will; for nearness doth not only import his favour, or inclination to help them, but that he will not delay his help too long; his help is at hand, therefore called 'A present help in trouble,' Ps. 46:1, and 'The Lord is at my right hand,' Ps. 16:8; ready as our second in all conflicts to stand by us, support, and comfort us in our troubles, yea, to deliver us; that is the notion of nearness in the text. Near as the enemies are near, only he is near to defend as they are near to destroy. When to appearance danger is nearest, at the same time help and salvation is nearest also, and this doth allay all our cares and fears: Phil. 4:5, 6, 'The Lord is at hand, therefore be careful for nothing.' Still present by his providence, or hastening his second coming: Rev. 22:20, 'I come quickly.' I rather quote that place, for the Septuagint hath it here ἐγγύς εἶ, κύριε, there ὁ κύριος ἐγγύς, therefore he bids us be careful for nothing; certainly the belief of God's nearness should encourage us.

2. That which is said of his word and law is, 'Thy commandments are truth.' One would think it had been more proper to say, are just and righteous, than to say are truth. His commandments are just as the rule of our duty, they are just as the rule of God's process; but the word commandment is not taken strictly for the mandatory part of the word, but it is put for the whole covenant, his precepts invested with promises and threatenings. The commandments thus considered, with the promises and threatenings annexed, are true. Yea, mark the emphasis of the phrase, truth itself. The happiness

promised to them that make conscience of their duty will be made good; and so the punishments on them that offend God will be inflicted. Now the joining of these two clauses seemeth to speak thus much: I know that thou art near me, because thy word is truth. God in his providence seemeth to be absent sometimes from his people, but upon the assurance of his word we must believe him near. I say, God seemeth to be far off from his people, for who would think that the God of peace and all comfort should dwell with them that are broken in spirit? Isa. 57:15, 'For thus saith the high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' Or that the author of all felicity should be present with them that are harassed and exercised with such sharp afflictions, and hunted up and down in the world, but because God hath promised it: Isa. 43:2, 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.' We should be satisfied with it; his word is truth: whatever sense and reason saith to the contrary, neither distance of place nor afflictedness of condition do hinder his nearness to us.

Quitting all other points, I shall only insist on this one.

Doct. That it is the privilege and happiness of God's children to have God near unto them upon all occasions.

My great business will be to explain what this nearness is, and then you will soon find it to be the great happiness and privilege of the saints.

1. What is this nearness?

## 2. How is it brought about?

First, What is this nearness?

1. God is not said to be nearer to them than others in regard of his essence, for so he is everywhere present, *nullibi inclusus, nullibi exclusus*. So a heathen described God to be a great circle, whose centre is nowhere, and circumference everywhere; and in the prophet he telleth us, Jer. 23:23, 24, 'Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? do not I fill heaven and earth? can any hide him in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord.' He filleth all things with his essential presence; he is in earth, in heaven, and under the earth: Ps. 139:7, 8, 'Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? and whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there: if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.' God is here, and there, and everywhere; the heavens do not confine and enclose his being, nor the tumults of the earth exclude it: in this sense God is alike near to all things. They that cannot endure the presence and thought of God, where will they go from him? They may run away from God as a friend, but they cannot escape him as an enemy. *Te non amittit nisi qui dimittit, et qui te dimittit, quo fugit, nisi a te placato ad te iratum?* Men may shut God out of their hearts, and yet he is there, do what they can, and will be found there one day in the dreadful effects of his anger.

2. Not in regard of his general providence and common sustentation; for so οὐ μακρὰν, 'He is not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being,' Acts 17:27, 28. This general presence and providential sustentation is vouchsafed to all his creatures, without which they could not subsist, nor move, nor act;

so all things are enclosed under the hand of his power, and are still under his disposing.

3. It is meant of his friendly and gracious presence, and those eminent and gracious effects of his power and goodness which he is pleased to afford his people. So God is sometimes said to be nigh unto his people, and they are said to be a people near unto him. The Lord is said to be near unto them: Ps. 34:18, 'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart;' and again, Ps. 145:18, 'The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, and to all that call upon him in truth;' Deut. 4:7, 'What nation is so great? who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?' The Lord is said to be nigh, because he is always ready to hear their prayers, and to direct them in their doubts, comfort them in their sorrows, defend and protect them in all their dangers, and deliver them in all their troubles. On the other side, they are said to be a people near unto God: Ps. 148:14, 'He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints, even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him.' Because they are the special objects of his mercy and favour. And as to the actual intercourse that passeth between God and them, God is said to draw nigh to them, as they are said to draw nigh to God: James 4:8, 'Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you;' and so drawing nigh to us on God's part signifieth grace and blessing; and drawing nigh on our part, our duty, love, fear, delight, and reverence of God. Well, then, it is meant of his friendly gracious presence vouchsafed to his people.

4. This nearness may be understood of his visible presence in his ordinances, or of that spiritual inwardness and saving union and communion that is between God and his converted people, or those that are brought home to him by Christ, and are the members of his mystical body. In some sense it is the privilege of the visible church



to have God near them, because they have the signs of his presence among them; as in the former place, Deut. 4:7, 'What nation hath God so nigh unto them?' It was the common privilege of the nation, in comparison of the pagans about them, who were a people afar off, and strangers to the covenants of promise. So Jer. 14:9, 'Thou, O Lord God, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not.' Thus God is said to be nigh because he dwelleth in the churches and walketh in the midst of them; but those that are converted indeed are in a straiter union with God. All those that are members of the visible church, and are united to Christ by a visible and political union, they have great privileges, for they are a society under God's special care and government, and enjoy the means of grace and the offers of salvation, and great helps by the gifts bestowed upon the body, and so have God nearer to them than others, though they have not the saving fruits of union with Christ and communion with God. Once more, a people that are nigh unto God visibly and politically may be cast off; as Jer. 13:11, 'For as a girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory; but they would not hear;' 'yet I will cast them away as a rotten girdle that is good for nothing,' ver. 10. These words are the application of a charge given to Jeremiah, to get him a girdle, and hide it till it was rotten, and then to bring it forth and tell the people the meaning of this ceremony. He was to get a girdle, not leathern, nor woollen, such as were commonly worn by the ordinary sort; but a linen girdle, such as the better sort of persons were wont to wear. He was not to wet it, or put it in water, to imply that neither God nor aught from him had been the cause of the general corruption and destruction of this people; but to hide it in a dry place near Euphrates till it was corrupted. Thus God would lay visibly before their eyes their own state; they were as near about him, girded

as close to him, as a girdle about a man's loins, yet then good for nothing. But for those to whom God is near by saving benefits they cannot be lost, for where the nearness is really begun, it will continue, and never be broken off. You may as well separate the leaven and the dough, impossibile est massam a pasta separare, &c.

5. In those that are living members of Christ's mystical body we must distinguish between a state of nearness and acts of nearness. By converting grace we are brought into a state of nearness unto God, and in worship we actually draw nigh unto him, and he to us. The state of nearness is the state of favour and reconciliation with God into which we are admitted who were before strangers and enemies: Col. 1:21, 'And you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.' And also our participation of the divine nature: 2 Peter 1:4, 'Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature; having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust;' or life of God, from which we were formerly alienated by sin: Eph. 4:18, 'Having their understandings darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.' For these three do always go together, the favour of God, the image of God, and fellowship with God. When Adam lost one, he lost all: when he lost the image of God, he also lost the favour of God, or fellowship with God, or nearness to him. So then our state of nearness lieth in the recovery of the favour of God, and the image or life of God, when we stand right in his grace, and live his life: they are both great mercies, and both the ground of our fellowship with God, or nearness to him. O Christians! think with yourselves. Is it not a great privilege for poor sinful creatures, that could not think of God without horror, or hear him named without trembling, or pray to him without great dejection of heart, to look upon God as reconciled,

and willing to receive us and bless us! So for the life of God, to have a life begun in us by the Spirit of God, and maintained by the continual influences of his grace, till all be perfected in glory, what a privilege is this! None but they that live this life can have communion with God. Things cannot converse that do not live the same life; as Adam had no companion or help-meet, but was alone, though all the creatures came and subjected themselves to him, trees, beasts, men, &c.: Gen. 2:18, 'And the Lord said, It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him an help-meet for him.' But besides this state of nearness, there are special acts of nearness, both on God's part and ours; he is nearer to us sometimes than at others, when we have more evidences of his favour inward or outward: inward evidences, when he quickens, comforts, supports the soul, filleth the heart with joy and peace in believing; at such a time God is near, we feel him sensibly exciting and stirring up his own work in us. The soul always dwelleth in the body, but it doth not always act alike; it is ever equal in point of habitation, but not in point of operation. So Christ doth always dwell in the heart by his Spirit, but he doth not always act alike, but κατ' εὐδοκίαν, 'according to his good pleasure,' Phil. 2:13. God is not alike always present with his people, but never withdraweth that influence that is necessary to the being of grace: Ps. 73:23, 'Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.' So outwardly; sometimes God hideth himself, sometimes seemeth not to mind the affairs of his people, at other times all the world shall know that they are near and dear to him: he that toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye: those that will not see, shall see and be ashamed for their envy at his people, Isa. 26:11. So on our part there is a standing relation between us and God, but our hearts are more or less towards him in worship; we especially then draw near unto him, though there be a communion in walking with God in our whole course. These things must be distinguished, for

actual intercourse may be interrupted or suspended, when our state of nearness to God ceaseth not.

6. The grounds and reasons of all nearness, or the way how it cometh about, are these four:—

[1.] God's covenant with us.

[2.] Our incorporation into Christ.

[3.] The inhabitation of the Spirit in us.

[4.] Mutual love between God and us. These are the reasons why God is near us, and we a people near unto God.

[1.] His covenant with us, or confederation in the covenant. God promiseth to be our God, and we to be his people: Jer. 32:38, 'And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.' As those two kings made a league offensive and defensive, 1 Kings 22:4, 'I am as thou art, and my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses;' so God will be ours as really as we are his; you shall have a propriety in God, as God has in you; not absolutely indeed the same, but enough for your comfort. You were his before the contract, and to be at his command; but he is not at your command: you may supplicate and humbly sue out the effects of your right in God, and may be sure of speeding, when it is for his glory and your good. We have a right to God, and all that is in God, but not a right over him, as he hath over us. We have propriety and interest in God, but not dominion, as we have over the creatures, or as God hath over us. He will let out his goodness, grace, and mercy to us and for us. God still keepeth the rank of a sovereign, and yet treateth us as friends: James 2:23, 'Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God.' Yea, children: John 1:12, 'But as

many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.' When we give up ourselves to God to serve him, we enter ourselves heirs to all the privileges of the gospel, and may lay claim to them.

[2.] By union with Christ; such as are under the covenant of grace are made members of the mystical body of Christ. This union the scripture sets forth by the similitude of head and members: Rom. 12:5, 'So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.' Vine and branches: John 15:1, 2, 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman; every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' Stock and graff, Rom. 6:5; body and garment: Gal. 3:27, 'For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.' The converting of meat and drink into our substance: John 6:56, 'He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.' House and indweller: Eph. 3:17, 'That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.' As the members receive sense and motion from the head, the branches sap from the root, and the graff liveth in the stock, so we receive all life and being from Christ. Christ first giveth himself to us, and with himself all things. We must have himself first, for it is he in us becometh the fountain of life: Gal. 2:20, 'I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' The hope of glory: Col. 1:27, 'Christ in you the hope of glory.' Now this endeareth us to God, and makes us near to him: John 17:21, 'That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.' Christ is God-man in one person, and we are united to him mystically, though not hypostatically; and so God and we are brought near together. For we are in him as he is in the Father, not with an

exact equality, but some answerable likeness; we are immediately united to Christ, and by Christ to God.

[3.] The inhabitation of the Spirit, that is the fruits of union, as union of confederation. The same spirit that dwelleth in Christ dwelleth in us: 1 Cor. 6:17, 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.' It is by the same spirit that the union is brought about, the same spirit that dwelleth in head and members; this is the foundation laid on Christ's part for all our communion and commerce with God: 1 John 4:13, 'Hereby we know that we dwell in God, and God in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.' We cannot know our communion with God as the author of grace by any other gift; he maketh his first entry this way, uniting us to himself by his Spirit.

[4.] The mutual love between God and them. God loveth them, and they love God; and so they are near and dear to one another: 1 Sam. 18:1, 'The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.' Such love is here between Christ and believers, and between them and God. God beginneth, he loveth first, and best, and most; no father or mother loveth their children so tenderly as God doth them: Isa. 49:15, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.' No husband loves his spouse as Christ doth the church: Eph. 5:25, 'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;' not only gave himself to the church, but for it. Alas! when we are at our best, we love God too little. There is a strong love which the saints have to God and Christ; they cannot live without him, are always crying, Abba, Father: Gal. 4:6, 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.' They cannot brook his absence, are dejected if they cannot hear from him at every turn.

7. There being such a ground laid for our nearness, all familiar intercourses do pass freely between God and us, through Christ, by whom and through whom are all things, and we by him, 1 Cor. 8:5. Our commerce with God is in donatives and duties.

[1.] On God's part, it is seen in his readiness to hear our prayers: Isa. 58:9, 'Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shalt say, Here I am.' God is at hand; when we knock at heaven's gates, he answereth presently, saying, And what would you have? If God should make an offer to us as Jonathan did to David, 1 Sam. 20:14, 'Whatever thy soul desireth, I will do for thee,' we would think then we should never want more. What would the world give for such a promise from an earthly potentate? You have it from God, if you like the condition: Ps. 37:4, 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart.' Thou canst not desire anything regularly, and consisting with the condition of the covenant, with thy delight in God, but thou shalt have it. In a holy sense, you have God at command, to do for you what you would have, as if von had his sovereignty at command: Job 22:27, 28, 'Thou shalt make thy prayers unto him, and he shall hear thee; and thou shalt pay thy vows. Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee; and the light shall shine upon thy ways.' Decree, and it shall be established; speak the word, and it shall come to pass, Is it for us to enact decrees, to appoint what shall be? Their prayer is a duplicate or counterpart of God's decrees. God guideth their hearts to ask such things as are pleasing to him; God is ready to help us, to give supplies in all our necessities; he is remembering us for good upon all occasions, especially in our low estate; when we have none to help, he will help: Isa. 59:16, 'And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness it sustained him.' It was when he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey;

he cannot be safe unless he be wicked; and none will bestir himself in the behalf of truth and right, or own the good cause, by speaking a word for it; therefore God himself would take the business in hand: Ps. 105:14, 'He suffered no man to do them wrong.' They that are God's confederates, he hath a watchful eye over them; they are under his defence and protection. An afflicted people are more sensible of God's presence, help, and assistance than others are; for straits and troubles are means to open men's eyes and waken their senses. Now you will ever find God with you when he seemeth most to forget you. But especially in duties of worship, the visits of love there, and the entertainment at God's table: Ps. 65:4, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach to thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.' They have many sweet experiences of God, which they find not elsewhere; there he doth comfort, quicken, and revive them.' Ps. 36:8, 'They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; thou shalt make them drink of the rivers of thy pleasures.' God biddeth them welcome to this table, and will not send them away empty; indeed, there they come to feel joys unspeakable and glorious. Not that we should build always on sensible experiences, or tie God to our time, or make an essay of curiosity; but if they humbly, resolutely wait upon God according to the encouragements of his promise, first or last they shall have a full meal, and God will own them, and fill their hearts with goodness. Thus in answering their prayers, helping them in straits, visiting in duties.

[2.] On our part, it is delightful to converse with God—

(1.) In holy duties: Isa. 26:16, 'Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them;' Job 22:21, 'Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good



shall come unto thee.' We have no reason to be strange to God, for if we were acquainted with ourselves, we should find daily and hourly some errand to the throne of grace. To forget him days without number showeth we have little knowledge of God or of ourselves. Be sure to look after a desire to enjoy God in the duty: 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of my God; my flesh and my heart crieth out for the living God,' Ps. 84:2, 3. To rest in an empty ordinance showeth we do what we do rather to pacify conscience than satisfy spiritual desires. God is to be our end and object, whom we are to seek and serve; *abs te sine te non recedam*.

(2.) In a course of holiness: 'How can two walk together except they be agreed?' Amos 3:3. Loveth what he loveth, hateth what he hateth. Suitableness of disposition is the ground of intimacy: 1 John 1:7, 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.' God saith, I will dwell in them, and walk in them. Walk as ever before God: Gen. 17:1, 'I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.'

Secondly, How we come to be brought into this nearness? The reason of doubting is because every man is born a stranger to God: Ps. 58:3, 'The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.' Sin causes a distance between God and us: Isa. 59:2, 'But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.' Man is averse from God, without God, Christ, covenant, or hope of any good from him. Christ represents our apostate nature by the prodigal's going into a far country; the breach groweth wider every day, and the distance is increased by actual sin. The wicked are far from God: Hosea 7:13, 'Woe unto them, for they have fled from me; destruction unto them, for they have transgressed against me.' While matters stand thus between us and God, there is no hope; the

rigour of divine justice and the terror of a guilty conscience will not give us leave to look for any communion with God.

Ans. In this hopeless and helpless estate the Lord Jesus had pity on us. The great end of the mediator is to bring us to God: 1 Peter 3:18, 'For Christ hath once suffered for sins; the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.' And therefore he is said to be the way to the Father: John 17:6, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.' He hath taken our case into his own hands, and doth, partly by his merit and partly by his Spirit, bring about this nearness and fellowship between God and us.

1. By his merit he bringeth us into a state of favour; he opened the door by his death: Eph. 2:13, 'But now in Christ Jesus we who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.' To go to God offended, and appeased by no satisfaction, is terrible to the guilty creature; but Christ hath made our peace, so that we have access into this grace wherein we stand: Rom. 5:1, 2, 'Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand.' This door which he hath opened by his death, he keepeth open by his constant intercession: Heb. 7:25, 'Wherefore he is able to save unto the uttermost all those that come unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us;' which our repeated provocations would otherwise daily and hourly shut and close again: 1 John 2:1, 'These things I write unto you, that you sin not: and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;' and so all distance is removed, and poor creatures may comfortably come to God.

2. There is a great averseness in our hearts, and we need not only leave to come to God, but a heart to come to God. We are fugitives as

well as exiles; we hang off from God, and are loath to make use of the offered opportunity; therefore the imprecation of our liberty is not only to be considered, but also the application of this grace to our souls, which is done by the Spirit of Christ. Certainly, as to God, he considereth us as united to Christ before he will be near to us: Eph. 2:13, 'But now in Christ Jesus ye, who were sometimes afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.' It was purchased by the blood of Christ, but it is not actually bestowed and applied to the elect until they be united to Christ, and in him by saving faith, as branches in the root; not only through Christ, but in Christ: something for us, and something in us as to ourselves; overcome our averseness to set our hearts to seek the Lord. *Nemo te quærerere potest nisi qui prius invenerit; vis igitur inveniri ut quæreris? quære, ut inveniaris; potes quidem inveniri, non tamen præveniri.* None can be aforehand with God; we cannot seek him till we have found him. He will be sought that he may be found; and found that he may be sought. He draweth nigh to us by his preventing grace, that he may draw nigh to us by further grace; and inclineth us to do what he requireth, that he may crown his own work.

Use 1. To persuade us to enter into this state of nearness by taking hold of God's covenant. It is an excellent thing in the general; all will grant that it is good to draw near to God; but it is not only good, but good for you, all things considered: Ps. 73:28, 'It is good for me to draw near to God;' it is our only blessedness. The practical judgment must be possessed with this truth, and then determine it so that it may have the authority of a principle; and then the heart must be engaged to draw nigh to God by a hearty resolution to come unto God. Till the heart be engaged, we are too easily enticed away from God. Now the engaging the heart is by covenant: 'Yield yourselves to the Lord,' 2 Chron. 30:8. All God's servants, they are his by covenant: Ezek. 20:37, 'I will cause you to pass under the rod, and bring you

into the bond of the covenant;' as sheep, to pass one by one out of the fold. God doth not covenant with us in the lump and body, but every man for himself must engage himself to live according to the will of God. It is not enough that Christ engaged for us as our surety: Heb. 7:22, 'Jesus was made the surety of a better testament;' something is to be done personally if we would have benefit by it. It is not enough that the church engage for us as a visible political body professing faith in Christ, Ezek. 16:7; but every man must engage his own heart. It is not enough our parents did engage for us, in behalf of little ones, avouch God to be their God: Deut. 29:10–12, 'Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of wood to the drawer of thy water; that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day.' We must ratify their dedication and covenant in our own persons, 2 Cor. 9:13, by a professed subjection to the gospel of Christ; this covenant and oath of allegiance. You eat at God's table to show that God and you are agreed, and entered into a strict union and fellowship one with another.

2. Let us live as in a state of nearness to God; let us fear him, and love him, and walk with him, as Enoch did, Gen. 5:24; or set the Lord always before us, as David did, Ps. 16:8. How so? In point of reverence, in point of dependence.

[1.] In point of reverence, that we may not displease God with whom we walk: Micah 6:8, 'Walk humbly with thy God.' Thou shalt humble thyself to walk with God. It is not a fellow-like familiarity or the intimacy of equals, but the common subjection of inferiors, the obedience of children, diligently taking heed lest a breach fall out

betwixt God and them: Deut. 23:14, 'For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thee, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy, that he may see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.' God threatens to leave them if he saw any filthiness among them. If we sin against God, we may find him near as a judge to punish, not as a father to protect us. Besides it is for the honour of God that a people near and dear to him should study to please him in all things, and that they should walk worthy of God, with whom they profess to be in covenant, and whose friendly presence they enjoy. The nearer you are to God the greater your sins. If you be the spouse of Christ, your sins are adultery; if you be the children of God, your sins are rebellion and parricide; if you be the friends of God, Christ hath the more cause to complain: Ps. 55:12, 13, 'For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.' Your sins are the injuries of a false friend, if you be of the household of God. After you had eaten his bread, will you lift up the heel against him? Ps. 41:9, 'Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lift up his heel against me.' It is treachery of an unfaithful domestic and servant. Men will endure injuries from strangers better than from nearer relations. Those that do not belong to God, that are not so dear and near to him, their sins are not so grievous. In short, if you be the people of God, whom God will own in the world, you should take care to live to his honour.

[2.] In point of dependence, did we believe more firmly that God was so near and so ready at hand, to comfort, support, deliver, and bless us, this would stay our hearts in all our troubles. Is God near us? What should we be afraid of? Ps. 23:1, 2, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he

leadeth me beside the still waters.' God admitteth you to his table to assure you of his bounty and liberality; he gives you this support as a sign of reconciliation with you, that God and you are friends. Now τὰ τῶν φίλων πάντα κοινὰ. Especially let it check our fears; when trouble is near, God is also near, to counterwork our enemies and support his people: Zech. 3:1, 2, 'And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' Where there is Satan to resist, there is an angel to rebuke; as extremities draw nigh, God draweth nigh. When Laban with great fury followed after Jacob, God followed after Laban, and stepped between, and commanded Laban not to hurt him. When Paul was like to be torn in pieces in an uproar, God runneth speedily to his help: 2 Cor. 1:9, 10, 'But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' When danger cometh to be danger indeed, you will find him a present help.

Use 2. To quicken us and encourage us actually to draw nigh to God with the more confidence; that is, let us address ourselves to converse with him in his ordinances, for his favour, mercy, and blessing, that we may not stand afar off, but come boldly. To this end, consider whither we come, by whom we come, in what manner we must come or draw nigh to him.

1. To whom we draw near; to God, as reconciled in Christ. If God were inaccessible it were another matter; but divine justice being satisfied in Christ we come to a throne of grace: Heb. 4:16, 'Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain

mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.' God's throne is a throne of justice, grace, glory. To the throne of strict justice no sinful man can approach; to the throne of grace every penitent sinner may have access; to the throne of glory no mortal man can come in his whole person; his heart may be there: so it is said, Heb. 10:19, 'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,' as petitioners are admitted to the prince in the presence chamber. The way to the throne of glory lieth by the throne of grace; we pass by one unto the other. In short, Christ stood before the throne of justice when he suffered for our sins; penitent sinners stand before the throne of grace when they worship him in faith. After the resurrection we shall ever stand before the throne of glory, and ever abide in his presence. Our business now is with the throne of grace, to give answer and despatch our suits. There is a threefold throne of grace—the typical, which was the mercy-seat: Ps. 80:1, 'Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth;' the real, which is Christ: 'Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;' the commemorative, which is the Lord's supper, where is a representation of wisdom and oblation of the grace of Christ in the New Testament. This throne of grace is set up everywhere in the church; it standeth in the midst of God's people, as the tabernacle did in the midst of Israel; for God is always in all places nigh unto such as call upon him in truth: John 4:23, 'The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.' Access to God may be had everywhere, therefore let us come.

2. By whom we come; by Jesus Christ: Eph. 3:12, 'In whom we have boldness, and access with confidence, by the faith of him;' upon account of his merit and intercession. We should come without fear or doubt to him, de facto, as if his blood were running afresh.

3. How we come; with a true heart: Heb. 10:22, 'Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.'

## **SERMON CLXX**

### **Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.—VER 152**

IN this verse is a further illustration of the last clause of the former. He had said there, 'Thy commandments are ipsissima Veritas;' now he amplifieth that saying from God's ordination and appointment, 'Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.' The prophet ends this octonary and paragraph with some triumph of faith; and after all his conflicts and requests to God, goeth away with this assurance, that God's word should be infallibly accomplished, as being upon his own experience of unchangeable and unerring certainty. Two things you may observe in the words:—

1. The constant and eternal verity of God's testimonies, thou hast founded them for ever.
2. David's attestation to it, I have known of old that it is so. What the word of God is in itself; and then what is the opinion of the believer concerning it.

First, What the scriptures are in themselves.



1. For their nature; they are God's testimonies, or the significations of his will.
2. For their stability; they are founded (there is a great emphasis in that word), and that by God, 'Thou hast founded them.'
3. For their duration, and everlasting use; in that word 'for ever,' of an eternal use and comfort.

Secondly, David's attestation or persuasion of this, 'I have known of old.'

I here observe—

1. His persuasion.
2. The date and standing of his persuasion; it was ancient, 'I have known of old.'

1. His persuasion, 'I have known.' There is a twofold knowledge—the knowledge of faith, and the knowledge of sense; both agree with the words.

[1.] The knowledge of faith: 'I know that my Redeemer lives,' that is, I believe it; what we read concerning thy testimonies. Other translations read, by thy testimonies: 'I have known by thy testimonies.' The Septuagint, ἔγνων ἐκ τῶν μαρτυρίων σου, have been persuaded of this by thy Spirit out of the word itself.

[2.] The knowledge of sense and experience: I myself have known by sundry experiences heretofore, which I shall never forget.

2. The date and ancientness of this persuasion, 'of old.' It was not a late persuasion, or a thing that he was now to learn. He always knew

it since he knew anything of God, that God had owned his word as the constant rule of his proceedings with creatures, in that God had so often made good his word to him, not only by present and late, but old and ancient experiences. Well, then, David's persuasion of the truth and unchangeableness of the word was not a sudden humour, or a present fit, or a persuasion of a few days' standing, but he was confirmed in it by long experience. One or two experiences had been no trial of the truth of the word, they might seem but a good hit; but his word ever proveth true, not once or twice, but always. What we say 'of old,' the Septuagint reads, κατ' ἀρχᾶς, 'from the beginnings,' that is, either—

[1.] From my tender years. Timothy knew the scriptures from a child, 2 Tim. 3:15; so David very young was acquainted with God and his truth.

[2.] Or from the first time that he began to be serious, or to mind the word in good earnest, or to be a student either in God's word or works, by comparing providences and promises, he found, concerning his testimonies, that God had founded them for ever.

[3.] Lastly, 'of old,' may be what I have heard of all foregoing ages, their experience as well as mine: Ps. 22:4, 5, 'Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them; they cried unto thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.'

The points are three:—

Doct. 1. There is an everlasting stability, and a constant unchangeable truth in God's testimonies.

Doct. 2. This must be known by us, or apprehended by us.

Doct. 3. Experiences of former times should give us encouragement to trust God for what is future.

Doct. 1. There is an everlasting stability and a constant unchangeable truth in God's testimonies.

Proof. Ps. 111:8, 'All his commandments are sure; they stand fast for ever and ever.' The word of God is of perpetual use and comfort, not in one condition, but in all; in every age of the world you have the effects of it: it shall be made good to us in the world to come: 2 Cor. 1:20, 'For all the promises of God in him are Yea, and in him Amen;' of one invariable tenor, and of a sure and certain accomplishment. They do not say Yea and Nay, but Yea and Amen; Yea to our hopes, and Amen to our desires.

Reasons. It must needs be so, if we consider—

1. Their author.

2. Their foundation.

3. Their use.

First, Their author is God, who is the self-same God, and needs not say and unsay; for he has wisdom enough to foresee all events; power enough to answer all difficulties that may stand in the way of his promises; authority supreme, and so is above all controlment. Sometimes men command, but without reason; sometimes they promise, but without performance; sometimes they threaten, but without effect: therefore the word of man dieth and may come to nothing; they forget their promises, or may be cast into such circumstances as to be unable to perform them: but these are God's testimonies, and therefore are pillars that cannot be shaken; they are

laid by God himself, who hath ordained them to stand firm for ever. His people shall find more in his performance than they could perceive in his promise, and his enemies shall find more weight in his judgments than they could apprehend in his threatenings: 2 Tim. 2:19, 'The foundation of God standeth sure;' *θημελία*, his obligation, not a foundation in the builder's sense, but in the lawyer's sense. His obligation or bill of contract, that is, his promise or covenant with us in Christ, remaineth unchangeable. A bill or bond is called *θημελία*. God will own his servants if they will be faithful to him. See Hammond.

Secondly, They are founded; the testimonies of God, if taken for the promises of the gospel, as they ought to be, are built on two foundations:—

1. One foundation is the unchangeableness of God's nature: Heb. 6:18, 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation.' God cannot change, cannot lie. God can no more break his promise than cease to be God; his love, truth, power is all unchangeable.

2. The other foundation is the blood of Christ; in him they are Yea and Amen. The things promised are purchased with a great price; surely that blood was not shed in vain: 'Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,' 1 Cor. 3:11.

Thirdly, Their use.

1. To be testimonies or declarations of God's mind and will to the creature; not only for the regulation of our actions, but the measure of God's dealings. God's covenant in respect of the commands is the rule of man's duty; in respect of the promises and threatenings, they are the rule of God's judgment or process with us. Now, it is for the

honour of God and satisfaction of man that this should be stated and held good in all ages and cases; therefore God hath established a process and rule of dealing with his creatures that shall never be changed. If your cause will hold good according to God's testimonies, it will hold good before his tribunal. Otherwise we could not know certainly that we do please or maintain any commerce with him, or know what to expect from him.

2. To be props and pillars of our confidence; so the scriptures, as they are founded themselves, so they are a foundation for us to build upon: Eph. 2:20, 'And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone;' they support the weight of the building. Now, foundation-stones must not be movable, or laid loosely and carelessly, for then all the building will be weak and tottering; therefore there is a sure word and sure promises for poor creatures to build upon. The apostle calls it *βεβαίωτερον λόγον*, 2 Peter 1:19, 'A more sure word of prophecy,' comparing it to the voice from heaven, whereof he spoke immediately before. We are upon more certain terms, now God guideth us by scripture, than if he guided us by oracle: *quoad nos*, it is so, though every declaration of God be alike evident and certain in itself. A transient voice is more easily mistaken and forgotten than a standing authentic record. Consider it as subject to jealousies, forgetfulness, mistakes; it is so. The general voice of the gospel gives more encouragement to self-undoing sinners than a voice from heaven calling us by name.

Use 1. To humble us for our uncertainty and inconstancy, when the testimonies of God are so stable and unchangeable. The scriptures are as firm as a rock; but, alas! we are unstable as water, both as to faith and obedience. There should be a proportion *inter regulam et regulatum*, between the rule and the thing ruled, the measure and

what is measured, the stamp and the impression. We carry it so as if the word spake one thing to-day, and another to-morrow; as if God would sometimes maintain the cause of his people, and at other times forsake them; as if he sometimes loved sin, and hated righteousness; would sometimes be good to penitent sinners, at other times turn away from them. We profess to walk by his rule, and yet live so disproportionable.

1. In faith, like waves of the sea rolled hither and thither, our dependence and trust now and anon changing with the posture of our affairs, not suited to the eternal verity of the promises. In crosses, confusions, and difficulties, we are at an utter loss: James 1:6, 'But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.' If we believe it to-day, why not to-morrow? Do difficulties abate anything of the certainty of God's word, and make it questionable? Then it would be in the power of man to disannul the promise, and God could never lay a sure ground of hope.

2. In obedience. The weakness of our faith and dependence necessarily inferreth that they that do not trust God cannot be long true to him: James 1:8, διψυχος ἀκατάστατος, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' Sometimes when we are soul-sick, we mourn and complain of sin, and seem to have a passionate hatred of sin; at other times, when the fit is over, we give it harbour and entertainment, and embrace our Delilah again; whereas the same reasons that once made us hate sin should still make us hate it, for sin is sin still. The scripture doth not one while condemn it, and another while allow it; but we are not swayed by our rule, but act as we are inclined by our changeable affections, and therefore complain of sin to-day, and commit it to-morrow, and lick up our vomit again. So for duty: Hosea 6:4, 'Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as

the early dew it passeth away.' Nothing so fickle and changeable as man in anything that is good, so vain and inconstant are we in our motions and devotion; pangs that can no more endure a trial than the morning cloud and early dew can endure the heat of the rising sun; it cometh by fits.

3. In our opinions and professions, how do we say and unsay, and build again the things we have destroyed, and destroy the things we have builded; so that we know not where to have them, and are like children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine! Eph. 4:14, where are two metaphors; they are compared to children for inconstancy in their choice, and to ships destitute of skilful masters, tossed this way and that way with contrary winds and tides. So they with divers doctrines and opinions. Sometimes taken with one opinion, sometimes with another; περιφερόμενοι, circled about by all the winds in the card. Is this becoming the constant unerring certainty of the scriptures? It will be necessary for us to quit this childish temper; God will not always bear with it in us, whatever he may do in babes; therefore let us not receive the truth of God lightly and uncertainly, but fix ourselves in the knowledge, the love, and practice of the truths that are there commended to us: Gal. 1:6, 'I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel.' This lightness is a disease incident to our natures, soon off, soon on; that other gosselling, or pretence of a purer way.

Use 2. Is comfort to the people of God—

1. In all the particular changes that pass over our heads. Our estate and condition is many times changed, but God's word is no more changed than himself is changed; all things shall come to ruin sooner than these foundations be overturned: Mat. 5:18, 'Till heaven and

earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.' The promises are still the same, even as God is: Mal. 3:6, 'For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' And these mercies we should take comfort in: Heb. 12:28, 'Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.' So also 1 John 2:17, 'And the world passeth away, and the lusts thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

2. In times of general confusion, when that which they apprehended to be right and a duty proveth a sin, when wickedness is established by a law: Ps. 94:20, 'Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?' and all that is just and right seemeth to be perverted. There is a God in heaven, who will judge not according to the opinions of the times, but according to the reality of things revealed in his holy word. These ordinances of men shall be forced to give way to those eternal testimonies; a duty in former times, a sin now.

3. Comfort against the encounters of violence, when we seem to be borne down with force, and have no hope. The testimonies of God are firm and steadfast, that none shall overthrow and frustrate them. They are but as the dashing of waves against a rock: Isa. 28:15, 'When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us.'

4. It is a comfort in prayer; so David useth it here. Yea and Amen, that relateth to our desires, as before.

Use 3. To persuade us to behave ourselves to the word of God as an unchangeable unerring rule.



1. To the directions and precepts of it. There are no other terms to be expected, but what God hath set down in the word; therefore frame yourselves to observe them, and be constant in this practice, then will you have the everlasting comfort of it. Bind them upon your hearts: you must take up Christ's yoke one time or other; do not think that he will alter the ordinances of his wisdom and justice for your sakes: Ps. 119:66, 'Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I have believed thy commandments.'

2. To the promises of it. They are founded for ever, whatever carnal reason suggests to the contrary in the hour of temptation. To this end consider what promises are. They are declarations of the purposes of God. Both confirm you. As they are purposes of God, they imply immutability: Heb. 6:17, 'Wherein God, willing to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it with an oath.' God's counsel is immutable, for God being an intelligent agent, of most perfect knowledge and profound wisdom, can will and determine nothing but according to the best and most exact understanding. There can be no cause of revocation, either for want of wisdom or justice, for he is absolutely both wise and just; nor from inconstancy of will, for 'the strength of Israel is not as man that he should repent;' nor can his will be frustrated for want of power, for he is almighty. But now when this purpose is declared, that draweth on a further obligation: Ps. 89:34, 'I will not alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.' There is a debt ariseth, and a right established of the creatures. To change counsel would imply weakness; to alter a promise, wickedness and unfaithfulness, which were the highest blasphemy to imagine in God, especially when this declaration is made with such emphatic averment, confirmed by an oath: Heb. 6:18, 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we may have strong consolation;' which is such a sacred assurance, yea, by seals and signs. Yet, again, your very believing

bindeth it the faster: Ps. 119:49, 'Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.' Would God invite a trust, and then decline it? The more you believe, the sooner you see the effects of the promise. This is the difference between promises and threatenings. Christ saith, 'Be it unto thee according to thy faith.' God's threatenings are fulfilled whether man will or no; let him believe or not believe, God will throw the ungodly into hell. But in promises it is otherwise; then they do good to us when by faith we embrace them; believe, and thou shalt be established. Besides God's two immutable things, faith is an anchor sure and steadfast, Heb. 6:19; therefore let us not entertain the promises of the gospel with a loose heart; you may know it by your slightness and carelessness about them, if you do not esteem them as great: 2 Peter 1:4, 'To you are given exceeding great and precious promises;' they contain spiritual and eternal riches, and deserve to be greatly esteemed. By your addictedness to sense and to present things you seem to declare that you think a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush, happiness to come but conjectural and uncertain. It is a fancy to live by faith, if it doth not support us in difficulties and afflictions: Ps. 119:40, 'This is my comfort in my affliction, thy word hath quickened me;' when you look on all the promises as a dry stick, or as words and wind; if they do not engage us to the earnest pursuit of heavenly happiness, and the blessedness which they contain and offer: Heb. 11:13, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.'

Doct. 2. That this unchangeable certainty and everlasting verity of God's testimonies should be known by us, that so a sure word should be entertained by a pure faith. David acknowledged here his own certainty.

1. What it is to know this. To know signifieth three things—to understand, to consider, to believe; all have place in this point. There must be a clear apprehension, a deep and serious consideration, and a firm assent and sound belief of this truth.

[1.] It is needful we should understand the unchangeable and everlasting verity of the scriptures; for how shall we believe what we do not know, and venture our souls upon what we are ignorant of? 2 Tim. 1:12, 'I know whom I have believed;' John 9:36, 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God? And he said, Who is he, that I might believe on him?' True faith is not content to go on implicit grounds, but seeks for clear knowledge of the ground it goeth upon. Nor can there be solid faith without knowledge of that which we do believe. Who will venture his soul on the bottom of the scriptures till he knoweth they are of God, and unchangeably fixed as the rule of life and charter of his happiness, especially since they require us to crucify our lusts, and sacrifice our interests, and perform those duties which are displeasing to nature, upon the hopes which they offer, and bid us with confidence and joyfulness to wait upon God for his salvation in the midst of all pressures and afflictions. If we build hand-over-head we build on the sand, not on the rock.

[2.] To know signifieth to consider. This is also necessary, because all knowledge is improved by consideration, without which it is but as ignorance or oblivion at the best, till consideration doth awaken it. Certainly it can have no efficacy upon us, breed no delight and hope in us. A transient view doth not acquaint us with things as serious meditation; the truth lieth by unimproved; as a man that passeth us by occasionally knoweth us not so much as he that doth intimately converse with us. Therefore, if we would improve our knowledge, excite the soul to its act of faith and choice, there must be consideration. We are bid to consider the Lord Jesus, Heb. 3:1; to

give heed to the gospel, Heb. 2:1, to consider its worth and certainty. The schoolmen have a distinction, *certitudo cognitionis seu speculationis*, and *certitudo adhesionis*; the former lieth only in a clearness of the mind, the last in its power upon the affections and the will. The object rightly propounded produceth the former from the understanding, not expecting the consent of the will; the latter followeth *imperium et consensum voluntatis*, the command and consent of the will. The former ariseth from the evidence of the thing; the latter from the worth, weight, and greatness of the thing, the gospel truth. Of this latter sort we read, 1 Tim. 1:15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief;' and therefore must not only be apprehended, but seriously considered by us, that we may adhere to it with all our hearts. Though illumination is helped by contemplation, yet much more the latter, where firm adherence is expected. Men may apprehend the truth of things, when corrupt affections and a perverse will keep them from closing with them; but when a man so knows a thing as to consider it both his duty and interest to close with the goodness and truth of it, then doth he rightly know it.

[3.] To know signifieth assent and firm believing; as John 17:8, 'They have known surely, ἀληθῶς, that I came out from thee.' So Acts 2:36, 'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, ἀσφαλῶς, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye crucified both Lord and Christ;' to know it so as they might safely build upon it. This is mainly necessary, considering the many temptations and assaults that we shall meet with to shake us; this assent must be very strong, well rooted and built upon sure ground. And because it doth not consist in puncto, it must be always growing, Mark 9:24, 'Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief;' till it grow up to the certainty of the thing on which it is built. There is an objective certainty in things

that is beyond that subjective certainty in persons about them; but because it is built on divine revelation, or God's testimonies, we should still increase in it.

2. Whence we know it, there is the difficulty. The doubt will not lie here, whether God's testimonies be of everlasting verity, but how we shall know them to be God's testimonies. For it is per se notum, that God is true, that he cannot lie, or give a false testimony: 1 John 5:9, 'If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.' But how doth it appear this is God's testimony? for that word that is propounded to be believed as such, cannot be perceived easily, neither is it known of itself to the understanding, neither is it demonstrable by evident reasons as to make infallible conclusions. The word's giving testimony of itself doth not solve it; indeed one part may give testimony to another, and one revelation be confirmed by another, as the New Testament giveth witness to the Old, and confirmeth its authority; but how shall we know that to be God's testimony? I answer, we have it—

[1.] Partly from the self-evidencing light of the scriptures themselves; they have passed God's hand, and have his signature upon them, as all his works make out their author. There are characters of his wisdom, power, goodness, and holiness impressed upon them: 2 Cor. 4:2–4, 'By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God: but if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.' The gospel being the result of God's wisdom, and suited to the heart of man, for whose use it was calculated, it hath something in itself to commend it to our consciences. It cannot be imagined that the hand of God should pass upon anything, and there should be nothing of

his character left on it to show it came from God. Look upon any fly or gnat, any flower of the field or pile of grass, and you may see some impressions to discover the author of them. So certainly if God shall set himself to write a book, or set forth a frame of doctrine to do man good, surely he hath discovered his wisdom and holiness and grace therein, and that in plain and legible characters, that, if man were not prepossessed and leavened with prejudice and corrupt affections, he could not choose but see it. That there is such an objective evidence or aptitude in the doctrine itself to beget faith in those that consider it, is plain from that of the apostle: 2 Cor. 4:2–4, 'By the manifestation of the truth we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God;' without miracle, or other confirmation, if they had a clear eye: it is light which discovereth itself, and all things else. The reason why it is not seen is not in the object, because of any defect there, but the faculty, the visive faculty; their eyes are blinded with worldly lusts. Well, then, when things are spoken so becoming the nature of God, and so agreeable to the necessities of man, and with such an evidence of reason, not to the law only, but also to the gospel, as to establishing of a way of commerce between God and us, and exempting us from the grand scruples that haunt us, though these things could not be found out by human wit, yet now they are revealed, they carry a great suitableness thereunto.

[2.] And partly by the testimony of the Spirit, this is one way of confirming the truth of the gospel: Acts 5:32, 'We are his witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him;' where the apostles are mentioned as one sort of witnesses, and the Holy Ghost as another. The great office of the Spirit is to testify of Christ Jesus: John 15:26, 'Even the spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.' The doctrine of the gospel concerning Christ's coming and power is so

great a mystery that it is not believed and received in the world without the Spirit. Upon the beginning of Christ's ministry, in his baptism, the Spirit appeared in the form of a dove. Now the Holy Ghost doth two ways bear witness of Christ—έντεχνῶς, άτεχνῶς, artificially, and inartificially. Artificially, per modum argumenti; and inartificially, per modum testis; partly as he doth afford sufficient matter of confirmation and conviction in those miraculous operations in the primitive times, and also as he doth persuade the heart, and convince us of the truth of the gospel.

[3.] There is experience of the truth of the word in God's hearing prayers: Ps. 65:2, 'O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' Fulfilling promises: Ps. 18:30, 'Thy word is a tried word; he is a buckler to all that trust in him.' Punishing the wicked: Hosea 7:12, 'I will chastise them as their congregation hath heard.' Rewarding according to the rules set down in the word, Rom. 1:18, and Heb. 2:3; but of this by and by.

3. Why we must understand, consider, and believe?

Ans. Both in order to our comfort and duty.

[1.] Comfort. If the certainty of the scriptures were more understood, believed, and thought of, we should be more fortified against fears and sorrows, and cares and discouragements, whencesoever they do arise; for as fire well kindled doth easily break forth into a flame, so assent freely laid doth fortify the heart against trouble. It is very notable when the apostles would raise the joy of faith, they plead the certainty of the doctrine they delivered; for it was comfortable in itself, suitable to the necessities of man; all that needed was to assure others of the truth of it—see 1 John 1:1–4—that their joy might be complete and full, upon this certainty of evidence, and complete demonstration. We could not be so comfortless and dejected, if we

were persuaded of the reality of these things. So 2 Peter 1:8, 'Believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorious.' We should love Christ, and rejoice in the believing confident expectation of enjoying of him. And where this is firmly believed, afflictions cannot damp or hinder this joy. A firm trust in the promises of the word will fill a man with comfort, and strengthen him against all difficulties, Ps. 56:4–10.

[2.] Our obedience would be better promoted, it would be a remedy against boldness in sinning and coldness in duty: Heb. 3:12, 'Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.' You cannot drive a dull ass into the fire: Prov. 1:17, 'Surely in vain is the net laid in the sight of any bird.' Men do not believe the everlasting verity of the scriptures, and therefore are so bold and venturous; they think they shall do well enough after all God's threatenings: Zeph. 1:12, 'And it shall come to pass that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and will punish the men that are settled upon their lees, that say in their hearts, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.' Secondly, coldness in duty. How do the scriptures reason against neglect? Heb. 2:1–3, 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip; for if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and every disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' The word spoken by angels was λόγος βέβαιος. Was only worth questioned? No; but the truth also, because so little believed, therefore so little thought of, less desired, least of all pursued and sought after: 2 Peter 1:16, 'We have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of the Lord Jesus, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.'



Use. Oh! study to be informed more and more of this great truth. Let us think of and often consider the unerring certainty of the scriptures. It is a truth not to be supposed and taken for granted, but known, that you may build sure. Man is apt to suspect evangelical truths, as being cross to his lusts and interests. You will find it of use, not only in great temptations, when we are apt to question all, Ps. 73:13, but in ordinary practice, in every prayer: Heb. 10:22, 'Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.' It is not an assurance of our particular estate, or our title to eternal life, but a full assurance of the word and promise of God, that is necessarily required in every one that will draw nigh to God: 'Let us ask in faith, nothing doubting,' James 1:7, 8.

2. Do not content yourselves with a light credulity, but grow up to a full persuasion: 2 Tim. 3:14, 'But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;' and Col. 2:2, 'That their hearts being comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding;' not a fluctuating doubting knowledge, but a full persuasion of the truth of the gospel: Luke 1:4, 'That thou mayest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed;' Col. 1:23, 'If thou continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel;' a rooted persuasion that it is the undoubted truth of God: the firmness of faith should answer the firmness of God's word. There are several degrees of assent, conjecture, opinion, weak faith, and receiving the word in much assurance, 1 Thes. 1:6. There is belief, confidence, assurance, and full assurance. Belief is grounded on God's word in general, and all the truths and propositions therein contained. Confidence, on the promise; the one goeth before the other: fidelity is before dependence and belief; for the promise is first a truth, and so to be considered, before it can be conceived under the formal

notion of a promise. Full assurance is grounded on the fidelity and immutability of God; no man believeth so far but he may believe more.

Doct. 2. That experiences of former times should give us encouragement to trust God for what is future. 'Thy testimonies I have known of old,' saith David.

So the children of God make use of them. See David's instance, 1 Sam. 17:36, 'Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them. Moreover David said, The Lord hath delivered me from the paw of the lion, and the paw of the bear, and he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.' Thus he argueth from former experience to future deliverance: I trust in the same God, who is able to give the same strength, and why should I not look for the same success? So Jacob: Gen. 32:10, 11, 'I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of the truth thou hast showed to thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands: deliver me, I pray thee, from the hands of my brother Esau.' So Ps. 23:5, 6, 'Thou hast prepared a table for me in the presence of mine enemies: surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.' He hath been good to me, and if it be for his glory, he will be still good to me; he hath been my God, and will be my God, and shall be my God for ever: 2 Cor. 1:10, 'Who hath delivered from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust he will yet deliver us.' In all respects of time we stand in need of deliverance; when one is past, another cometh; there have been dangers, there are dangers, and there will be dangers; but God hath, doth, and will deliver. It is a trade God hath used, an art he is versed in, and never at a loss about. Our God is a God of salvation, and is excellent in working of it.

Reasons of the point.

1. God's constancy and unchangeableness. God is the same, always like himself, for mercy, power, and truth; he is never at a loss: what he hath done, he can do, and will do. I am, is God's name, not I have been, or shall be. His providence is new and fresh every morning, Lam. 3:23. God is but one God, Gal. 3:20; always like himself. As he hath delivered, so he doth, and will: Isa. 59:1. 'Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that he cannot save, neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear.' No decay in him. When we give to another, we give from ourselves; we waste by giving. The creatures are at a stint, and soon spend their allowance; but God cannot be exhausted; there is no decrease of love and power, no wrinkle upon the brow of eternity.

2. Experience begets confidence: Rom. 5:3, 'And patience experience, and experience begets hope.' The heart is much confirmed when it hath faith and experience of his side. If we were as we should be, the promise should be beyond all experiences, for it is the word of him that cannot lie. Experience addeth nothing to the certainty of the promise, nor any authority to it; only in regard of our weakness, it is a help and sensible confirmation against our distrustful cares and fears. Sense and experience is not the ground of faith. We must believe God upon his bare word; yet it is an encouragement: John 20:29, 'Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.' Then more encouraged when Christ felt. We have a double proof and experience:

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[1.] What God is able to do for us.

[2.] What God will do again, when his own glory and our need requireth it.

[1.] We know what God can do; former deliverances are as so many monuments and significations of his power: Isa. 51:9, 'Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord; art not thou he that cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? awake, and put on strength, as in the ancient days.' Rahab is Egypt, Ps. 87:4; the dragon, Pharaoh, Ezek. 29:3, the dragon or crocodile of Egypt. Can he do this, and not do that? Upon every experience, we that learn by sense should be more strongly persuaded of God's power. It is a complaint they will not learn after all these signs and wonders: Mat. 16:9, 'Do ye not understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?' Upon every experience we should have high thoughts of God's power and all-sufficiency. The great controversy between Christ and his disciples was their not profiting in faith.

[2.] We see and know what God is willing to do for poor sinners. He is not sparing of necessary supplies and comforts; he hath been a present help. We have no cause to believe the contrary; it is only distrust saith he will not; it is a suspicion and jealousy without cause. It may be, for it hath been: 1 Sam. 17:36, 'The Lord hath delivered me,' &c. Particular and special confidence is not so usual now, but we have no reason to be discouraged in the ways of God; though we cannot be absolutely confident, yet we should not balk duty out of distrust and jealousy. In such faintings take the cordial of experience: Ps. 77:10, 'And I said, This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.'

3. Former mercies are pledges of future; by giving, God becometh our debtor: Mat. 6:25, 'Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment?' If he gives life, he will give food; if he gives a body, he will give raiment: one mercy is an earnest of another. Rom. 8:32, if he give us Christ, he will give us all things; if he give grace, he will give glory; if we have the first-fruits, Rom. 8:23, we shall have

the harvest; if we have the beginning, Phil. 1:6, we shall have the ending. There are some dispensations that are but as a tendency to other mercies, given out in such a way as to invite hope.

4. We are the more endeared to God by his own mercy and tender care of us: Zech. 3:2, 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the burning?' The danger heightens the mercy.

Use 1. To reprove the people of God for their diffidence and distrust, when, after many experiences of God, they can no more quiet their hearts concerning future events; upon every new trouble as much tormented and perplexed as if never known nor heard anything of God before. David: 1 Sam. 27:1, 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' When God hath abundantly done enough to evidence his power and love unto his: Ps. 78:19–21, 'They said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?' &c. When we are to credit God in another work, as the disciples after the miracle of the loaves. When new temptations assault us, we should not be disheartened. What were God's motives before to help? Because you were in misery; the same you may expect again.

Use 2. To press you—

1. To observe your experiences, and compare them with the word. All that God doth is full of truth and faithfulness: Ps. 111:7, 'The works of his hands are verity and judgment, all his commandments are sure;' exactly according to what he hath promised; they certainly come to pass. Especially observe your experiences in your troubles and temptations, what hath been your greatest comfort and support then.

2. Begin to do so betimes; long experience is a great advantage. Most Christians are to be blamed that they begin so late to know God, or to observe the truth of his word, or that adjourn and put it off. Fruits

planted late are seldom ripe and come to anything. When we have a long journey to go, we set forth early. Begin with the Lord betimes, if you would thrive in faith. The longer experience you have had of God, the more you will believe in him: Ps. 22:9, 10, 'Thou art he that took me out of the womb; thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breast: I was cast upon thee from the womb; thou art my God from my mother's belly.'

3. Remember and improve experiences. 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.' Let not new troubles startle us, after we have found the power and goodness of God so ready for our help.

## **SERMON CLXXI**

### **Consider mine affliction, and deliver me; for I do not forget thy law.—VER. 153**

IN this verse observe—

1. David's petition, consider mine affliction, and deliver me.
2. His argument, for I do not forget thy law.

First, His petition is double—for pity and deliverance; the one is preparative to the other.

1. That God would consider his case.

2. Deliver him from the danger into which he was cast by his enemies.

Secondly, His reason is taken from his constant obedience, 'For I do not forget thy law.' The phrase is a meiosis, and noteth—

1. His diligence; he did carefully observe.

2. His constancy; he never departed from the obedience of God's word, whatever temptations he had to the contrary.

I shall give you some brief notes.

Doct. 1. That God's choicest servants in this world have their afflictions.

David saith, 'Mine affliction;' and others of God's children have their share of the sorrows and vexations of this world. This will be so whether you consider them as men or as Christians.

1. As men: Job 14:1, 'Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.' So Job 5:7, 'Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward;' and Gen. 47:9, 'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.' It is well they are so few, since so evil. As our relations and comforts are multiplied, so are the occasions of our sorrow. God never intended the world to be a place of our rest, but our exercise; it is a middle place between heaven and hell, and hath somewhat of either. In our passage to the other world we must look for it, it is that we are born to. Many are born to great honour and estate, but they have another portion goeth along with it; they are born to trouble. Ever since sin entered into the world, punishment entered with it. *Vitam auspiciatur a supplicio.* In heaven full of days, full of comforts; but here it is otherwise, few, and full of trouble. *Unusquisque*

nostrum, cum nascitur, ex hospicio hujus mundi excipitur, initium sumit ex lacrymis—Cyprian de Pat. Austin, infans nondum loquitur, et jam prophetat—Serm. 24, de Verbis Apost.

2. As Christians. A man is no sooner brought home to God but he must expect to be hated by the world: John 15:19, 'If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.' Assaulted by Satan: Luke 22:31, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat'. Chastened by the Lord himself for their trial and humiliation: Heb. 12:8, 'But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.' Our own corrupt hearts will be vexing us, thwarting all the motions of the new nature: Gal. 5:17, 'For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary one to the other; so that ye cannot do the thing that ye would.' The lusts of the flesh are as pricks and thorns in our sides. In short, wicked men will hate us because we are so good: 2 Tim. 3:12, 'Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.' God will afflict us because we are no better: Isa. 22:9, 'By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin.' A Christian is too strict and pure for the world, and is not strict and pure enough for God; and therefore must look for afflictions to mortify sin from God's hand, and great enmity from the world, if he meaneth to keep up the majesty of his profession.

Use. It presseth us—

1. To look for crosses.
2. To prepare for them.



3. When they come, bear them with more patience.

1. Look for them. The first day that we begin to be Christians we must reckon of the cross. Christ hath drawn up the form of our indenture, to which every one must yield and consent before he can call him Master: Mat. 16:24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.' In Luke it is, 'take up his cross daily,' Luke 9:23. Though there be fair days as well as foul in Christianity, yet we must every day be ready. As porters stand in the street waiting for a burden for them to carry if they be hired to it, so must a Christian every day be prepared to take up his burden if God shall call him to it; yea, 'daily' noteth not only continual readiness, but the frequency of our conflicts; as if every day there were some exercise of our faith and patience. If God keep us to the cross all the days of our lives, we must be content. Once more, taking up the cross daily showeth that private and personal calamities are a part of the cross as well as the afflictions of the gospel. Afflictions from God as well as afflictions for God; such as sickness, death of friends, loss of estate, by an ordinary providence; though not enduring persecution for the name of Christ, yet enduring affliction at the will of Christ. Ordinary crosses do not exclude the comforts of Christianity. These occasion experience of God and trial of grace, and are a part of God's discipline for the mortifying of sin, happy opportunities to discover more of God to us; yea, there is more reason of submission to God in these, because God taketh us into his own hands. A man that stormeth when a bucket of water is cast upon him is patient when wet to the skin with the rain that cometh from heaven. Well, then, we must be daily ready for all these things; if we take up the profession of stricter Christianity with other thoughts, we should soon see our mistake. It is a vain thing to flatter ourselves with the hopes of a total exemption; many think they may be good Christians, and yet live a life of ease and peace, free from troubles

and afflictions. This is all one as if a soldier going to the wars should promise himself peace and continual truce with the enemy; or as if a mariner committing himself to the sea for a long voyage should promise himself nothing but fair weather and a calm sea without waves and storms; so irrational is it for a Christian to promise himself a life of ease and rest here upon earth.

2. Be prepared for them, otherwise our looking for them is in vain; and to this end would Christ have us reckon upon the cross, that we may be forewarned. He that buildeth a house doth not take care that the rain should not descend upon it, or the storm should not beat upon it, or the wind blow upon it; there is no fencing against these things, they cannot be prevented by any care of ours; but that the house may be able to endure all this without prejudice. And he that buildeth a ship doth not make this his work, that it should never meet with waves and billows, that is impossible; but that it may be tight and stanch, and able to endure all weathers. A man that taketh care for his body doth not cark for this, that he meet with no change of weather, hot and cold, but how his body may bear all this. Thus should Christians do; not so much take care how to shift and avoid afflictions, but how to bear them with an even and quiet mind. See Chrysostom, Hom. 35, in 1 Cor. As we cannot hinder the rain from falling upon the house, nor the waves from beating upon the ship, nor change of weather and seasons from affecting the body, so it is not in our power to hinder the falling out of afflictions and tribulations; all that lieth upon us is to make provision for such an hour that we be not overwhelmed by it. We need get a stock of spiritual comforts, that all may be peace within when trouble without; and as afflictions abound, so may comforts. We had need get a sound back, be much mortified, and weaned from the vanities of the world: Heb. 12:13, 'And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but rather let it be

healed.' If we have any weak part in our souls, there the assault will be most strong and fierce. A garrison that looketh to be besieged taketh care to fortify the weak places; so should a Christian mortify every corrupt inclination, those that are most pleasing. We need much resolution. A Christian had need be a resolved man, well shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, Eph. 6:15, or else in a hard way he will soon founder and halt. That ἐτοιμασία, that preparation, is a resolved mind, to go through thick and thin, and to follow Christ in all conditions: Acts 21:13, ἐτοιμῶς ἔχω, 'I am ready not only to be bound, but to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' A well-shielded established mind in the comfort and hope of the gospel; unless we be thus prepared and armed with a mortified heart, and a thorough persuasion of the truth and worth of gospel privileges, and thereupon a resolution to encounter all difficulties and hardships, we shall not long be faithful to Christ; but after we have launched out into the deep with him we shall be ready to run ashore again. Now most Christians are not mortified, and so they trip up their own heels. Most Christians are not resolved, and so take to religion as a walk for recreation, not a journey, so as to be prepared for all weathers.

3. When they come, bear them with more patience. A resolution which we thought strong out of a trial, is often found weak in a trial; for we have other apprehensions of things when we know them by experience, of what we have when we know them only by guess and imagination. Therefore, notwithstanding expectation and preparation, there must be a care of patience in troubles and afflictions, that we bear them with an equal and Christian mind; not suffering as perforce, by compulsion and constraint, but willingly: it is not enough to bear the cross, but according to Christ's law we must take it up. It is said of the three children, Dan. 3:28, that they yielded their bodies willingly, cheerfully suffered themselves to be cast into

the furnace, rather than worship any but the true God. Many suffer, but it is unwillingly, and with repining and impatience, under the hand of God, like refractory oxen that draw back, and are loath to submit their necks to the yoke. Patience perforce, is no true patience, little better than the suffering of the devils and damned in hell, who suffer misery and torment against their wills. Rebellion, murmuring, and want of subjection is the very curse of crosses: the sacrifice that went struggling to the altar among the heathen was counted unlucky. Two things feed this impatience:—

[1.] Men think none suffer as they do: 'Is any sorrow like unto my sorrow?' Lam. 1:21. Every one hath the greatest sense of his own burden, therefore they think none hath so heavy and grievous an one as they have. It were well if they did this in feeling of sin. Paul felt his burden greatest in that respect: 1 Tim. 1:15, 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' But alas! in afflictions, all God's children have their trials; many fare more grievous. When you lament the feared loss of an only child, what think you of the Virgin Mary? Luke 2:35, 'A sword shall pierce through thy soul.' Generally, 1 Peter 5:9, 'The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.' Every Christian hath his measure of hardship and suffering; you are not singular and alone; your lot is no harder than the rest of the saints of God through the world; others are poor, and carry it well, and are cheerful; such an one under a painful disease, very patient in an acute fever, racked with stone, &c. If they, why not thou?

[2.] They could bear any other cross but this that is now upon them. Christ biddeth us to take up the cross indefinitely, whatever God is pleased to lay upon us; we must not be our own carvers, but stand to God's allowance. The wise physician knoweth in what vein to strike. God knoweth us best, and what is fit for us. Many in their troubles

wish God would afflict them in any other kind, lay any trouble upon them but that which is laid, and think they could bear it better. The poor man wisheth any other cross but poverty; the sick man he could bear poverty better than pain or sickness; he that hath a long and lingering sickness wisheth for a sharp fit, so it might be short; e contra, another that hath a sharp and violent sickness had rather have a lingering distemper. Thus apt are we to dislike our cross which God layeth on us for the present. This is disobedience and folly too; for if God should leave us to ourselves to choose our own crosses, we should choose that affliction which is hurtful and dangerous for us.

Doct. 2. That in our afflictions we should run to God by prayer. So doth David here, so should we.

1. We may do so.

2. We must do so.

1. We may do so; we have leave to come to God. Affliction is a fruit of sin, a part of the curse, introduced into the world upon the breach of the old covenant; yet then the throne of grace standeth open for us: when God seemeth most angry, we have liberty to come to him. In afflictions we are apt to think God an enemy, and that he beginneth to put the old covenant in suit against us; but our trouble should not be our discouragement, but our excitement; the throne of grace was for such an hour: Heb. 4:16, 'Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need;' and it is God's allowance: James 5:13, 'Is any among you afflicted? let him pray: is any merry? let him sing psalms.'

2. We must come; it is a duty God hath required at our hands: Ps. 50:15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble;' and Job 22:27, 'Thou

shalt make thy prayer, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.' God will have us come and speak to him in our most serious frame, and act faith by putting promises in suit, and take new vows and resolutions to part with sin, when we feel the bitter effects of it. He knoweth it preventeth distracting fears and cares, when we can commend our condition to his pity and powerful providence: Phil. 4:7, in every thing we are to make our requests known to God; and he knoweth this maketh us sensible of his providence and dominion over us in all conditions. Prayer is an acknowledgment of his sovereignty over all causes and events; the affliction could not come without his appointment, nor go away without his leave: it is a kind of breaking prison, to hope to get through without supplication to God: Job 34:28, 29, 'So that they cause the cry of the poor to come unto him, and he heareth the cry of the afflicted: when he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be against a nation, or against a person only.'

Use 1. It informeth us of the goodness of God, that he is willing to receive us upon any terms. When afflictions drive us to him, he doth not turn away his face from us. Those very prayers that are extorted from us by necessity, he accepts as a piece of worship done to him, provided we do not neglect him upon other occasions, for that is hypocrisy: Job 27:10, 'Will he delight himself in the Almighty? let him always call upon God.' We ought not therefore to be discouraged if our acquaintance with God begin in the time of our afflictions, and these set us a-work to think of him. Man will say, You come to me in your necessity; but then God is willing to receive us. Christ had never heard of many, if their necessities had not brought them to him—palsy, possession, deaf, dumb, fevers. Long would God sit upon the throne of grace unemployed if he did not send trouble and secret rack with it to bring us into his presence; so that that which in

appearance doth drive us off from him, doth in effect make us draw near to him.

2. It informeth us of the folly of them that neglect God in their troubles: Dan. 9:13, 'All this is come upon us, yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God.' You defeat the dispensation; now you should make up your former negligence. When we are pressed hard on all hands it should put an edge upon our prayers, otherwise our afflictions will turn to a sad account; when God sendeth a tempest after us, and this will not bring us back to him; we are summoned to make our appearance, and will not come. Joab would not come till Absalom set his barley-field on fire.

Use 2. To encourage us to come to God in our afflictions. Now is a time to put the promises in suit, to begin an interest if we have none, to make use of it if we have any; then our weakness and nothingness is discovered, that we may more apply ourselves to God; and a time of need will be a time of help: Ps. 46:1, 'God is a refuge for us, a very present help in trouble;' that is, when trouble is trouble indeed, then therefore we should call for it most earnestly; a necessitous creature is a fit object for mercy. You expound providences amiss if you think afflictions are a casting off. No; they are God's voice calling you, nay, his hand pulling you to him. Blessed seasons to bring God and us together; then God's aim is accomplished: Hosea 5:15, 'I will go, and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early;' Isa. 26:16, 'Lord in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.' Afflictions do not work thus simply, for then they would work upon all, but as accompanied with some drawings of the Spirit. Every condition is blessed when it bringeth you nearer unto God; though crosses be great trials to any, yet if they chase us to the throne of grace, God is not wholly gone, but hath left

somewhat behind him to draw us to him. It is desertion in point of felicity, but not in point of grace.

Doct. 3. One great request of the children of God in prayer is that he would consider their affliction.

This David promiseth in the first place. So elsewhere: Ps. 132:1, 'Remember David, O Lord, and all his afflictions.' He beggeth God to take notice of his person and condition. So also Ps. 25:18, 'Look upon my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins.' He beggeth that his groans might not be passed over. So Hezekiah, Isa. 37:17, where many words are used to this effect: 'Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear; open thine eyes, and see, and hear all the words that Sennacherib hath sent to reproach the living God.' If God would but take notice, hear, and see, all would be well. And as for personal calamities, so in public and church cases: Ps. 80:14, 'Return, we beseech thee, O Lord God of hosts; look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine.' If God will but come and see, it is enough. So in the Lamentations, chap. 1:9, 'O Lord, behold my affliction, for the enemy hath magnified himself.' So again, ver. 11, 'See, O Lord, and consider, for I am become vile.' Yet again, ver. 20, 'Behold, O Lord, for I am in distress.' Thus do the children of God lay open their miseries before him, in confidence of his pity.

But why do the children of God press this point so earnestly, as if they did doubt of his providence and omniscieny? God knoweth all things, and can forget nothing. I answer—

1. Though God be not ignorant and unmindful of our condition, yet we are to put him in remembrance: Isa. 62:6, 'Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.' Christ is the advocate, we are solicitors and remembrancers for others, and



humble supplicants for ourselves. Indeed, in so doing, we do not put God in mind, but put ourselves in mind of the providence of God, which is most graciously conversant about us in our afflicted condition, which is a great comfort and support to us. The moving of God to consider begets faith in us that he will consider; and so we wrestle with God, that we may catch a heat ourselves.

2. The sight of misery is a real argument. It is clear that we are to use arguments in prayer; for God dealeth with us as rational creatures, and as such we are to deal too with him. Now, among arguments, our afflictions and miseries are real ones; they have a voice to work upon his pity, and to move him to have mercy upon us. He being inclined to compassion, his eye doth affect his heart, as a beggar, to move pity, will not only plead with his tongue, but uncover his sores; so do the saints lay open their misery, and unfold their estate before the Lord; for God so loveth his people, that the very show of their miseries moveth him to help them. Thus God saith that he would show mercy to his people, 'for I have seen with mine eyes,' Zech. 9:8. God seeth our case, and every degree of our trouble is marked by him, which bringeth it the nearer to his heart; yea, God's people themselves are comforted under their saddest sufferings by the Lord's seeing and marking thereof: Ps. 10:14, 'Thou hast seen it, for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand.' It is enough to them thou hast seen it. So Ps. 31:7, 'I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy, for thou hast considered my trouble, and known my soul in adversities.' It is a mighty comfort that God hath an eye upon them in particular, and hath friendly affections towards them.

3. The Lord is said to consider when he doth in effect declare his not forgetting, or remembering us for good; and therefore, though God cannot but see and consider our trouble, yet we cannot rest satisfied with it, till by real effects he maketh it evident, that we may know,

and all the world may know, that he doth consider us, and regard our condition; and this is that which saints beg so earnestly, that he would, by some act or work, experiment the truth, or make it appear that he hath heard and seen and taken notice of our sorrows. Though the saints believe his omniscieny and particular providence, yet they cannot rest satisfied till they feel it by some effect, by giving real support or help in need, according to covenant; and so must all the places before mentioned be interpreted.

Use. When we, or the church of God, or any of the people of God, are in any distress—

1. Let us go to God and beg that we may see, and the world may see, that he hath regard to us in our sorrows, and doth not wholly pass us over. To this end, impress upon your hearts the belief of these two things—the eye of his pity, and the arm of his power.

[1.] The eye of his pity, which is more than bare omniscieny; it imports his knowledge accompanied with a tender love. This is often spoken of in scripture: Exod. 2:25, 'God looked on the children of Israel, and had respect to them.' So Exod. 3:7, 'And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, and have known their sorrows;' Acts 7:34, ἰδὼν εἶδον, 'I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people;' or seeing, I have seen. The very sight of God is a comfort and support to a sinking soul; it is some comfort to us to have our crosses known to such as we are assured do love us, if they condole with us, though they be not able to help us; so that the Lord looketh upon us with a merciful, pitiful eye.

[2.] As God will cast the eye of his pity on us, so he will put forth the arm of his power; as he hath a merciful eye, so he hath a powerful hand, ready to help; though sometimes we see nothing of this: 2

Chron. 16:9, 'For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him.' There is his care and effective providence.

2. Be sure you keep up your qualification: 'I do not forget thy law.' Many times when men in their prosperity do not regard God and his commandments, he regardeth them in their straits; for though we forget the duty of children, he doth not forget the mercies of a father. But surely he will not forget them that do not forget his law; therefore it is not credible that God should forget us and our condition, that we should be more mindful of his law than he of our affliction. He that puts us in mind of his law will also put himself in mind of the troubles we endure for the keeping of it; for certainly God is more mindful of his part of the covenant than we can be of ours. See Christ's argument, John 17:10, 'And all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.'

Doct. 4. We may ask deliverance from temporal troubles; not only support, but deliverance. So doth David.

1. God hath promised: Ps. 50:15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.'

2. Much of God is discovered in it. His wisdom: 2 Peter 2:9, 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation.' We are at a loss many times, but God is never at a loss. His power: Dan. 3:17, 'If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king;' when the wrath of the king was great, and the fiery furnace burning before them. His goodness: God is sufficiently inclined to it by his own grace, and delights to do it: Ps. 149:4, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in his people; he will beautify the meek with salvation.' He loveth the person of believers, and loveth their prosperity and happiness, and delighteth to see them do well in

the world. He hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servants, Ps. 35:27, which is a good encouragement to pray for it: 2 Sam. 14:1, 'Joab perceived that the king's heart was towards Absalom.' Yea, not only his love, but the constancy and unweariedness of his love: 2 Cor. 1:10, 'Who delivereth us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' There are all respects of time. Solomon saith, Prov. 25:17, 'Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house, lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.' Men waste by giving, but I Am is God's name; we still need, and he is still a-giving: 2 Tim. 3:11, 'Thou hast fully known my persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, &c.; but out of them all the Lord delivered me.' So many troubles, so many gracious experiences of God: Ps. 34:19, 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all;' Job 5:19, 'He shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea, in seven shall no evil touch thee.' Seven is the number of perfection. God can and doth deliver us as often as we need deliverance; when clouds return after the rain, or one evil treadeth on the heels of another; he hath a succession of mercies, for our succession of sorrows. We are dismayed when we see one trouble is over and another cometh. We have the same God still, the same certainty of his mercy in delivering. Many times God so delivereth that the troublers of his people shall come in their room: Prov. 11:8, 'The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead;' as the leprosy of Naaman went to Gehazi. His faithfulness, which he hath laid at pledge with us, that he will make a way to escape: 1 Cor. 10:13, 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way for you to escape, that you may be able to bear it.' His dominion and sovereignty: Ps. 44:4, 'Thou art my king, O God; command deliverances for Jacob.' He hath all things at his command, all second causes, the hearts of his enemies.

3. We have greater opportunities to serve God: Ps. 119:134, 'Deliver me from the oppression of man, so will I keep thy precepts;' Luke 1:74, 75, 'That he would grant unto us that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, should serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.'

Use. They are too nice that think we may not ask of God temporal mercies. It is lawful to ask them if we ask them lawfully, with a submission to God, and for his glory, that we may serve him more cheerfully; so you may ask a deliverance out of your troubles.

Doct. 5. Those that would have God to deliver them out of their afflictions should be sure they do not forsake their duty.

All the evil that David suffered could not weaken his love to the law of God, nor draw him from the obedience of it. And what was the issue? He pleadeth this in prayer to God.

Reason 1. Because if we do so, the nature of our sufferings is altered, both as to God and man. As to man, we do not suffer as evil-doers: 1 Peter 4:15, 'But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other men's matters;' which will much darken our comfort and glory in suffering; though for the main you have an interest in God, if by your miscarriage you have deserved the stroke of human justice. As to God, your sufferings are not castigatory, but probatory: Rev. 2:10, 'The devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried;' not punished, but tried.

Reason 2. Because uprightness giveth boldness with God in prayer: 1 John 3:21, 'If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.' So Paul showeth he was capable of their prayers, or a fit object of them: Heb. 13:18, 'Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.' It is an error to

think that justification giveth us only comfortable access to God, and sanctification hath no influence at all upon it. We lie in some secret sin, then our plea is spoiled. If God give thee a heart to adhere close to him in a constant course of obedience, the more you may be assured to be delivered. The joy of our faith is mightily confirmed by the conscience of our constant respect and observance of the word of God, and firm adherence to him.

Use. If we would boldly come to God in our straits, let us not forget or forsake our duty, nor throw off the profession of godliness, whatever we suffer from men: Ps. 44:17, 'All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant.' Yea, from God; though he seem to cast us off, taketh no care of us: Job 13:15, 'Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him.' Diogenes Laertius telleth us of a cynic that went to Athens to Antisthenes to be taught by him; when often met with a repulse, yet still insisted on his request.

## **SERMON CLXXII**

### **Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.—VER. 154**

IN this verse are three requests, and all backed with one and the same argument.

1. The three requests are—

[1.] That God would own his cause.

[2.] Deliver him out of his troubles.

[3.] And in the meantime, before the deliverance came, quicken him.

In the first he intimateth the right of his cause, and that he was unjustly vexed by wicked men; therefore, as burdened with their calumnies, he desireth God to undertake his defence, 'plead my cause.'

In the second he representeth the misery and helplessness of his condition; therefore, as oppressed by violence, he saith, 'deliver me;' or, as the words will bear, 'redeem me.'

In the third; his own weakness and readiness to faint under this burden; therefore, 'quicken me.'

Or, in short, with respect to the injustice of his adversaries, 'plead my cause;' with respect to the misery of his condition, 'deliver me;' with respect to the weakness and imbecility of his own heart, 'quicken me.' God is his people's patron, to defend their cause; his people's redeemer, to rescue them out of their troubles; the author and fountain of their life, to quicken them and support them: accordingly we may beg of him, as the Psalmist doth here, defence of our cause, the deliverance of our persons, and the support of our hearts.

2. The reason and ground of asking, 'According to thy word.' This last clause must be applied to all the branches of the prayer: plead my cause, according to thy word; deliver me, according to thy word; quicken me, according to thy word: for God in his word engageth for all, to be advocate, redeemer, and fountain of life. This word that David buildeth upon was either the general promises, 'made to them that keep the law, or some particular promise made to himself by the prophets of that time. The sum of all is this: If we believe the word of God to be true, we may in a righteous cause with comfort and confidence ask defence, deliverance, and support.

I begin with the first request, plead my cause.

Doct. When we have to do with unjust and wicked adversaries, we should desire God to plead our cause; or, as the original will bear, to judge our judgment, or contend our contention—κρίνον τὴν κρίσιν μου, Septuagint—litiga litem meam. So others.

There is a threefold cause that cometh usually into debate:—

1. Inter hominem et hominem, between man and man; as between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent: Gen. 3:15, 'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel;' those that are born after the flesh, and those that are born after the spirit: Gal. 4:29, 'He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit;' the children of God and men of this world: John 15:19, 'If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.' As between wolf and lamb, raven and dove. This is an old controversy, that will never be reconciled. It is often set afoot in kingdoms, in cities, in townships, in villages, and families, and will continue till the world's end. For while there are two seeds, there will be strifes and enmities. Now, in this quarrel and strife, sometimes success is cast on this side, sometimes on that, as God seeth fit either to favour, or to try and correct his servants. Usually the world prevaieth, being more numerous; only let me tell you, this controversy doth not always appear to the world unveiled or bare-faced. Enmity to godliness is such an odious thing in itself, and hath so often miscarried, that it is not for its interest to appear openly and in its own colours, but under the mask and disguise of other pretences, which are the more plausibly taken on when the holy seed have scandalised their profession, and made the



way of truth to be evil-spoken of; and yet it is the old enmity and antipathy still, as appeareth by the parties contesting, their aims and designs, and the means and ways they use to compass them, with scorning of faith and piety.

2. Inter hominem et diabolum, between man and the devil: he is called ἀντίδικος, the adversary, 1 Peter 5:8, 'Your adversary the devil like a roaring lion walketh about continually seeking whom he may devour;' and such an adversary as hath law of his side, and by law would carry it against all the children of fallen Adam, if there were not a new court erected, where grace taketh the throne. So Rev. 12:10, he is called 'the accuser of the brethren;' but it is our comfort that as there is an accuser, so there is an advocate: 1 John 2:1, 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who also is the propitiation for our sins.' We shall do well to put our cause into his hands, and then it cannot miscarry. Satan will not be more ready to accuse than Christ to plead for us; and he hath a greater interest in the court of heaven than our adversary hath, stronger arguments to plead, merits to represent; therefore make him your attorney, to appear in court for you.

3. Inter hominem et Deum. God hath a controversy with us about the breach of his law, and our undutiful carriage to him. Now you can never reason it out with God. It was Job's presumption to think that he could order his cause before him: Job 23:3–5, 'Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments: I would know the words which he would answer me; and understand what he would say unto me.' No; there is no trusting to the equity of our cause, or hope to clear ourselves before God's judgment-seat. We have no way left but submitting and humbling ourselves, and suing out our pardon in a broken-hearted manner; no way but yielding to

the justice of the first covenant, and putting in the plea of favour and grace according to the second: Ps. 130:3, 4, 'If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who can stand? but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.' If you deny or excuse sin, you stick to the first covenant, and plead innocency, and then God will deal with you according to the tenor of strict justice; but if you humbly confess sin, and acknowledge your guiltiness and shame, then you may plead mercy. Justice dealeth with the innocent, mercy with the guilty.

We speak now of the first, of the strife between men and men, or the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, who do not only oppress them by violence, but seem to have a plea against them in law, because of the seeming justice of their quarrel, and the calumnies and slanders wherewith they burden their cause. Therefore David beggeth God to plead his cause for him; and elsewhere, that God would stand by him, not only as a champion and second, but as a patron and advocate: Ps. 35:1, 'Plead my cause against them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me;' as they allege false things against him, and condemn him as being in an evil cause and evil way: so plead my cause against them that strive with me; as they opposed him with violence, so fight against them that fight against me.

In this point—

1. The nature of God's pleading our cause.
2. The necessity of it.
3. What hopes there are that he will plead the cause of his people.

First, The nature of this pleading would first be explained; and here

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1. In what quality God pleadeth for us. In all judicial proceedings there are the principal contending persons, and those are called *ultor et reus*, the plaintiff and defendant; and the manner of proceeding in judgment is, that the plaintiff bringeth forth his bill, and the defendant his answer. But besides these principal contending persons, there are the witnesses, the advocate, the judge. Now, in some sense God might be all these, *testis, advocatus, et judex*, without any wrong and injustice. Our witness to attest for us, as he knoweth all things, and knoweth our hearts; for as such do the saints often appeal to him. Our advocate to plead for us, for he is tender of the credit of his people, and hath undertaken to preserve them from the strife of tongues: Ps. 31:20, 'Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of men, thou shalt keep them secretly in thy pavilion from the strife of tongues.' As a judge to give sentence in our behalf, or such a decree whereby the adversary may be convinced of our righteous cause, and our innocency cleared; and all this may be called God's pleading, either as *testis, advocatus, or judex*. But I rather confine it to the last. God's pleading is rather as a judge; not as *advocatus*, but as *patronus*; that is a more proper and honourable name. Zonaras tells us that the Romans called their patrons *τοῦς κηδεμονικοῦς*; and it was enacted in the law of the twelve tables, *si patronus clienti fraudem fecerit, sacer esto*. If any man had deceived his client, he was accursed, devoted to slaughter, and any man might kill him. *Cientes quasi colentes, patroni quasi patres*, saith Servius. So that to deceive a client was as to deceive a son. This was begun by Romulus, who commended the common people and worser sort to the nobles, leaving every man his liberty to choose whom he would for his patron; and that defence of them was called patronage; and the *jus patronatus* during this constitution consisted in these duties

and offices; they were to defend the poor in judgment, to answer for them in all points of law; they were to take care of them that none might wrong them present or absent; they were *omnem accusatoris impetum sustinere*; and this *jus patronatus* was of such authority among the ancients, that Marcus Cato telleth us that first the name of father was most sacred, next that of patron. It were long to say all that might be said of them; this is enough, that their principal work was to be present at all causes wherein their poor client was concerned, and to appear for him and defend him, as they would their own cause. Advocates were taken in afterwards, when laws were multiplied, to suggest what was law; they were men skilful in the law. See Hall's lexicon. Now thus it is God pleads the cause of his people as their patron, who hath taken them into his tutelage and clientship; not as interceder, but defender. They have betaken themselves to his tuition, and desire to honour and serve him; God will therefore take part with them against their enemies. He doth not only hear pleas and debates on either side, but interposeth as the patron and chief party concerned in the strife, and having withal the power of a judge, will pass sentence on their behalf, and see it executed.

2. The manner of God's pleading. It is not a verbal or vocal, but a real and active plea. God pleadeth not by words, but by deeds, by his judgments, and powerful providence, righting the wrongs done to them. For since, as I said, there concur in God the relations of *judex* and *patronus*, he maketh the one serviceable to the other. As their *patronus* he owneth the cause, taketh it upon himself, as the answerable party, and then useth his judicial power in defence of his people. Now the property of a judge is to pronounce sentence, and then to put his sentence in execution. God hath pronounced sentence in his word, and he puts the sentence in execution in his providence; and that is God's pleading. Many times there is *sententia lata*, but *dilata*; long ago was sentence passed, but it is not speedily executed,

Eccles. 8:11. Because sentence is not speedily executed upon an evil-doer, therefore do they vaunt and insult over his people, as if God had forsaken and disclaimed them, and would never more own their cause and quarrel; but when God seeth fit to appear, and to show himself in this mixed relation of judge and patron, the world will have other thoughts of their cause; and therefore, Isa. 3:13, 'The Lord standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge his people.' He will bring matters under a review, and will powerfully show himself against their oppressors. To this pleading Job alludeth when he saith, Job 23:6, 'Will he plead against me with his great power?' if he should use his almighty and invincible power against me, he would easily ruin me. So Ezek. 38:22, 'I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood;' against Gog and Magog, that is, the Scythians, Turks, and Tartars. So that you see that God's pleading is not by speaking, or by word of mouth, but by the vengeance of his providence against those that wrong his people. So against Babylon: Jer. 51:36, 'Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee.' But that this is a mixed act of patron and judge, see Micah 7:9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him; until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.' When God's people provoke him to anger by their sins, he casteth them into troubles; and then their adversaries are chief, and their cause is much darkened and obscured: all this while God is pleading against them, but it is not the enemies' quarrel, but his own vindication of abused mercy and goodness. But when once the controversy is taken up between God and them, by their submission, and clearing his justice, and imploring his mercy, then God will plead their cause, and take their part against the instruments of his vengeance (and clear their righteous cause), who only sought their own ends in afflicting them. When God hath exercised their humility and patience, he will thus do. And how, I pray you, will he plead for

them? The text saith there, by executing judgment for them; that is, by putting his sentence in execution, and then will restore to them their wonted privileges, and own them in the public view of all, and make manifest they are his: he will bring them forth to the light, and they shall see his righteousness.

3. The effect of God's pleading, which is the clearing of God's people, and the convincing of their adversaries; which God doth partly by the eminency and notableness of the providences whereby he delivereth his people, and the marks of his favour put upon them: Neh. 6:16, 'And it came to pass that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.' Their own judgments were convinced of their folly in opposing the Jews; the extraordinary success showed the hand of God was in it: by such incredible and remarkable occurrences doth God bring about their deliverance. So Micah 7:10, when God shall plead her cause, 'Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? mine eyes shall behold her; now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets.' Those who mocked her faith should be confounded at the sight of her deliverance. Thus God delights to make the happiness of his people conspicuous. So Rev. 3:9, 'Behold I will make them which are of the synagogue of Satan (which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie), behold I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.' He will make their enemies to know that he hath loved them, and ask them forgiveness for the wrongs and outrages done to them. Partly by the convictions of his Spirit, undeceiving the world, and reproving them for the hatred and malice against his people: John 16:8, 'The Comforter, when he is come, shall reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.' The word is ἐλέγξει, not comfort,

but convince or reprove; put them to silence, so as they shall not in reason gainsay. The object, the world, the unconverted, if not the reprobate. The things whereof convinced, of sin and righteousness and judgment, of the truth of Christ's person and doctrine. This was spoken for the comfort of the disciples, who were to go abroad and beat the devil out of his territories, by the doctrine of the cross, that were weak men destitute of all worldly sufficiencies and props and aids. Their master suffered as a seducer, their doctrine cross to men's carnal interests, for them in this manner to venture upon the raging world was a heavy discouraging thing. Now the Spirit should come and convince the opposing world, so far that some, terrified before, brought to evangelical repentance: Acts 2:37, 'Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart;' soon desire to share in their great privilege: Acts 8:18, 19, 'And when Simon saw that through laying on the apostles' hands, the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost;' but he was yet in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. Some almost persuaded: Acts 26:28, 'Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' Some forced to magnify them, who did not join with them: Acts 5:13, 'And of the rest, durst no man join himself to them, but the people magnified them.' Some would have worshipped them, being yet pagans: Acts 14:11–13, 'And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lift up their voices, saying, in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. Then the priests of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.' Others bridled that were afraid to meddle with them: Acts 5:34, 35, 'Then stood there up one in the council, a pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space, and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves, what ye intend to do

as touching these men.' That Christ, that Messiah, that righteous person, one able to vanquish the devil, thus without any visible force, and with mere spiritual weapons, by this conviction of the Spirit, did the Lord subdue the world to the owning and receiving Christ's kingdom; at least, not go on in a high hand to oppose it. God cleared Christ as righteous, and Lord.

Secondly, The necessity of this pleading.

1. Because the people of God are often in such a condition that none will plead their cause unless the Lord plead it; and therefore we are driven to him as our judge and patron. God's design is not to gain the world by pomp and force, but by spiritual evidence and power; and therefore, as to externals, it is often worse with his people than with others; for the world is upon their trial, and therefore though God will give sufficient means of conviction, yet not always such evident marks of his favour to the best cause in temporal things as that mere sense shall lead them to embrace it. No; he will only set a good cause a-foot, and then suffer it to be exposed to the hatred of the world, and sometimes to be overborne as to any temporal interest it can get, that the mere evidence and love of truth may gain men, and not any secular motives. All the countenance and owning God will give to it is by infusing courage and constancy to his servants to suffer for it, and so they overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and not loving their lives to the death, Rev. 12:11. He speaketh of such a time when the church seemeth weakest, like a poor woman travailing; and her enemies seem strongest, like a great red dragon ready to devour the child as soon as born. Now, though at such a time the church is overcoming, and the devil and his instruments are but pulling down their own throne, and establishing Christ's while they are shedding the blood of his saints, yet none of this appeareth and is visibly to be seen. Though suffering be a feeling and ratifying of the truth, yet to the



world's eye it seemeth a suppressing and overbearing of it. Therefore few will own such a despised, hated, persecuted way; and the difficulty is the greater when there is much of God's truth owned by the persecuting side, and the contest is not about the main of Christianity, but some lesser truths, and so the opposition is more disguised; then certainly it may be said, Isa. 59:4, 'None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth;' all half friends are discouraged, therefore nothing is left the people of God, but their prayers, 'Lord plead my cause.' David in the text appealeth to God's judgment when he was deserted by men, burdened by prejudices, oppressed by man's wrong judgment. So often God's people are not able to defend themselves, and few in the world will own them, or be advocates for them, then God will take their cause in hand. In the civil law, if a man could not get an advocate, *metu adversarii*, the judge was to appoint him one to plead for him; so God taketh notice of his people's condition: Jer. 30:13, 'There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up.' Often among men none can or dareth undertake the defence and patronage of oppressed right.

2. Though we have a good cause and hopeful instruments, yet we cannot plead it with any effect till God show himself from heaven. Nay, though the cause be never so right and just, and instruments and means hopeful, yet it requireth God's power to keep it afoot; for the justice of the cause must not be relied on, nor probable means rested in; but God must have the trust of the cause, and the glory of maintaining it; otherwise by our own ill managing, or by some secret and unseen opposition, it will miscarry: Ps. 9:4, 'Thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right.' This is a work wherein God will be seen, while it is in agitation, or under decision. God will have the trust, and when it is over, he will have all the glory.

Thirdly, What hopes or grounds there are to expect that God will plead the cause of his people.

1. He can.

2. He will. Infinite power and infinite justice can do it.

1. He can. The Lord is able; he that pleadeth our cause hath infinite power: Prov. 23:11, 'Their redeemer is mighty, he shall plead their cause with thee.' It is easy to bear down a few afflicted creatures, that have no strength or heart to oppose, being in bonds, and under oppression; but there is a mighty God, who when he pleadeth any one's cause, he will do it to the purpose, really and effectually delivering them for whom he pleadeth: Jer. 50:34, 'Their redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is his name; he will thoroughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon.'

2. He will, considering—

[1.] Their relation to God.

[2.] God's relation to them and to the whole world.

[1.] Because of their relation to him. The dominus, the lord whom they had chosen, was to be their patronus. They that have put themselves under God's protection, and are faithful to him, keeping close to his word, he will plead their cause, and manage it as his own: Isa. 51:22, 'Thus saith thy Lord, the Lord and thy God, that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold I have taken out of thy hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again.' He being their sovereign Lord, had undertaken to protect his servants; he counteth the wrongs done to them done to

himself: Acts 9:4, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' especially since molested for his truth.

[2.] Because of his relation to them. He is the supreme potentate and the righteous judge of the world, and so bound by his office to defend the weak and innocent when oppressed: Ps. 146:7, 'He executeth judgment for the oppressed. Those that should maintain right upon earth, and punish wrongs, are often prevaricators; but the judge of all the earth will do right; he is an impartial judge, and will maintain the cause of his people: Prov. 22:22, 23, 'Rob not the poor, because he is poor, neither oppress the afflicted in the gate; for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.' Though no relation to him, yet, if poor, if afflicted, if destitute of human help, the Lord taketh himself to be the patron of all such, much more his people.

Use 1. To rebuke our fears and misgiving of heart. When we see the best men go to the wall, and to be made objects of scorn and spite, we are apt to say, as the church doth in the prophet Isaiah, chap. 40:27, 'My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God;' that is, in effect, that God doth wholly neglect them, and will not plead their cause. Oh no! He knoweth what strife there is between us and our adversaries, and how good our cause is, and how much he is concerned in it; only we must wait his leisure, and bear his indignation until he plead. True submission to God ought to prescribe no day to him, but refer all to his will.

Use 2. Let us commit our cause to the Lord, as the expression is, Job 5:8, 'I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause;' who is the friend and advocate of the afflicted, and hath promised to be so, and to keep us from the hand of the wicked and the mouth of the wicked; from their hand and violence so far as it

shall be for his glory: Isa. 49:25, 'I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children;' and from the mouth of the wicked: Ps. 5:15, 'He saveth the poor from the sword, and from their mouth, and from the hand of the mighty;' from slanders that may endanger their life and credit. So ver. 21, 'Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue;' from their bitter reproaches. Therefore commit your cause to God. But then—

1. Be sure that your cause be good, for God will not be the patron of sin. Unless he hath passed sentence for us in his word, it is boldness to appeal to him; as Baalam, that would hire God by sacrifices to curse his people. Hasty appeals to God in our passion and revengeful humours are a great dishonour to him. Sarah appealed: Gen. 15:3, 'The Lord judge between me and thee;' and David appealed: 1 Sam. 24:15, 'The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between thee and me, and see and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thy hand.' But there was more of justice in David's appeal in the case between him and Saul than in Sarah's appeal in the case between her and Abraham; it would have been ill for her if God had taken her at her word; it showeth that even God's children are too apt to intitle him to their private passions.

2. Let us be sure that there be no controversy between God and our persons, when yet our cause is good. The Israelites had a good cause, Judges 20, but there was once and again a great slaughter made of them, before they had reconciled themselves to God. There must be a good conscience as well as a good cause, otherwise God will plead his controversy against us before he will plead our controversy against our enemies: Jer. 2:35, 'Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger will turn from me: behold I will plead with thee, because thou sayest I have not sinned.' Because we have a good cause, we think God hath no cause to be angry with us; therefore he

will first plead in judgment against us. So Hosea 12:2, 'The Lord hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways, according to his doings will he recompense him.' Though God may approve what is right in worship and profession, yet he will punish our shameful disorders and unanswerable walking in his people.

3. Let us pray in a right manner, with confidence, with earnestness.

[1.] Confidence that God will plead our cause when he seeth it good and for his own glory, whether there be any likelihood of it, yea or no; for he hath promised to support the weak and humble, and protect the innocent against their oppressors: Ps. 140:12, 'I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.' God is party with you, not against you, and leave him to his own ways and means. Faith should support us when sense yieldeth little comfort and hope. He knoweth how to justify your cause, and deliver your persons; and you should know that he will do it, and can do it, though the way be not evident to you, and God seem to sit still for a while.

[2.] Earnestly. Oh! be not cold in the church's suit. If you be Sion's friends, and are willing to take share and lot with God's people, awaken him by your incessant cries. Nay, it is God's cause: Ps. 74:22, 'Arise, O Lord, plead thine own cause; remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily.' The godly are not maligned for their sins, but their righteousness. So Ps. 35:23, 'Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, even unto my cause, my God and my Lord.' There is a long suit depending between the church of God and her enemies; desire that God would determine it, and declare what is right and what is wrong.

Secondly, He begged God in the text to redeem or deliver him; the word in the text, גֹּאֵל, the usual word for goël, redeemer; the Septuagint, λύτρωσαί με, 'ransom me.' Here he craveth that as his cause might be in safety, so his person.

Doct. We may beg a deliverance or a release from our troubles, provided we do not beg it out of an impatience of the flesh, but a desire of God's glory.

God delights to be employed in this work. What hath he been doing all along in all ages of the world, but delivering his people from those that oppressed them? He delivered Jacob from the fury of Esau; Joseph from the malice of his brethren: Gen. 37:21, 'And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, saying, Let us not kill him.' Daniel from the lions' den: Dan. 6:22, 'My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me, and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.' Peter from prison: Acts 12:11, 'And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.' And will not he do the like for his suffering servants? How came his hand to be out? he delivered Israel out of Egypt, out of Babylon; he can do it again, it doth not cost him much labour: Ps. 68:2, 'As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.' Therefore refer your deliverance to God, and when you are in a way of duty, be not thoughtful about it: there is a price paid for it; Christ redeemed us from temporal adversity so far as it may be a snare to us. God hath his times; we may see it, unless he hath a mind to sweep away the unthankful and froward generation that provoked him to so much anger: Num. 14:22, 23, 'Because all those men that have seen

my glory, and my miracles which I did in Egypt, in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened unto my voice: surely they shall not see the land, which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it;' Jer. 29:31, 32, 'Thus saith the Lord concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite, Because that Shemaiah hath prophesied unto you, and I sent him not, and he caused you to trust in a lie; therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his seed; he shall not have a man to dwell among this people, neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people, saith the Lord; because he hath taught rebellion against the Lord.' It may be, we may be more broken and afflicted first: Deut. 32:36, 'For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left.' Oh! let us desire to see the good of his chosen: Ps. 106:5, 'That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.' It is a favour: Ps. 50:23, 'Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me; to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God.'

Thirdly, For quickening, 'Quicken me;' in which he prayeth either to be kept alive till the promises be fulfilled, or rather to be comforted and encouraged in waiting.

Doct. We need continual influence from God, and lively encouragement, especially in our troubles.

1. We are apt to faint before God showeth himself: Isa. 57:16, 'I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.' The devil's design is to tire and weary us out. Some are of a poor spirit, that they will tire before their strength faileth them: Prov. 24:10, 'If thou faint

in a day of adversity, thy strength is but small.' Yea, there is a readiness to faint in the best through many troubles, delayed hopes. Those that have upheld others by their good counsel are apt to sink themselves.

2. At least we are clogged, cannot so cheerfully wait upon God, and walk with him: Heb. 12:12, 'Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.' We grow weak, slothful, remiss in God's service. Fear and sorrow weakeneth the hands, indisposeth us for duty.

Use. Let us encourage ourselves, rouse up our heavy hearts, and wait for God's quickening; let us not give God cause by our negligence to deny support to us.

## **SERMON CLXXIII**



## **Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.—VER. 155**

DAVID had begged his own deliverance, as one of God's servants or clients, in the former verse; now he illustrateth his petition by showing the opposite state of the wicked. They could not with such confidence go to God, or put in such a plea for deliverance: 'Salvation is far from the wicked.' Some read it prayer-wise, Let salvation be far from the wicked; for in the original the verb is understood, and it is only there, Salvation far from the wicked; but most translations read it better proposition-wise; for as the man of God comforts himself in his own interest and hopes, so also in this, that God would not take part with the wicked enemies against him, who had no interest at all in his salvation and protecting providence, and therefore would keep him from their rage.

In the words—

1. An assertion.

2. The reason of it.

1. In the assertion we have the miserable condition of wicked men, salvation is far from them.

2. In the reason we have the evil disposition of wicked men, 'They seek not thy law;' which will give us the true notion and description of them, who are wicked men; such as seek not God's statutes, busy not themselves about religion, study not to please God.

In the words two propositions:—

Doct. 1. That salvation is far from the wicked.

Doct. 2. They are wicked who keep not God's statutes.

Doct. 1. That salvation is far from the wicked. Salvation is of two sorts—temporal and eternal. The proposition is true in both senses; they are far from salvation, and salvation is far from them. To be far from salvation is to be in a dangerous case, as to be far from light is to be in extreme darkness. To be far from God's law, ver. 150, is to be extremely wicked; to be far from oppression, Ps. 54:14, is to be in a most safe condition. So that the point is—

That the wicked are in a very dangerous case, both as to their temporal and eternal estate.

First, Temporal salvation is far from them, and they are in a dangerous condition as to their outward happiness. This seemeth to be the harder part, and to have most of paradox in it; but this will appear to you if you consider—

1. That all these outward things are at God's disposal, to give and take according to his own pleasure: Job. 1:21, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;' not the Sabeans and the Chaldeans: 1 Sam. 2:7, 'The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up.' He that cast the world into hills and valleys disposeth of the several conditions of men, that some shall be high and some low, some exalted, some dejected. All things that fall out in the world are not left to the dominion of fortune or blind chance, but governed by the wise providence of God: 'Their good is not in their hands,' Job 21:16.

2. That it belongeth to God, as the judge of the world, to see ut malis male sit, et bonis bene. Gen. 18:25, 'That be far from thee to do after

this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' Rom. 3:5, 'But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous that taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man.) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?' Job 34:17, 'Shall even he that hateth right govern? and wilt thou condemn him that is most just?' Job 34:11, 'For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways.' He is not indifferent to good and evil, and alike affected to the godly and the wicked; but hateth the one, and loveth the other. He hateth the wicked: Ps. 5:5, 'Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity;' and, on the other part, he loveth the good and the holy: Ps. 35:27, 'He hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servants;' it is his delight to see them happy and flourishing. This different respect is often spoken of in scripture: Ps. 31:23, 'The Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer.' That he will uphold and maintain those that are faithful to him, and avenge himself upon the pride and oppression of the wicked; though all the world be against the godly, God will preserve them and ruin the wicked, though all the world should let them alone. So 1 Peter 3:12, 'For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.' There is a watchful eye of God over the righteous, to supply their wants, to direct them in their ways, to uphold them against dangers, to comfort them in their griefs, to deliver them out of all their troubles. God hath an eye to take notice of their condition, and an ear to hear their prayers; but his face is set to pursue the wicked to their ruin: so that this is enough to assure us that holiness is the way to live blessedly, even in this life, where misery most aboundeth, because this is a part of the care that belongeth to the judge of the world.

3. Besides his general justice as the ruler and judge of the world, and the condecency that is in such a dispensation to the rectitude of God's nature, there is his covenant declared in his word, wherein he promiseth temporal happiness to the godly, and threateneth misery and punishment to the wicked. And God ever stood upon the truth of his word, to make it good in the eyes of the world; therefore it will be with men as their condition is set forth in the word of God. A promise there is as good as accomplishment, and a threatening as sure as performance; and therefore, accordingly as the word saith of them, so is salvation far or near from them. Now search all the word of God, and see if it speak anything of hope and comfort to the wicked, or them that make a trade of provoking God. Nay, they are well enough aware of that, and therefore will not come to the light, care not to busy themselves in the scriptures; for they say of them as Ahab of Micaiah, 'He prophesieth nothing but evil to me;' and justly enough, for they can see nothing there but their own doom. If they are evil, it can speak nothing but evil: Isa. 3:10, 11, 'Say ye unto the righteous, It shall be well with them; for they shall eat of the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked: it shall be ill with them; for the reward of his hands shall be given to him.' This is the tenor of the whole word of God: so Eccles. 8:12, 13, 'Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.' It is a certain truth; it is a certain evident truth, for it is *judicium certi axiomatis*. I do know and confidently affirm that it shall be well with them that fear God; but it shall not be well with the wicked, that is, it shall be very ill with them.

But here cometh in the great objection of sense, How can these things be so? We see the contrary, that all things come alike to all:

Eccles. 9:1, 2, 'The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.' That those outward things are given indifferently to good and bad, and the wicked are as free from temporal punishment as others, and enjoy all prosperity in this world, even sometimes to the envy and offence of God's children, and the hardening of their own hearts; and, which is more, that often it happeneth to the just according to the work of the wicked, Eccles. 8:14, and to the wicked according to the work of the righteous; that is, evil to good men, and good to evil men. As to outward things, the advantage is usually on the side of the worst.

Ans. 1. By concession; we must grant what is to be granted, that temporal things not being absolutely good or evil, the Lord taketh a liberty in the dispensation of them. The eternal promises and threatenings, being of things absolutely good and ill, are therefore absolute and peremptory. None that live godly can fail of the eternal promises; none that goeth on still in his trespasses can escape the eternal threatenings. But the temporal promises and threatenings, being of things not simply good and evil, are not so absolutely fixed, but God will take a liberty sometimes to cross his hands, out of his general indulgence to give prosperity to the wicked, and out of his fatherly wisdom to chasten the godly; and so all things come alike to all. Is Abraham rich? So is Nabal; yea, so the godly may be afflicted when the wicked triumph; as Lazarus pined with want when Dives fared deliciously every day, and Jerusalem was in a heap of ashes when Babylon flourished.

2. By correction. The wicked have no right by promise or covenant, and so salvation is far from them; for this promise or covenant right inferreth two things—(1.) A sanctified enjoyment; (2.) A more sure tenure.

[1.] A sanctified enjoyment; they that have salvation by promise, they have it as an effect of God's special love, and so have it as a mercy, not as a judgment; but without this they have it only by God's general indulgence, and so it may be a snare: Ps. 69:22, 'Let their table become a snare before them, and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap,' and promote their ruin, not only eternal, but temporal. If they be not by these common mercies brought to repentance, the greater shall their condemnation be, and their downfall the more speedy. For while they let loose the reins, and run headlong into all sin, God is the more provoked against them, and his anger, that was a little delayed and put off, is the more severely executed. It is a blessed thing to have salvation by covenant: Rom. 8:28, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose.' When we are sanctified to God, saith Baxter, all things are sanctified to us; to serve us for God, and to help us to him.

[2.] Our tenure is more sure, and we can with more confidence wait upon God for it. In this sense salvation is far from the wicked, because they cannot lay claim to God's favourable providence, or look for the continuance of it with any confidence, because they have no right, no promise to build upon. The word of God speaketh no good to them, whatever God may do out of his general indulgence: James 1:7, 'Let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord.' Now the misery of this appeareth by considering wicked men either as in prosperity or adversity.

(1.) If they be still at ease for the present, yet they are not upon sure terms, because they know not how soon God may break in upon them and theirs: Job 5:3, 4, 'I have seen the foolish taking root; but suddenly I cursed his habitation. His children, are far from safety' (the notion of the text), 'and are crushed in the gate, and there is none to deliver them.' In the eye of the godly they are far from salvation. I judged him unhappy for all his wealth, foretold his sudden destruction, which God would speedily bring on him and his; I read his doom. So Job 8:11–13, 'Can the rush grow without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in its greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb: so are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hopes shall perish.' A wicked man cannot lift up his head above others for want of God's favour to uphold him, as the rush or flag cannot grow without mire or water. The prosperity of wicked men, when it is most green and flourishing, yet wants its sustenance, which is God's blessing. This is the condition of wicked men in the opinion of the good. But what is it in his own opinion? Take him in his serious and sober moods, he always liveth miserably and expecting a change, as knowing that God oweth him an ill turn: Job 15:21, 'A dreadful sound is in his ears: in his prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him.' He trembleth secretly, as if danger were always near; therefore cruel and mischievous against whom they fear, that shut the door against their own danger, for everything that is fearful will be cruel.

(2.) If he fall into adversity. In their troubles they have not a God to go unto, nor promises to build upon; therefore it is said, Prov. 15:29, 'The Lord is far from the wicked, but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.' God's children have ready access to a sure friend, and are assured of welcome and audience when they come; but they are at their wits' end, know not which way to turn: Job 15:22, 'He believeth not that he shall return out of darkness, and he is waited for of the

sword;' that is, full of terrors of conscience and distracting disturbing fears, hath no hope to be delivered, but lives as if he had a sword hanging over his head.

Use 1. To show us the reason why the people of God, when they grow wicked, are often disappointed in that salvation which they expect: Isa. 59:11, 'We look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us.' Why? Because they had exceedingly sinned against God, and scandalised their profession. There was a horrible depravation of the people of God in those times, and therefore all their prayers and fasts and seekings of God could not prevail for a deliverance.

Use 2. Comfort in a good cause, wherein the godly are opposed by the wicked. There is a double comfort:—

1. Because the prosperity, power, and pride of the wicked is not to be regarded; for though they flourish for a while, and all things flow in upon them according to their heart's desire, yet salvation is far from them. God is engaged both for the rectitude of his nature, the quality of his office, as judge of the world, and the tenor of his covenant, to employ his power and terror for their ruin; and though he may for a while spare them, and they take occasion from this indulgence to do more and more wickedly, yet you should not be dismayed if you see them engaged in ways or courses that are naught and wicked; you may say, I know they cannot prosper in them. When they are lifted up in the prosperity of their affairs, you should lift up your hearts by faith, see a worm at the root of their happiness: ἔνδον τὸ κακὸν, &c.

2. Because by the rule of contraries, if salvation be far from the wicked that seek not God's statutes, then deliverance is near to the godly that fear God and desire to be faithful with him, how hard soever their condition seemeth to be for the present: Ps. 85:9, 'Surely



his salvation is nigh unto them that fear him.' You should be confident of it. They that please God cannot be always miserable; it is nearer than we think of, or can see for the present. There is a surely, or a note of averment put upon it. It is better be with the godly in adversity, than with the wicked in prosperity; when they are men appointed as sheep for the slaughter, yet there is a way of ransom and escape; but the wicked, at their best, are in the appointment of God as the stalled ox, or as swine fatted for destruction; when fattest, then nearest to destruction and slaughter.

Secondly, As to eternal salvation, so they are in a dangerous case.

1. The phrase here used by the Psalmist seemeth to be used to obviate their vain conceit. They think they shall do well enough, and have as much to show for heaven as the best; it is near in their conceit, but far indeed: 1 Cor. 6:9, 'Be not deceived; know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?' Thoughts of impunity are natural to us; those that are in the ready way to hell are apt to think they shall get heaven at last, as if God would turn day into night; but alas! it is an eternal truth, 'salvation is far from the wicked.'

2. There is somewhat of a meiosis in the expression, less being said than is intended. The man of God saith that salvation is far, but he implieth that damnation is near; certainly the one it doth imply the other: Heb. 6:8, 'The ground that beareth briars and thorns, is ἐγγὺς κατὰρας, nigh unto cursing.' They are upon the borders of hell, and ready to drop into those eternal flames which shall consume God's adversaries.

3. Once again, the longer they continue wicked, the farther off is their salvation every day; farther off from heaven, and nearer to hell. A godly man, the more progress he maketh in virtue, the nearer he is to

his salvation: Rom. 13:11, 'Now is your salvation nearer than when ye first believed.' Not only nearer in point of time, but nearer in the preparation of their hearts; not because older, but because better: and so by consequence, wicked men go farther and farther off, and therefore they are said to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, Rom. 2:5. Every sin they commit puts them a degree farther off from salvation, as every degree of grace is a step nearer heaven.

Reason 1. The inseparable connection that is between privileges and duties. The gospel offereth salvation conditionally; if we forsake the condition, we fall short of the privilege; and therefore if we be wicked, salvation is far from us. When God took Abraham into covenant with him, he doth not tell him only what privilege he should enjoy, but also bindeth him to walk suitably: Gen. 17:1, 'I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be thou perfect.' God will take care of our safety, if we will take care of our duty. The covenant is called a bond: Ezek. 20:37, 'I will bring you into the bond of the covenant;' because it hath a tie upon us, as well as upon God. We are not at our own liberty, to walk as we list; there are bonds upon us; not vincula, carceris, the bonds of a prison, gins and fetters, but vincula nuptiarum, the bonds of wedlock. Now, they that cast away these bonds from them, as the wicked do—(Ps. 2:3, 'Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us')—and will be their own men, and walk by their own will, have no title to the privileges that accrue by the marriage; such licentious spirits are at liberty, but to their own woe; they have a liberty to go to hell, and undo their own souls. It was the wisdom of God to bind us to displeasing duties by the proposal of comfortable privileges. Every man would desire to be saved, and to be happy for evermore, but corrupt nature is against holiness. Now without holiness there is no happiness. The conditional promise doth more bind and draw the heart to it, when we lay hold of it, by yielding to perform the

condition required; then may we groundedly expect the privilege promised. We would have salvation, but we cannot unless we submit to God's terms; for Christ came not to gratify our selfish desires, but to subdue us to God. We would have sin pardoned, we would be freed from the curse of the law and the flames of hell, but this can never be while we walk in our own ways, and are averse to holiness of heart and life, for God would even sweeten duties by felicities.

Reason 2. Because of the perfect contrariety between the temper of wicked men and this salvation, so that they are wholly incapable of it.

1. They care not for God, who is the author of this salvation; he is not in all their thoughts, words, and ways: Ps. 10:1, 'The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.' They are far from him, though he be not far from every one of them; he is within them, and round about them, in the effects of his power and goodness; but they never think of him, nor take care to serve and please him; that is the reason in the text, 'They seek not thy statutes.' If they seem to draw nigh to him at any time in some cold and customary duties, they do but draw nigh to him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him: Isa. 29:13, 'This people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me; and their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men.' Or as it is in another prophet, Jer. 12:2, 'Thou art near in their mouth, but far from their reins.' They profess to honour God with a little outward and bodily service, but have no love and affection at all to him.

2. They slight Christ who is the procurer of this salvation; however they could like him as their Saviour, they like him not as their guide and governor. So he complaineth, Ps. 81:11, 'My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me;' and Luke 19:14,

οὐ θέλομεν τοῦτον βασιλεῦσαι ἐφ' ἡμᾶς, 'His citizens hated him, and sent a messenger after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.' Men cannot endure his bonds and yokes: Ps. 2:3, 'Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us;' that they should deny themselves their own wisdom and will, and wholly give up themselves to the conduct and will of Christ. It is his spiritual kingdom that is most contrary to our carnal affections, for if there were no king in Israel, then every man might do what is best in his own eyes. They would not be crossed in their licentiousness of life, and therefore when Christ bringeth his bonds and cords with him, they set him at nought.

3. They despise the word, in which we have the offer of this salvation, and counsel and direction given us how to obtain it. There God calleth upon us to be saved: 1 Tim. 2:4, 'He will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.' But most slight his voice, and thereby put all hope far away from themselves. See Acts 16:26, compared with the 48th verse; in the 26th verse, 'To you is the word of this salvation sent.' Mark first, he calleth the gospel the word of salvation, because there we have the way and means set forth how it was procured for us; there we have counsel given us what we must do on our parts that we may be interested in it; there also we have the promise and assurance on God's part, that, so doing, we shall obtain it. Mark again, he saith this word of salvation was sent to them; he doth not say brought, but sent. The preaching of the gospel is governed by God's special providence. When salvation is offered according to his mind and in his name, we must look upon it as a message from heaven, directed to us for our good; not by the charity or good-will of men, but by the grace of God. Now if you despise this, what will be the issue? See ver. 46, 'Since ye put away the word of God from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life' (that is, by this obstinacy and perverseness), you become incapable

of receiving benefit of it. That phrase, 'ye judge yourselves,' is very notable. There is a judging ourselves unworthy that maketh way for the applying of the gospel unto us, rather than taking it from us, as the publican judged himself, and went home justified; but a humble self-judging is not meant here, but an obstinate, contemptuous refusal of eternal life. All unconverted men are unworthy of eternal life, but they that refuse grace offered judge themselves unworthy of eternal life; put it out of all question, clear God, if he thus judge them by their fact, declare their condemnation just.

4. They refuse the beginnings of this salvation and foregoing pledges, which God vouchsafeth in this world by way of taste and earnest. Grace is the beginning and pledge of glory; to be turned from sin is a great part of our salvation: Mark 1:21, 'He shall save his people from their sins.' It is not only salvation when freed from misery, but salvation when freed from sin; not only from evil after sin, hell, and punishment, but from the evil of sin; from a proud, lazy, self-loving heart: 'He hath saved us by the washing of water,' Titus 3:5. When the power of sin is broken, and the life of grace is begun in the soul, then do we begin to be saved. The spirit of holiness is the earnest of our inheritance, and an earnest is part of the sum: Eph. 1:13, 14, 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation, in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise; which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of his glory.' Therefore holiness is a part of eternal salvation. Now without this we cannot have the other part; they that slight holiness shall never see God.

5. They despise the salvation itself, rightly understood, partly because they only value it under a fleshly notion, as a state of happiness and ease, not as a state of immaculate and sinless purity;

for so it is wholly unsuitable to them. What should a carnal sensual heart do with heaven? or how should they desire it that hate the company of God, the communion of saints, the image of God? God maketh meet: Col. 1:12, 'Giving thanks to the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.' There is *jus hæreditarium*, et *jus aptitudinale*; though they do not desire to be saved for it, they would love holiness more. Partly because those conceits that they have of the adjuncts of salvation, and that happiness and personal contentment which results to them, they do not practically esteem it as to value it above the delights of the flesh and the vanities of the world, and they do not think it worthy the pursuit, but for the interests of the bodily life, cast off all care of it: Heb. 12:16, 'As Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright;' Mt. 22:5, 'They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise.'

Use 1. It informeth us of two things:—

1. That wicked men are the authors of their own ruin. Salvation doth not fly from them, but they fly from it; they are far from the law, and therefore is salvation far from them. They will not take the course to be saved, for they care not for God and his statutes; it is but just, *ut qui male vivit, male pereat*, that they which despise salvation should never see it.

2. That the wicked buy the pleasures of sin at a dear rate, since they defraud their own souls of salvation thereby. Their loss you have in the text, 'Salvation is far from them;' and their gain is nothing but a little temporal satisfaction; and are these things worthy to be compared? What is it maketh you wicked, but the case and sloth of the flesh, and the love of some carnal delight? And are you contented to perish for this whoredom from God?

Use 2. Let it exhort us to believe and improve this truth; for if men did surely believe it, there would not be so many wicked men as there are, neither would they dare to lie in sin as long as they do. Oh! consider, if the wicked have no part nor portion in the salvation offered, nor any jot of God's favour belonging to them, the wicked should not flatter themselves with presumptuous hopes, but break off their sins by repentance.

1. God's mercy will not help you; though he be a God of salvation, yet he will not save the impenitent and such as go on still in their trespasses: Ps. 68:19–21, 'Blessed be the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah. He that is our God is the God of salvation, and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.' You must not fancy a God all honey and sweetness, and that his mercy should be exercised to the wrong of his justice; the Lord will not spare the abusers of grace whoever he spareth: Deut. 29:19, 20, 'And it shall come to pass when he heareth the words of this curse, that if he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst; the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.'

2. No doctrine preached in the church will bear you out; not law, for that discovereth both sin and the curse. Convinceth of sin: Rom. 3:20, 'By the law is the knowledge of sin,' what is sin, and who is the sinner; that bindeth you over to the curse: Gal. 3:10, 'For as many as are of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of

the law to do them.' The gospel, that showeth a remedy against sin, but upon God's terms, that first with broken hearts we sue out our pardon: 1 John 1:9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Sin must be condemned, confessed, before pardoned. And then, that in the way of holiness we should seek salvation and eternal life. The way and end must not be separated: Rom. 6:22, 'We must have our fruit into holiness, if we would have our end to be eternal life.' The pure and undefiled have only part in this salvation, but it is far from the wicked. Christ disclaims the unholy and unsanctified: Mat. 7:23, 'Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' You may as well expect the way to the west should bring you eastward, as to walk in the ways of sin and hope to come to heaven at last; to think God will save us, and suffer us to walk in our own ways; or that this undefiled inheritance shall be bestowed on dirty sinners. This had been pleasing to flesh and blood, but it is the devil's covenant, not God's. That article, you shall be saved, and yet live in your sins, is foisted in by Satan, that false deceiver, to flatter men with vain conceits.

3. Do you hope of repentance hereafter, but in the meantime ye run a desperate hazard to leave the soul at pawn in Satan's hands? It is not easy work to get it out again. Who would poison himself upon a presumption that before it cometh to his heart he shall meet with an antidote? Judicial hardness is laid on them that withstand seasons of grace: Isa. 55:6, 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near;' Prov. 1:24–26, 'Because I have called and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, but ye have set at nought all my counsels, and would none of my reproofs; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh;' Luke 14:24, 'None of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper.'



4. The heart is more hardened the longer you continue in this course: Heb. 3:13, 'But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' Inveterate diseases are seldom cured; a tree that hath long stood, and begun to wither, is unfit to be transplanted: Jer. 13:23, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.'

5. There is a stint and measure as to nations: Gen. 15:16, 'The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.' Persons, vessels of mercy, vessels of dishonour: Rom. 9:22, 23, 'What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared unto glory?' Meet for heaven, ripe for hell. Saints like a shock of corn in season; so when sinned enough, then away to hell.

But this exhortation is like to be lost, because nobody will apply it; let us see, then, the character of wicked men.

Secondly, 'They seek not thy statutes.'

Doct. They are wicked men who seek not God's statutes.

Here I must inquire—

1. What it is to seek God's statutes.
2. Show why they are wicked that do not seek them.

First, What it is to seek God's statutes? There—

1. The object or thing sought is God's statutes, those rules and counsels which he hath given us to guide us in our service of himself, and pursuit of true happiness. These are all enforced by his authority, and enacted as laws and statutes, which we cannot transgress without violation and contempt of his authority. Now, he saith 'statutes' indefinitely, because they must all be regarded without exception, for they all stand upon the same authority. It is said of Ezra, that good scribe, Ezra 10:7, 'That he prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it;' that is, to be thoroughly informed of, and to practise whatsoever was enjoined in the law of God; so must we prepare our hearts to do all. And because our Christian law is broader, and compriseth gospel too, which is the law of faith, we must take care of all which God hath given us in charge, and all that is adopted into our rule of faith and repentance, as well as moral duties, and because there are *minutula legis*, and *βαρύτερα νόμου*, therefore our chief care must be about the weighty things; and those of greater moment must be sought most earnestly. Therefore it is said, Mat. 6:33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof;' these concern the change of our estate.

2. The act of seeking. The word implieth earnest and constant endeavour: I seek for that which I mind and pursue with all my heart, and use all means that I may obtain it, till I do obtain or find it. Thus we are bidden to seek that which is good: Amos 5:14, 'Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live;' and Zeph. 2:2, 'Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgments: seek righteousness, seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.' So Christ: John 5:30, 'I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father, which hath sent me.' And here the Psalmist speaketh of seeking God's statutes.

[1.] It implieth earnest endeavour (for a man's heart is upon what he seeketh), that it be the business of our lives, not a thing done by the by, but our ἔργον, our work to please God, and to this all other things must give way. Many think it is a foolish thing for them to trouble their heads with matters of religion, and to lay bands of strictness upon themselves; but it must not only have its turn and respect among other affairs, but be indeed as the great affair of our lives. There is no business of such weight and necessity, because the saving of our souls lieth on it; and therefore it must be followed in good earnest; as a man, when he is seeking a thing, quitteth all other cares, and mindeth that only.

[2.] Constant endeavour, seeking till we find; as the woman for her lost groat: Luke 15:8, 'What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?' So we must not content ourselves with our first and cold essay, as many, if they find not success upon some fair attempt, give over all care of religion, as if it were a tedious thing, not to be endured. Now seeking implies a resolute diligence, and persevering endeavours till we find.

3. The end of seeking after God's statutes is to have them and keep them; as Christ saith, John 14:21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.' First hath, then keepeth. To have the commandments is to know them, to understand our duty and prove what is the revealed, holy, and acceptable will of God concerning us, Rom. 12:2, that it may have the authority of a principle in our consciences. To keep them is to endeavour actual obedience thereunto, and to regulate our practice thereby: for both these ends do we seek, and in both these respects do men show their wickedness.

[1.] We must make it our business to know the tenor and compass of our duty, and we are said to seek after this, because it will cost us pains ere we can obtain it. All knowledge will cost us industry, especially divine and practical knowledge, as he that applieth his heart to the understanding of his duty will soon find: Prov. 2:4, 'If thou wilt seek for it as for silver, and search for it as for hid treasures.' Now this the wicked cannot endure; they indulge the laziness of the flesh; they know they that increase knowledge increase sorrow. If they did know more of their duty, they should be troubled for not observing it; for knowledge will be urging duty upon the conscience, it bringeth a great obligation along with it: and as an obligation, so an irritation or provocation; it will call upon them to do that which they have no mind to do; yea, and further, a self-condemnation and accusation, or sting for not doing it, or breaking any of God's statutes: therefore to prevent their own trouble, they are so far from seeking light, that they would shut it out, and quench those convictions that break in upon them; therefore the language of wicked men is, Job 21:14, 'Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;' the language of their hearts, and lives, if not of their tongues. They do not only err in their minds, but err in their hearts; they have no will to know, would not trouble themselves about religion, or acquainting themselves with God, neglect the means of grace.

[2.] We must make it our business to observe them, or our serious study to keep at a distance both in heart and practice from every known sin, eschewing what the Lord forbiddeth, and endeavouring every good duty which the Lord commandeth. This will cost us pains indeed, and requireth much seeking to get such a frame of heart, and whoever trieth it will find it long ere he can attain to it: Rom. 7:18, 'To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.' He sought for; his words imply that; but he could not do as

he would; there was not a total omission, but a coming short of his aims. We must seriously give up ourselves to the observation of God's will, and attend upon this work. This wicked men do not seek, it is the least of their cares: Ps. 73:27, 'Lo, all they that are far from thee shall perish.' The whole stream and course of their affections, lives, and actions do run from God to the creature; they care not whether they please God, yea or no: Prov. 19:16, 'He that keepeth the commandments, keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways, shall die.' He slight his way that goeth on as his own heart leadeth him; as a traveller that regardeth not to choose his way, but goeth through thick and thin, he despiseth his way, so he that careth not whether his way be pure or filthy. Well, then, the sum is, wicked men care not to know and obey God's word.

Secondly, Reasons why they are wicked that do not seek God's statutes.

1. Because omissions, where they are of duties absolutely necessary and total and universal, do necessarily draw sins of commission along with them, do argue a state of wickedness. But such is the case here; to live in a known sin, whether of omission or commission, is damnable: James 4:17, 'To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin;' but especially when total, &c. The wicked are thus described, them 'that forget God;' Ps. 9:17, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God;' Job 8:13, 'So are the paths of all that forget God;' Ps. 50:22, 'Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.' This layeth a man open to all sin, and maketh way for his destruction. So Zeph. 1:6, 'They have not sought the Lord, nor inquired after him;' that is enough to damn them, if they do not break out into excess.

2. Because they are guilty of great wrong to God and to their own souls.

[1.] To God; it is a contempt of his authority when men will not study to know and do his declared will; that is, make it their business to do so; for it is a great slighting of him, looking upon his direction as of little importance: Hosea 8:12, 'I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing,' and therefore were strangers to it, as if there were no danger in walking contrary to it.

[2.] To themselves; God's statutes concern our salvation as well as his own glory: Luke 7:30, 'The pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves.' Thus a wicked man is *felo de se*: Prov. 8:35, 36, 'Whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord; but he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me, love death.'

Use 1. You see now who are far from salvation, they that do not study the word of God to conform themselves thereunto.

Use 2. Let us be sure to be far from the disposition of the wicked; let us with all our hearts seek to comply with the precepts of God, and be more diligent and earnest in bringing our hearts to a true scriptural holiness, that we may not be in this danger.

Motives:—

1. From the excellency of these statutes. To be employed in the service of God is the greatest honour and the most blessed life upon earth. If it be irksome, it is a sign of a disease, and some great distemper or inclination to some base dreggy delights of the flesh. If the soul were rightly constituted, it would be our greatest pleasure,

honour, and content; other work spendeth our strength, this increaseth it: 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright.'

2. From salvation; it is great, sure, near. Great, both as to body and soul; sure, God's word passed is unalterable; near, should we faint in the sight of our country, and be sluggish and negligent, when heaven is at hand?

3. There is present content in the sight of our qualification and clear distinction from the wicked.

## SERMON CLXXIV

**Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord:  
quicken me according to thy judgments.—**

**VER. 156**

IN the former verse we presented you with the judgment of God against the wicked; we shall now present you with a more comfortable argument, his mercies to his people. Whenever we think or speak of the damnable condition of the wicked, we should remember the grace of God, that hath made the difference between us and them. We were by nature no better than they, only mercy interposed for our rescue, and snatched us as brands out of the burning. So here David flieth to God's mercy, as the original cause of all that he had or hoped for from him: 'Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord,' &c.

In the words there is—

1. An eulogy, or an ascription of praise to God, 'Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord.'
2. A prayer, 'Quicken me according to thy judgments.'

The one maketh way for the other; for because God's mercies are so great, therefore he is encouraged to come unto him for help. In the eulogy we have the thing praised, God's mercy. It is set forth by a double adjunct, one taken from the quality, the other from the quantity. From the quality, it is tender and bowel-mercy; from the quantity, it is great. Or the word may be rendered 'many;' the mercies of God, as one saith, are many and mother-like. Having laid this foundation for his hope, the man of God proceedeth to his prayer, which is our second branch, where you have the request, 'Quicken me;' the argument, 'According to thy judgments;' that is, thy promises in the new covenant, as we before explained the word. Those promises are called judgments, because they are rules of proceeding in the new court which God hath set up.

Many things might be observed from these words.

1. That the primary cause of all that we have and expect from God is his mercy. The man of God beginneth here, when he expected different usage from the wicked, or that God should deal with him in another manner than with them.
2. That this mercy is so great and large, that it is every way sufficient for our help.
3. The terms and rules according to which we are to expect this mercy are set forth in the new covenant, where God hath bound himself to show mercy to his people, upon such conditions as are



there specified. So that this covenant doth inform us and assure us both of God's mercy and God's quickening.

4. One special new-covenant blessing is the preservation of the life of grace in our souls. There is a great necessity of it, because in the spiritual life we are subject to fainting; and the children of God have a great value and esteem for it, for they are more sensible of soul-distempers than other men; and when they see others stark dead in trespasses and sins, they are the more displeased with their own remaining deadness, and therefore would have the distinction between them and wicked men made more clear and sensible, by the activity and vigour of grace, and their diligence and care of salvation (which the wicked neglect), awakened by new influences from God; and therefore do they so often pray for quickening. Accordingly, God in the new covenant, as the God of their life and salvation, hath undertaken to keep them fresh and lively; and therefore, whenever we are under deadness, we should not be satisfied with it, or think it a light evil, but present our condition to God, looking to the promise of the new covenant, wherein God hath promised to put his Spirit into our hearts, to cause us to walk in his ways.

But because all these points have been often discussed, I shall only handle this one point.

Doct. That in the Lord Jehovah there are great and tender mercies.

1. I shall open the mercy of God.
2. The adjuncts, the greatness and tenderness of them.

First, I shall open the mercy of God. That mercy is one of God's attributes, the scripture is plain and clear: Ps. 62:12, 'Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy.' He had said before, 'Once hath God

spoken, and twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God.' This is an evident and certain truth, that God is almighty, and hath all power to avenge his enemies and reward his friends; but because this is not a sufficient foundation for our trust, there wanteth more to invite the creature to depend upon God than his bare power and ability to help us, there must be also an assurance of his readiness to do what he is able; and that we have in this other attribute, which is as proper, and as much belonging to God as power, and that is mercy; yea, it is an attribute in the exercise of which God delights most of all: Micah 7:18, 'Because he delighteth in mercy.' God delighteth himself in all his attributes, yea, in the manifestation of them to the world, but chiefly in acts of mercy; these come readily from him, and unextorted. Though God willeth the punishment of a sinner, for the manifestation of his justice, yet these acts of his vengeance are not so pleasing to God as the acts of his mercy; for he never doth them of his own accord, but is provoked. Acts of mercy flow from him like life-honey, but acts of vengeance are his strange work, Isa. 28:21. Bees give honey naturally, sting when provoked. Therefore God is nowhere called pater ultionum, whereas he is called pater miserationum, 2 Cor. 1:3, 'The father of mercies.' It is the original and fountain cause of all our comfort; get an interest in his mercy, and all his other attributes shall be for our good. Mercy will set a-work his wisdom to contrive, his power to accomplish, what is for our comfort and salvation; his justice and wrath to avenge your quarrel. All other attributes are serviceable to mercy. Among the things that are ascribed to God there is this order, that one is given as a reason of the other. As in the business of our salvation. Why doth God discover himself with so much wisdom and power? Because of his mercy. Of his mercy hath he saved us, Titus 3:4, 5; of his mercy quickened us, Eph. 2:4, 5; of his mercy begotten us to a lively hope, 2 Peter 1:3. But what moved him to show mercy to us? You can go no higher, unless you assign a cause like itself; God, who is rich in

mercy, out of his great love wherewith he hath loved us; indeed, so he showed mercy because he would.

1. The goodness of the divine nature, as it doth discover itself to the creature, is called benignity or bounty, sometimes grace, and sometimes mercy. The first issue or effect of the divine goodness is his benignity or bounty, by which God, by giving something to the creatures, showeth himself liberal or bountiful; this is his goodness to the creature as a creature. Thus he hath given being to all things, bare life to some, sense to others, and to man and angels reason and grace. The next term by which the goodness of God is expressed is grace, by which he freely giveth to the creature all that good which they have, beyond all possibility of requital. The third term is mercy, which implieth the ready inclination that is in God to relieve our misery notwithstanding sin. These three terms agree in this, that they all express the goodness of God, or his communication of himself to the creature. God knoweth himself, loveth himself, but he cannot be said to be bountiful, or gracious, or merciful to himself; these things respect us. And again, that none of these can be reciprocated, or turned back from the creature to God. We may love God, who hath loved us first, 1 John 4:19, but mercy or grace never results from the creature to God. We know God, and love him, but cannot be said to be merciful to him. He giveth out mercy and grace, but receiveth none. Thus they agree; but they differ in that bounty or goodness respects the creature as a creature, grace respects the creature as being able to make no recompense to God, or to merit anything at his hands; but mercy addeth these two things to the former, as supposing us in misery. The object of it is persona miserabilis, or as finding us under demerit or ill-deserving, and appoints a remedy for us. God doth good to the angels, that never sinned, out of grace; but to man fallen, out of mercy; so that his

mercy is nothing else but his proneness to help a man in misery notwithstanding sin.

2. We must distinguish between mercy as it is an attribute in God, and the acts and effects of it as they are terminated upon the creature. As it is an attribute in God: Ps. 103:8, 'The Lord is merciful and gracious.' So it is infinite, as his nature is; but in the effects as to us there is a great difference. Mercy is one in the fountain, many in the streams, because there are divers effects, divers ways of showing mercy. Mercy in the effect may cease, as when the angels turned devils, and when God threateneth to take away his mercies from us; but God doth not cease to be merciful in himself: the effects of God's mercy are more or less, but the attribute in God is not so. Mercy as an attribute doth not oppose justice; but the effects of God's mercy may be, and are, contrary to the effects of his justice, as punishment is contrary to blessing.

3. God's mercy is either general, or special, or peculiar. First, God's general mercy hath for the object of it not only men, even them that are strangers to the faith, but also all the creatures; for it is said, Ps. 145:5, 'His tender mercies are over all his works.' God helpeth the poor brute creatures in their needs, and doth supply them with provision convenient for them. Then there is his special mercy to man, helping and succouring him in his misery, notwithstanding sin; and so the giving of Christ to be the Saviour of the world: Titus 3:4, 'But after the loving-kindness of God our Saviour to mankind appeared;' his man-kindness, this was pity to us above the angels: no remedy was plotted for them. And then his peculiar mercy is to his elect in Christ. So the Lord saith, Rom. 9:15, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.' This is again seen either in the first grace, or bestowing that upon us, or in all the subsequent grace that we stand in need of.

[1.] The first grace is pardoning all our past sin, or receiving us into a state of favour upon our repentance. So it is made the motive, Joel 2:13, 'Turn unto the Lord, for he is merciful;' penitent sinners will find him so to be. The apostle saith, 1 Tim. 1:13, 'But I obtained mercy, ἠλεήθην; I was overwhelmed in mercy.' So also in giving us a heart to repent and turn unto him, 1 Peter 1:3. We were unworthy and miserable sinners, could not help ourselves, and then his eye pitied us and his hand saved us; by his preventing grace he brought us home to himself.

[2.] In all the subsequent grace that we stand in need of. So the objects of his mercy must have a qualification; such as fear God, Ps. 103:13; such as love him, and keep his commandments, Exod. 20:6; that walk according to the rule of his word exactly, Gal. 6:16. To the merciful, Mat. 5:7; for to the unmerciful God will not show himself merciful, James 2:13; but to those that are thus qualified he reneweth his pardoning mercy, in taking away the guilt of our daily failings, Ps. 25:7. His sanctifying mercy, by freeing them more and more from the dominion of sin, Rom. 6:14. His preserving mercy, by delivering them from afflictions, so far as it is convenient: Ps. 119:41, 'Let thy mercies come unto me, O Lord; even thy salvation according to thy word;' Lam. 3:22, 'It is of the Lord's mercy we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.' His rewarding mercy: Jude 21, 'Looking for the mercy of God unto eternal life.' So Ps. 62:12, 'Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for thou renderest to every man according to his work.' He will graciously accept, reward, and crown every sincere and faithful servant of his when they have done their work. Sincerity and faithfulness shall be accepted and rewarded, when infirmities and weaknesses shall be pardoned and covered.

Secondly, Let me now open the two adjuncts of his mercy.

1. It is tender mercy: Luke 1:78, 'Through the tender mercy of our God.' The word signifieth bowels; as when you see a poor miserable creature, your bowels work within you, especially if you be related to him. *Misericordia complectitur affectum et effectum.* Let us take the nearest relation. If you be a father, we need not much entreat a father to pity a poor helpless child; his own bowels will persuade him to it: Ps. 103:13, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.' Or if you think passions in females more vehement, take the relation of a mother; as Hagar was affected to Ishmael when the water was spent in the bottle; she sat over against the child, and lift up her voice and wept, Gen. 21:16. God will take the affections of a mother; as Isa. 49:15, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee.' It is passionately set out by the prophet. If all the compassions of all fathers and mothers were joined together, it were nothing to God; he is the father of mercies, he is pitiful and merciful, James 5:11. It is true there is in God no sickness, or trouble of mind, no commotion; but there is pity and tender love, though no perturbation, which will not stand with the perfection of his nature; that is, he layeth to heart, and taketh notice of our misery. The tenderness of God may be known by the compassion which Christ had in the days of his flesh, for he was the express image of his Father's person. Now we read, Mat. 9:36, 'When he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were as sheep scattered abroad that had no shepherd.' Their teachers did not do their duty to them in any profitable way; this wrought upon Christ's heart, when he saw the multitude. So when he saw many sick and under noisome diseases, Mat. 14:14, when they followed him, he pitied them, and helped them. So Mat. 15:32, Jesus had compassion on the multitude, when they continued with him three days, and had nothing to eat. The care of man's welfare lieth near unto Christ's heart. Before the disciples

took notice of it, he taketh notice of the people's necessities, and is affected with it; he would not send them away fasting. The two blind men, when they feelingly laid out their miseries, Mat. 20:34, 'Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes.' So Luke 7:13; the widow of Nain lamented her only son, the Lord saw her, and had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. This for a taste what a tender heart Christ had. And in heaven he is still a merciful high priest; he came down on purpose to acquaint himself with our griefs and sorrows. Surely he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and God's pity, though it hath no trouble with it, is real, operative, and efficacious.

2. His tender mercy is seen in his readiness to hear and help, and come in to the cry of his people, if they be but anything humble and profitable in their afflictions: Isa. 58:10, 'And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day;' Luke 15:20, 'And he arose and came to his father; but when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him.' When the son was coming, the father ran to meet him: Isa. 65:24, 'Before they call, I will answer;' as if God could not tarry to hear the prayer made: Ps. 32:5, 'I said, I would confess my transgression unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin;' Jer. 31:19, 20, 'Surely after I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.' The first relentings of the creature work upon the bowels of God's mercy; when we do but conceive a purpose, the Lord is easy to be entreated.

3. By the motives that do induce God to show mercy, the bare sight of our misery, and therefore the saints do so often represent their condition: Ps. 69:20, 'I am poor and sorrowful; let thy salvation, O Lord, set me on high.' You see he bringeth no other argument but his grief and misery. Justice seeketh a fit object, mercy a fit occasion: Deut. 32:36, 'For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left.'

Thirdly, The next adjunct is 'great.' The mercies of God are seldom spoken of in scripture but there is some additional word to show their plenty and excellency; as Ps. 130:7, 'For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption;' 1 Peter 1:3, 'Which according to his abundant mercy;' and Eph. 2:4, 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he hath loved us.' So Eph. 2:7, 'The exceeding riches of his grace,' ὑπερβάλλοντα πλοῦτον. Paul thinketh he can never word it enough: when he speaketh of mercy, he saith it over over-abounded; all to show the multitude and greatness of God's mercies. So Ps. 51:1, we read of the multitude of his tender mercy. It must needs be so if we consider—

1. How many there are to whom God hath done good, even as many as there have been, are, and shall be creatures in the world. None that ever had a being, but tasted of God's goodness. Nay, for his special mercies, the same persons that are pardoned, all the elect from the beginning of time, till the day of judgment. What hath God been doing these thousands of years that the world hath continued, but multiplying pardons and passing acts of grace in favour of his people? Time would be no more, but only that there are some more whom God meaneth to pardon: 2 Peter 3:9, 'Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.' When we come to heaven, how many monuments of grace shall we see there! A



man would think that the unthankful world had given discouragement, and God should wait no longer; but yet there are some vacant places to be filled: 'In my Father's house are many mansions,' John 14:2. We waste by giving, give from ourselves what we give to another; but this fountain is never dry: Rom. 5:10, 'The free gift is of many offences.'

2. How many benefits he bestoweth on every one, many repeated acts of grace of the same kind, divers kinds of benefits, bodily mercies, soul mercies: Ps. 40:5, 'Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done; and thy thoughts, which are to usward, they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.' Private mercies and public mercies, mercies in hand and mercies in hope: Ps. 31:19, 'Oh! how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men.' We have not one sin, but many sins; not one misery, but many miseries; therefore we have many mercies. The creatures are always in some necessity, and so are always an object of mercy. How many supports this life continually needeth! all which the providence of God supplieth to us.

3. The greatness of these effects, the sending of his Son: 1 John 4:9, 10, 'In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.' The gift of the Spirit himself to be everlastingly with us, John 14:16, and by present troubles to prepare us for future glory, 2 Cor. 4:17, and Rom. 8:18. Surely nothing but mercy, and great mercy, could do all this for us.

Use 1. To exhort us to consider of this, and to meditate much upon this attribute. To this end I shall lay down a few considerations:—

1. All that come to God should consider of his mercy; it is the great motive to repentance, and beginning our acquaintance with God: Joel 2:13, 'And rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.' Our distrustful and unbelieving thoughts draw an ill picture of God in our minds. We think him a hard and austere one, that is more ready to condemn us than to receive us to mercy. Thus we look upon him in the glass of our guilty fears. Oh no! he is merciful, if we will but stoop to him. Besides, it is a great check to our pursuit of carnal vanities: Jonah 2:8, 'They that seek after lying vanities forsake their own mercies.' Thus to the secure and careless, when they consider all this grace and tender mercy, it is the great means to overcome them with kindness. A serious consideration of what God hath done and is ready to do for us: Rom. 12:1, 'I beseech you by the mercies of God.' Saul wept when David had spared him, 1 Sam. 24:16. If we had not let all ingenuity: 'I am not worthy of all the mercy and truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant,' Gen. 32:10. Then when we come to a reckoning and audit with God, how great is the sum of them! There are more effects of his mercies, and of more diverse kinds: Ps. 139:17, 'How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great are the sum of them!'

2. It is not enough to know that God is merciful, but we must also consider how great and tender his mercy is; for God's children are wont to have great and large thoughts of it. We must think of it as becometh the infiniteness of his nature whose mercy it is: Isa. 55:8, 9, 'For my thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor my ways as your ways, saith the Lord: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so

are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts;' Hosea 11:9, 'For I am God, and not man.' We must not straiten God to our scantling; our drop is soon spent. Peter, a good man: What! forgive seven times a-day? How tender it is! It is so natural to God. Acts of punitive justice are exercised with some reluctancy, but he rejoiceth over them to do them good; he is strongly inclined to let out his goodness to unworthy and miserable sinners who deserve the contrary from him. The sea doth not more naturally flow, nor the sun more naturally shine, nor fire more naturally burn, than God doth naturally show mercy. These thoughts will answer all the doubts and fears of a penitent. Thou canst never have too large thoughts of God.

3. We shall never have such great and large thoughts of God's tender mercy as when they arise from our own experience and particular observation. To know God by hearsay will not work upon you as when we have seen him ourselves; as they said unto the woman, John 4:42, 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the saviour of the world.' We do not think or speak of God with any sense and life, affection and admiration, till we have studied his nature and observed his ways; otherwise we speak by rote when we praise him for his mercies, and it is but an empty compliment: Ps. 103:1-3, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name: bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thy iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases,' &c.

4. Then will our own experience inform us of the greatness and tenderness of mercy, when we are sensible of our sins and miseries. When a man seeth his sins great, his dangers great, then he will see God's mercies towards him great also: Ps. 86:13, 'For great is thy mercy towards me, for thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest

hell.' We do not know the greatness of the pardon but by the greatness of the debt, nor the greatness of our protection and deliverance but by the greatness of the danger. God continueth trouble upon his people, that they may be sensible of the sweetness of the mercy, and his help in their deliverance: Rom. 5:8, 'But herein God commendeth his love to us, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.'

5. When our sense of sins and miseries hath most recommended mercy to us, we should magnify it, both with respect to supplication and gratulation.

[1.] With respect to supplication. When we are under fears and discouragements, we should oppose and set these great and tender mercies in the balance against our doubts and fears. Our sins are many, our troubles great, yet let us not be discouraged from praying, and making our supplication to God; for God will pardon a penitent people, and help a sensible supplicant. The more sensible of our misery, the fitter objects for mercy. What is it that troubleth us? fear of not speeding with God in prayer? You hear how soon he relenteth when you relent and lie at his feet; for to what use doth pardoning mercy serve but to encourage broken-hearted sinners? 'We have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful kings.' Benhadad having lost the day, and in great fear of losing his life with his kingdom, his friends comforted him with the fame they had heard of Israel's kings, 1 Kings 20:31. We know most certainly it is hard to raise up truly poor, downcast sinners, how presumptuous soever they have been before. God would have these by all means to be encouraged; so that though you have many objections from your unworthiness, the multitude and greatness of your sins. Or is it the power of men, and difficulty of our deliverance? God's mercy is beyond the proportion of their cruelty. The more violent and ungodly our oppressors are,

the more hope of God's pity towards us: Ps. 86:14, 15, 'O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul, and have not set thee before them: but thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.'

[2.] Let us magnify it as to gratulation: Gen. 32:10, 'I am not worthy of all the mercy,' &c. Less than the least of all thy mercies. Let us consider our unworthiness; that God may have all the glory.

Use 2. To press us to be merciful: we should be like God, let us put on bowels of mercy: Col. 3:12, 'Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering;' Luke 6:36, 'Be ye therefore merciful, as your heavenly Father also is merciful.'

## **SERMON CLXXV**

### **Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.—VER. 161**

IN this verse we have—

First, David's temptation.

Secondly, The godly frame of his spirit.

First, In David's temptation, take notice of—

1. The nature of it, it was a persecution.

2. The instruments of it, Saul, and the chief men about him, princes.

3. The malice and groundlessness of it, without a cause.

Secondly, The godly frame of his heart, but my heart, &c. And there we have—

1. The seat of his affection, my heart.

2. The kind of the affection, standeth in awe.

3. The object of it, the word of God.

First, With David's temptation I will not meddle any further than an introduction, or the necessity of an exposition enforceth me a little to reflect upon. And—

1. From the nature of it. Persecution is one of the ordinary trials of God's children. As God chasteneth them because they are no better, Isa. 27:9, so the world persecuteth them because they are so good, John 15:19. This ever hath been and ever will be the lot of God's children while there are two seeds in the world: Gen. 3:15, 'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.' And the apostle saith, Gal. 4:29, 'But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, so it is now.' The first place speaketh of the antipathy between the church and its open opposites; the second was in Abraham's family, and it is brought to comfort the true members of the Christian church against those persecutions which they sustained from the false apostles and such as adhered to the Jewish synagogue. Isaac was begotten by the power of God's Spirit, according to the tenor of the promise; Ishmael by the ordinary strength of nature, a figure of the regenerate and unregenerate, John 1:13. Persecution is a thing

common to the church in all ages, then and now; therefore, as they grow worse, let us grow better; and let us be content to take the ordinary way, by the cross, to come to the crown.

2. The instruments of his trouble were Saul and his chief men about him. The man of God had said, 'Many are my persecutors,' ver. 157; now he showeth they were not mean ones, and of the inferior sort, but such as by their power were able to crush him, such as by their place should be a refuge to him. I observe, the trial is the sorer when our trouble cometh not only from the basest of the people, but from the rulers themselves. No doubt a great part of the people followed Saul in his persecuting of David, yet the nobles most troubled him. In the primitive times, *lapidibus nos invadit inimicum vulgus*—the base riff-raff were most ready to stone the Christians; but this was mere brutish rage: a multitude, though they have power, yet they have no authority. But when the rulers were set against them, and persecuted them with edicts and punishments, then the greatest havoc was made of them. To see God's ordinance abused maketh the trial the more grievous. The godly should be defended by their governors, for therefore they are called the shields of the earth, Ps. 49:9. But now when they persecute them for righteousness' sake, it is a sore but no strange temptation. They may do so partly out of ignorance: 1 Cor. 2:8, 'Which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;' and partly out of prejudice and blind zeal; so the corner-stone is refused by the builders, Ps. 118:22, applied to Christ's persecutors: Acts 4:11, 'The stone that was set at nought by you builders is become the head of the corner;' and partly by the instigation of evil men. Wicked men labour to engage those who are in power against the people of God, and make them odious to them: Prov. 29:10, 'The bloodthirsty hate the upright.' Flattery giveth the first onset to the work of impiety, Acts 24:1–3. And partly because riches and power efferate men, swell

them with pride, fill them with enmity against the ways of God: Ps. 123:4, 'Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and the contempt of the proud.' Well, then, let us not be dismayed though great men be prejudiced against us, and we have powerful enemies in church and state: Mat. 10:17, 18, 'But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.' Though we be persecuted with censures, civil and ecclesiastical, and both judicatures thunder against us: John 16:1, 2, 'These things have I told you, that you should not be offended; they shall put you out of the synagogue; yea, the time cometh when they that kill you will think they do God good service.' It is a stumbling-block to see power, which is of God, bent against God and his interest; the beast in the Revelations pushed with the horns of the lamb. But Christ hath told us of these things beforehand, that we should be forearmed against them. Christ's followers must not only look for injuries from wicked men in a tumultuous way, but ordinarily carried by fixed judicatures; thrown out of the church by excommunication, and out of the world by death. Let us bless God that our rulers deal more Christianly by us; and let us not irritate them, but show all love and meekness and obedience; and let the mild government of our gracious sovereign move us to pray to God for the continuance of his life, and the prosperity of his affairs: it is but a necessary gratitude that we should pay him for the rest and peace we enjoy under him.

3. The malice and groundlessness of this persecution, 'without cause.' David did not suffer for his deserts as an evil-doer; he had done nothing disobediently against Saul's authority; when he had spared him in the cave, he giveth him an ample testimony: 1 Sam. 24:17, 'Thou art more righteous than I, for thou hast rewarded me



good, but I have rewarded thee evil.' Again, he had another testimony when he surprised his camp sleeping: 1 Sam. 26:21, 'Return, my son David; I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes: behold I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.' Theodoret expoundeth this of the next verse, with application to these passages. When David found Saul asleep he would not kill him, and this was more comfort to him than if he had slain and obtained all their spoils. Observe, we may the better represent our case to God when we suffer without a cause; then our sufferings are clean sufferings, more comfortable to us, and honourable to God. It was Daniel's glory that they could find no occasion or fault against him, but only in the matter of his God, Dan. 6:4, 5. Blameless carriage disappoints the malice of wicked men, or shameth them. *Cajus Sejus vir bonus nisi quod Christianus.* Now a pretended crime doth not take away the glory from us. Saul pretended that David was an enemy to his life and crown, but David declared the contrary by word and deed; he might have slain him twice. 'Put to silence the ignorance of foolish men,' 1 Peter 2:15. There may be in man's court a cause which before God is no just cause, as when we are punished for the breach of law which is contrary to our duty to God: Ps. 94:20, 'Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?'

Well, then, whatever we suffer, let it be without a cause. There is cause enough on God's part to afflict and strike us for our sins; but on man's part, let us not procure sufferings to ourselves by our provocations. We shall hereby have more peace in sufferings, and bring more honour to religion: 1 Peter 3:17, 'For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing;' 1 Peter 4:15, 16, 'But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer. Yet if any suffer as a Christian, let him not be

ashamed; but let him glorify God in that behalf.' Surely Christ's cross is more comfortable than the cross of Barabbas.

Secondly, Let us come to his gracious frame of heart, to stand in awe of the word, but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.

Doct. It is a gracious frame of heart to stand in awe of the word of God.

God's people are often described by it: Prov. 13:13, 'Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed; but whoso feareth a commandment shall be rewarded.' There are many fear a judgment, when, to visible appearance, it is like to tread upon the heels of sin; yea, and some fear a threatening, at least when it is like to be accomplished; but who fears a commandment but a gracious heart? This is reason enough to draw back if a commandment stand in the way; it is more than if there was a lion in the way, or a band of armed enemies, or an angel with a drawn sword, such as stood in the way to stop Balaam. They have a deep reverence of God's authority, and dare not break through, when God by his law hath fenced up their way. So Isa. 66:2, 'To him will I look that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word;' a man that is affected according to his doom and sentence passed in the word; if the word speaketh bitter things, or the word speaketh peace, accordingly the man is affected; this is the man that God will look at: Ezra 9:4, 'Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel.' None so careful to redress disorders, to use all the means they can to prevent judgment, as those that tremble at God's word; and therefore they above others did assemble to Ezra. A man hath gained a great point when he doth not value his condition by external probabilities, but by the sentence of the word. It is hopeful if the word speaketh good unto it, sad when the word speaketh bitter things. This man will be

otherwise affected than the most are, and more careful to please God. Once more: Ezra 10:3, 'Those that tremble at the commandment of our God.' Shechaniah referreth the reformation to them. These are persons exactly conscientious; they make God's commandments their rule, and tremble at the apprehension of having anything done against God's will. None so fit as they to judge of cases of conscience and to regulate affairs; men that enlarge themselves, and do not stand so nicely on the will of God, will be more lax and complying with their own lusts and the humours of men.

1. I will show you what it is to stand in awe of the word.
2. Then give you the reasons why they that are godly will do so.

First, What it is to stand in awe of the word. We will determine it by opening the circumstances of the text. And—

1. Let us take notice of the seat of this affection, the heart, 'My heart standeth in awe of thy word.' A true reverence of the word of God must be planted in the heart, or else all outward profession of respect is but hypocrisy: Ps. 50:16, 17, 'Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth? seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thy back.' Many may solemnly pretend to piety, and talk of it, and perhaps preach of it, to others, but do not exactly reform their carnal practices; they do but abuse themselves and deceive others. So strangely are many bewitched with their own deceitfulness of heart and power of Satan, that they can without remorse of conscience profess the true religion, pretend to a covenant with God, yet affront that religion by being loose and scandalous, and can break the covenant without any scruple; such are contemners of God's word, however they seem reverencers of it. That psalm speaketh of the collection of the gospel church: 'Gather

my saints together, who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice;' not that of bulls and goats, but by Christ Jesus. But many profane this covenant, and are carried away by every temptation, some as greedy thieves and extortioners, some as filthy adulterers, some as haters of godliness, some as injurious slanderers and whisperers and backbiters. In the Christian world, this prediction is too plainly verified; the carnal Christian and the serious Christian profess respect to the same Bible, to believe the same creed, to enter by the same baptism, to claim privilege by the same covenant, yet hate one another, and are as contrary one to another as perfectly as infidels and pagans. On the one side, there is mouth-respect to the word, on the other, heart-respect; the one in outward covenant with God, the other brought into the inner court. God beareth long with the former sort, but will not bear always: so Jer. 12:2, 'Thou art near in their mouth, but far from their reins.' They profess thee in word, but deny thee in heart and in deed; draw near thee in show and pretence as a people in league with thee, but their hearts, love, and affection are wholly estranged from thee; and would take it ill to have their religion disproved or questioned, yet are not brought under the power of it. So Isa. 29:13, 'This people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips honour me, but have removed their heart from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men;' because of tradition, teaching by authority, maintaining or enjoining the worship of God. A worship and respect to God they will have, but such as doth not proceed from an impression upon their hearts, but only in compliance with their customs.

2. The kind of the affection, 'standeth in awe.' There is a twofold awe of the word—(1.) One that driveth us from it; (2.) Another that draweth us to it.

[1.] Fear and awe of the word which driveth us from it is spoken of John 3:20, 21, 'For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.' Carnal men, who live contrary to the light of nature and scripture, that they cannot endure anything which should put them into serious remembrance of God, This is an effect of legalism and slavish fear, which as it bewrayeth itself in its carriage towards God himself, so also in its carriage towards his saints and word. Towards God himself: a slavish fear of God is always accompanied with an aversion or turning away from him; as guilty Adam was afraid of God, and hid himself in the bushes, Gen. 3:10; and still an unsound conscience is shy of God, and hangeth off from him. So towards the saints, who have God's image printed upon them; they fear the saints and hate them; as Herod feared John, and put him to death, Mark 6:20. Still men malign what they will not imitate. Natural conscience in them doth homage to the image of God, shining forth in the lives of his people; they see an excellency in them which they have not; and because all those who keep up the majesty of their profession are objects reviving guilt, they hate them; and if their hatred be more than their fear, they destroy them when it is in their power. So for the word; they are afraid of the word, so as to stand at a distance from it, and cannot endure it, no more than sore eyes can the light of the sun. They have a mind to cherish their lusts and carnal practices, and therefore hate the light which disproveth them; as they that would sleep draw the curtain to keep out the light; whereas, on the contrary, the godly delight to have their ways tried and made manifest by this light; it is a refreshing light to them, but a reprov'ing and discovering light to others; it convinceth them to be what they are. Now they shun all means of searching and knowing themselves, by wishing such things were not sin, or not desiring to know them so, and that there were not a God to punish them. But a

sincere man is otherwise affected; he is jealous and suspicious of himself, he bringeth his work to God's balance, and cannot quiet his conscience without God's acceptance.

[2.] There is an awe of the word, not that maketh us shy of it, but tender of violating it, or doing anything contrary to it. This is not the fruit of slavish fear, but holy love; it is not afraid of the word, but delighteth in it, as it discovereth the mind of God to us, as in the next verse. This is called by a proper name, reverence, or godly fear; when we consider whose word it is, God's; who is our God, and hath right to command what he pleaseth; to whose will and word we have already yielded obedience, and devoted ourselves to walk worthy of him in all well-pleasing; who can find us out in all our failings, as knowing our very thoughts afar off, Ps. 139:2; and having all our ways before him, and being one who will not forgive our wilful transgressions: Josh. 24:19, 'He is a holy and jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions and your sins,' that would impenitently continue in them; and so we receive the word with that trembling of heart which God so much respects.

3. The object, 'thy word;' that is, the whole word of God—the precept with its double sanction, the threatening and the promise; the precept is the rule of our duty; the sanction, of God's proceeding. We are to stand in awe not only of the threatening, but the precept itself; for love to God hath a great influence in producing this awe of the word. It is in angels and heavenly creatures, whose happiness is absolutely secured to them, Jude 4. The great ground of it is God's authority; and that is seen in the precept as much as in the sanction. God's will is the reason of our duty, and his will declared in his word is the rule of it; and the saints obey *intuitu voluntatis*—a bare sight of his, though no inconvenience should follow of it: 1 Thes. 4:3, 'For this is the will of God;' 1 Thes. 5:18, 'For this is the will of God concerning

you in Jesus Christ;' 1 Peter 2:15, 'For so is the will of God,' &c. But yet I would not exelude the sanction; no, not the sad part of it; neither the threatening, nor the promise; because I dare not contradict any of the Holy Ghost's methods; nor exclude his argument from having an influence upon our obedience, as he telleth us of Moses, who had an eye to the recompense of reward, Heb. 11:26. So of Job, who was tender of doing anything contrary to the will of God, because destruction from God was a terror to him, Job. 31:23. To be afraid of God's judgments in a holy manner is not sin, but a grace, a great point of our duty; yea, a matter of faith to apprehend that destruction which God in his word threateneth to sinners. Unbelief of the threatening had a great predominancy in the first sin: 'Ye shall not surely die,' Gen. 3:4; and still it is a main ingredient. Men embolden themselves to rebellion because they look upon God's wrath as a vain scarecrow, and that he doth only frighten us with a deceitful terror and a flash of false fire. But yet reflection upon the threatening must not be alone, that breedeth legalism; nor yet upon the promises alone; but a deep awe and reverence of God's authority must be the main thing that swayeth the conscience. A Christian should have no more to move or stop him, than to know what God will have him do or not do. That terror that doth arise from a mere slavish fear of God as a judge and avenger is not right; but such an awe as doth at once arise from looking upon God at once as a wise lawgiver, a gracious father, and righteous judge. A son, a child, if he take liberty to break the bonds of duty, shall smart for it: though a believer obeyeth and keepeth off from sin upon higher and nobler terms than wrath, yet he maketh a good improvement of these terrors also; for godly fear is influenced by God's being a consuming fire: Heb. 12:29, 30, 'Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire.'

Secondly, We come to the reasons why we should stand in awe of the word of God.

1. From the author of it; it is God's word, not the word of a weak man, but of the great and mighty God. His authority is supreme, his power infinite, his knowledge exact, his truth unquestionable, his holiness immaculate, his justice impartial. The same reasons which move us to fear God do move us also to reverence his word; and add this above all the rest, that therein his truth is impawned to us, and by it he obligeth himself to make good both his threatenings and his promises. Three things I shall take notice of, which showeth God's stamp and impress upon the word:—

[1.] Its authority in searching the heart: Heb. 4:12, 13, 'The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, joints and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart;' that is, as a sharp sword doth pierce asunder between joints and marrow, so doth the word divide soul and spirit; and is a discerner, that is, of the convictions of the mind, and the disposition and inclination of the soul, or sensual appetite. The soul cleaveth to the sin when the mind or spirit disliketh it; or plotteth pretences to hide it from himself or others, even in those sins which lie as hidden in the mind as the marrow in the bones. Secret purposes fall under its judging power as well as practices accomplished. And what use must we make of this, but that we stand in awe of the word, avoiding what it forbiddeth, and following what it commandeth. Now, to evidence this property of the word, he urgeth the omniscience of God, whose word it is: ver. 13, 'Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; for all things are naked and open to him with whom we have to do.' As the sinner's secret thoughts are under the sight of the all-seeing God, so they are under the piercing power of his word; for



God joineth with his word, and giveth it that discovering and piercing virtue. So the apostle of the word preached or explained it: 1 Cor. 14:24, 25, 'He is convinced of all, and judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.' The word is the rule, God is the judge; and the word being assisted by God, God is there where the word is; and so doth ransack the conscience, and discover men to themselves in order to judgment.

[2.] It hath a mighty power and force, because of the spirit that goeth along with it: Rom. 1:16, 'It is the power of God to salvation;' 1 Cor. 1:22, 'The gospel is the power of God, and the wisdom of God.' It is powerful to convince, even there where it converts not; as Felix trembled, Acts 24. It is powerful to convert from one religion to another, from one state to another. (1.) From one religion to another: 'Have any of the nations changed their gods?' Jer. 2:11. There needs much ado to bring men from a false religion wherein they have been brought up, how vain and foolish soever it be; yet this power the word hath. Though the doctrine of a crucified Christ were so distasteful, partly as now drawing men from their old temples, and altars, and ceremonies, wherein they were educated, especially as incredible, offering life by one that died; and partly as contrary to the carnal gust, as requiring duties distasteful to flesh and blood, and engaging in troubles and persecutions, yet it prevailed. (2.) Converting men from a state of nature to a state of grace, so that they are as it were born. To bring men to hate what they naturally love, and love what they naturally hate; it is hard to alter the nature of things, Isa. 11:6; to quicken the dead, to purify the unclean, confirm the weak, to meeken the proud and passionate: Oh! who would not reverence such a word, such a law and doctrine, as can do all this? Yet this and much more hath the word done.

[3.] Its authority: Eccles. 8:3, 4, 'Where the word of a king is, there is power,' or authority to back it. How is it where God is? We reckon not of the words of a private person, though never so wise: Eccles. 9:16, 'The poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.' Where the command of a king cometh, it cometh with authority; for he hath power to back it, and to avenge himself on whosoever shall contradict it; but wise counsel, where there is no authority to enforce it, is little regarded. But now with God is sovereign majesty, and in his word, wherein sentence is pronounced concerning every person and action, according to which judgment doth proceed and will be executed.

2. The second reason is taken from the matter of the word; it is direction about our everlasting concernments: Deut. 32:46, 47, 'Set your hearts unto all the things which I command you this day; for it is not a vain thing, it is your life.' In a matter of life and death a man cannot be too exact and nice; yea, in the obedience or disobedience of the word, life or death eternal is concerned; yea, in every action morally considered, the word telleth you what is the merit of it, and what will be the event, or an evil or a good estate. Man would fain know his destiny, whether happy or miserable; here you may know whether you shall live for ever with God. Man in his laws doth not threaten or promise beyond his power; his power reacheth to men's outward estate, and no further, and is only limited to the bounds of the present life; therefore the sanction of their laws are never extended beyond the promises or threats of present and outward good, to give or take away men's liberty, wealth, estate, life at most. But God threateneth everlasting fire, Mat. 25:41; promiseth an inheritance immortal, 1 Peter 1:4. As God commandeth inward holiness, righteousness, love, so eternal rewards, and eternal penalties, things that concern us more nearly than estates, liberties, peace, yea, our lives themselves.

3. The third reason, because of the profit of standing in awe of the word.

[1.] It fortifieth us, and preserveth us in such temptations as arise from the fear of man. Where there is a reverence and awefulness of God's word, the greater awe overcometh the less. In such a temptation a man may miscarry two ways—by distrust of God, and disobedience to him. The one is the cause of the other. Now that we may not distrust him, it is good to set fear against fear, God against the creature: Jer. 1:8, 'Be not afraid of their face, for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord His powerful protection should encourage us against their wrathful disposition: Isa. 51:12, 13, 'Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and the son of man, that shall be as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy maker?' The immortal and almighty God is able to bear us out. A due sense of the power of the Almighty checketh the fear of men. Or by disobedience we dishonour him: certainly a gracious heart feareth more to offend God than to fall into any temporal inconvenience: Isa. 8:12, 13, 'Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid; but sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear and dread;' 1 Peter 3:14, 15, 'But if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye, and be not afraid of their terror; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.' But let him be your fear and your dread. Be afraid to offend so holy a majesty. The countenance of princes is very awful unto men, but the fear of God's wrath should overcome the fear of man's displeasure, even of the greatest: Heb. 11:27, 'He feared not the wrath of the king, because he saw him that was invisible.'

[2.] It maketh a man sincere. When a man standeth in awe of the word, he obeyeth in presence and absence, Phil. 2:12, and avoideth secret as well as open sins, Gen. 39:9, sins of thought as well as in deed—heart-sins, which the laws of men cannot take hold of; but the

tear of God is instead of all laws, 2 Cor. 1:12. Conscience is to them more than shame of men. Something without keepeth back wicked men; but something within, the godly. Abner's question was not good, 'How shall I hold up my face to thy brother Joab?' 2 Sam. 2:22. He should have said, How shall I hold up my face to the Lord thy God? Though an upright man might do wickedly, uncontrolled of man, and nobody seeth him or punisheth him, yet reverence of God and his word restraineth him.

[3.] It maketh a man punctual and exact when afraid to do anything contrary to God's revealed will. It is universal, and it is powerful. It is universal; the soul that maketh conscience of the word is more thorough in obedience: there will be failings, but, for the main, his heart is sound with God; and lesser failings are retracted by repentance, Ps. 141:1, 2. And powerful: 'Stand in awe, and sin not,' Ps. 4:4; this will cause us to stop in an evil course, on the remembrance of our duty; as David's heart smote him when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment. Some think the text then verified, 'My heart standeth in awe of thy word;' a commandment was in his way.

Use 1. To show us what frame of spirit they are under who despise the word.

1. All do so who deliberately and voluntarily prefer their own will before the will of God: 2 Sam. 12:9, 'Wherefore hast thou sinned in despising the commandment?' They obey their own inclination, whatever the word saith to the contrary. Despising the commandment is the root of all sin, as formality of wilful sin. Oh! that men did regard this as they ought! considering that to despise commandments is to despise the Lord himself, and what it is for poor worms to despise the God of heaven and earth. Nay, that God

that is our judge, he hath power to cast both body and soul into hell-fire—the God whom we are bound by so many ties to obey.

2. When swayed by delight and profit against the course of our duty. Esau sold his birthright to keep him alive, yet despised it, Gen. 29:31, and Heb. 12:16.

3. The case is more aggravated when we cast a precept behind our backs for a light pleasure or small profit; the greater is our contempt to break with God for a little trifle; sell the righteous for a pair of shoes.

Use 2. To press us to get this blessed frame of heart, to stand in awe of the word.

1. It is a great curb in actual temptations: Gen. 39:9, 'How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?'

2. It is a great help in reading and hearing: Acts 10:33, 'Now therefore we are all present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.'

3. A great help in humiliation and suing out our pardon: Ps. 130:3, 4, 'If thou shouldest mark iniquity, who could stand? but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.'

For means to get this awful frame of heart.

1. Faith is necessary. Sundry articles of religion have influence upon it. God's power: Mat. 10:28, 'Fear not them that can kill the body, but fear him that can cast both body and soul into hell-fire.' God's providence, that he observeth human affairs, and accordingly doth reward and punish: Hosea 7:2, 'And they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness, now their doings have beset

them about, before my face;' and Heb. 2:2, 'And every transgression and every disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' A day of judgment: Rom. 2:5, 'But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God;' eternal recompenses of heaven and hell, or the state of the world to come. Those who believe not these things are bold and venturous, and out of a daring confidence will put it to the trial whose word shall stand, God's or theirs: Jer. 44:28, 'And all the remnant of Judah, that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose word shall stand, mine or theirs;' which shall be fulfilled or made good: Heb. 11:8, 'By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, being moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.'

2. Love is necessary, for reverence ariseth from love. David was afraid to displease so good a God, to whom bound by so many ties. Surely love breedeth a greater tenderness than a bare sense of danger: Hosea 3:5, 'Fear the Lord and his goodness.' That which maketh a wicked man presumptuous maketh a child of God awful; he hath to do with a good God, and therefore would not offend him, nor cross his will.

3. A humble penitent spirit is necessary for this frame of heart. Josiah, when he heard the words of the law, he rent his clothes: 2 Kings 22:19, 'Because thy heart was tender, and thou humbledst thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, I have heard thee, saith the Lord;' and 2 Chron. 34:27, 'Because thy heart was tender,' &c.; troubled at God's anger. To some, nothing is of less consideration with them.

4. A good stock of knowledge, or frame of divine truths: Ps. 119:11, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee;'

Prov. 6:21, 22, 'Bind them continually upon thy heart, and tie them about thy neck; when thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou wakest, it shall talk with thee.' A treasure of knowledge not only got by heart, but impressed on us by his Spirit. The great new-covenant blessing, Heb. 8:10, is God's law written upon the heart by the finger of the Spirit, as before on tables of stone, on the directive and imperative powers, the heart and mind; and this maketh us conformable to it in heart and life. God's law is said to be in the heart of the godly, that maketh them willing to obey: Ps. 40:8, 'His law is in my heart;' tender to offend: Ps. 37:31, 'The law of God is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide.' He loveth what is commanded, and hateth what is forbidden; he hath a sense of it, to keep from usual guilt.

5. Advised consideration and watchfulness: 'Let thine eyes look right on, and thine eyelids straight before thee; ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.' When you are about to do anything, examine and consider it, whether God alloweth it, yea or no. Will it please or displease, honour or dishonour God? If he disallow, forbear, how safe, profitable, or comfortable soever it be; if he allow it, then engage: this holy fear must never be laid aside: Phil. 2:12, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling;' 1 Peter 1:17, 'Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.'

## **SERMON CLXXVI**

**I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth  
great spoil.—VER. 162**

IN the text—

1. An assertion or declaration of his delight in the word, 'I rejoice at thy word.'
2. An illustration of it by a similitude, taken from those who have gotten some notable prey and booty, 'As one that findeth great spoil.'

First, The similitude is very expressive, taken from the joy which a conqueror in battle doth find in the spoil of his defeated enemies. The same similitude is used Isa. 9:3, 'They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.' He speaketh there of the highest joy; in a time of peace, joy of the harvest is the greatest joy; in a time of war, victory obtained after a hazardous fight, and rich spoil and booty gotten. To heighten that joy, several circumstances concur:—

1. Deliverance after a doubtful conflict. No man goeth to war but carrieth his life in his hands, and the event is very uncertain. Now when it is unexpectedly determined on our side, there is great rejoicing.
2. The joy of victory, especially to be victorious in a battle.
3. There is booty and spoil, whereby men are enriched, and so profit as well as pleasure.
4. The joy of honour and triumph over fallen enemies.
5. Peace and ease from toil. All these make the joy of victorious men in a battle to be a great joy.

Secondly, It was a fit similitude for David to use, who was a great warrior, and so a man not unacquainted with the joy of victory. A



gracious heart spiritualiseth every occasion that falleth out in their ordinary callings: here is great joy, but this is nothing to the knowledge of God's will.

Thirdly, Every Christian is a warrior against Satan, the world, and the flesh; so it is a fit similitude for them. Victory over sin and Satan is above all the conquests in the world; this is a part of the good news the word bringeth to us, Col. 2:14, 15; John 16:33.

Now observe, in the former verse David had expressed his reverence to the word, now his delight.

First, Our trembling at the word doth not hinder our delight in it; none more cheery than the awful soul: Acts 9:31, 'They walked in the fear of God and comfort of the Holy Ghost;' and Ps. 112:1, 'Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.' Those who are most observant of God's will, and careful to follow it, have the greatest contentment in their souls.

Secondly, Joy should be mingled with reverence, lest it degenerate into slavery and a scrupulous fear.

Doct. That God's people do greatly rejoice in his word.

1. It is not an ordinary delight which is here set forth, but such as is high and intense, such joy as the richest and most gainful victory can raise in any worldly man. It is incredible, and cannot be expressed, how much joy and comfort the word of God yieldeth to good men; therefore so many similitudes used: 'More than in all riches,' Ps. 119:14; 'Sweeter than honey and the honeycomb,' ver. 103; 'I love it above gold, and above fine gold,' ver. 127. A joy greater than the joy of worldly men.

2. It is not a light flash, or a fantastical impression, but a solid consolation, such as is affliction-proof and death-proof, when the strength of this joy cometh to be tried and assaulted by deep afflictions. Therefore the heirs of promise are said to have strong consolation, Heb. 6:18. So ver. 50 of this psalm, 'This is my comfort in mine affliction, thy word hath quickened me.'

3. This joy, which is the mark of a sound believer, is delighting to know, believe, and obey God's word. For it is in the way of his testimonies, Ps. 119:14. It is in his commandments they delight greatly. Study and contemplation breedeth a pleasure, but nothing like practice. The pleasures and delights of the mind do certainly exceed those of the body, for the more noble the faculty is, the more capable of delight. A man in study hath a truer pleasure than the greatest epicure in the most exquisite enjoyments of sense. Now moral delights exceed those which are the mere result of contemplation, as they give us a more intimate feeling of the worth of things. Again those delights which are supernatural, and come from the Spirit, as the pleasures of faith and obedience do, exceed those of the natural mind as much as those do bodily pleasures, as being exercised about nobler objects, which are the sense of the favour of God, and reconciliation with him, and the hopes of eternal life; and as coming from a higher cause, the Spirit of God. Therefore, upon the whole, there is no true delight and contentment but what proceedeth from a careful performance of God's commands, strictly abstaining from what may displease him, and cheerfully practising all that he requireth of us. Truly the present gratefulness of such an employment, and the succeeding comforts of such practices, are a continual feast; all other pleasures to this are nothing worth. The obedience of faith to a believer is more than any worldly advantage. It is a sweet thing to be exercised in the word of God, in reading and

hearing it with serious meditation, but much more to be brought under the power and practice of it.

Reason 1. The godly find glad tidings in the word, suitable to their soul's necessities, and therefore rejoice in it. For the object of delight is bonum conveniens et sufficiens; here is enough to content them, and it is very suitable. There is pardon of sins, and that is ground of joy: Mat. 9:2, 'Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee;' there we hear of a Saviour: 1 Tim. 1:15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' When the gospel was preached at Samaria, Acts 8:8, 'There was great joy in that city.' Zaccheus received Christ joyfully, for he brought salvation to his house, Luke 19:6. There is the true way of mortifying sin and sanctifying the heart: Ps. 19:8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the soul; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.' There we are told of the joys of the world to come: 1 Cor. 2:9, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.' We should exult for joy to hear of those things. Thus you see the word of God affordeth such comforts, such matter of rejoicing, as cannot be paralleled. A poor man, when he findeth a treasure, receiveth it with a joyful heart. Oh! what inestimable treasure do we find in the word of God! the way of eternal salvation is there made manifest.

Reason 2. The saints have felt benefit by it; they have been renewed and sanctified by it, therefore they prize it: James 1:18, 19, 'Of his own will begat he us, with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures. Therefore be swift to hear.' There they have found powerful heavenly truths, by which their souls are made new; they have tasted God's love in the doctrines and promises thereof, and against a taste there is no disputing, 1 Peter 2:2, 3.

Experimented sweetness is beyond all arguments; they have been revived and comforted by it in their troubles, as at the 93d verse of this psalm more largely, 'I will never forget thy word, for, by them thou hast quickened me.' God hath done their souls good by it. It is the charter of their hopes, ver. 111 of this psalm. Whatever calamities they meet with in the world, there they see ground of peace, and composedness in their soul.

Reason 3. They love God, and they hear more of him in the word than they can elsewhere. The soul that loveth God heareth and seeth his blessed name in every leaf; they find the effects of his goodness in creation, some fruits and pledges of his love in daily providence, but there they find his great eternal and wonderful love in Christ; there they know God's will, and it is their desire to be subject to it, and therefore value it, not only as the charter of their hopes, but as the rule of their duty.

Use 1. To condemn them—

1. That find no sweetness in the word of God; they do not mind the business of salvation, and then no wonder if they have a slight and mean esteem of the word.

Two reasons of this contempt:—

[1.] Their scope is not fixed. All means are regarded with respect to the end. Now, if they do not make the everlasting enjoyment of God their end, the scriptures are of little use to them, a trouble rather than a comfort, because they disturb them in pursuing their lusts; but a man that would enjoy God, get to his holy hill, is apprehensive of the benefit.

[2.] They are not affected with their wants, and therefore esteem not the word; for the great benefit of the word is to teach us a remedy for sin and misery. Now they that mind not the misery and danger in which they stand go on carelessly and despise the word of God: Prov. 22:3, 'A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself, but the simple pass on, and are punished.' They little think of the evil which is near them, and so slight the counsel of God.

2. Those that will not believe them that find sweetness in it, as if all were fantastical and imaginary. Are the wisest and most serious part of mankind deceived? and hath the carnal fool only the wit to discern the mistake? Surely in all reason it should be otherwise. These tell us of those delights and transports of soul in meditating on the promises, in purifying their hearts by the precepts; and though a stranger intermeddeth not with their joys, yet surely these find them. All that is spiritual and supernatural is suspected by those who are drowned in matters of sense, John 12:29; a voice from heaven is thunder; the motions of the Spirit, fumes of wine, Acts 3:13; joy in the Holy Ghost but a fancy, &c.

3. Them that count it an alphabetary knowledge fit for beginners. David was no novice, yet he rejoiced in the word as one that found great spoil; the more conversant he was in these holy writings, the more he delighted in them. No; it is not only children's meat; there is not only milk there, but strong meat also, Heb. 5:14. It is our rule to walk by, till our blessedness be perfected. The continual storehouse of our comforts, Rom. 15:4. It is the continual means of growing into communion with God in Christ.

Use 2. To exhort us to delight in the word of God. It is the work and mark of a blessed man: Ps. 1:2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' As far as the

necessities of the present life will bear it, they are still getting more knowledge of true blessedness, and the way that leadeth to the enjoyment of it. This is their business and pleasing study. His work is to form his heart to a sincere, uniform, impartial obedience. And as he doth increase in godliness by the help of the word, his soul is more satisfied; all the joys of the world to this are nothing to him. Are your hearts thus set to know the Lord and his revealed will, and the way of life?

## **SERMON CLXXVII**

### **I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.—VER. 163**

IN this verse the man of God showeth his affection to the word by the hatred of those things which are contrary to the word. Observe here —

1. Affection set against affection.
2. Object against object.

First, Affection against affection, hatred against love. Love and hatred are natural affections, which are good or evil according to the objects to which they are applied. Place love on the world, sin, and vanity, and nothing worse; place hatred on God, religion, holiness, and it soon proveth a hellish thing. But now, set them upon their proper objects, and they express a gracious constitution of soul; let us hate evil, and love good, Amos 5:15, and all is well. Man needeth affections of aversation as well as choice and pursuit. Hatred hath its use as well as love. Love was made for God, and things that belong to

God, and hatred for sin. It was put into us that, at the first appearance, sense, or imagination of evil, we might retire ourselves and fly from it; and is anything so evil as sin, so contrary to God, so baneful to the soul? The office of love is to adhere and cleave to God, and whatever will bring us to the enjoyment of him; and the office of hatred is that we may truly and sincerely turn from all evil with detestation, according to the nature and degree of evil that is in it. The emphasis of the text is notable, 'I hate and abhor;' it must be a thorough hatred, which David, Ps. 139:22, calleth a 'perfect hatred.'

Secondly, Here is object set against object. As love is opposed to hatred, so the law to lying; for the word of God is truth, and requireth truth of all that submit to it; pure sincerity and simplicity. Some render the word more generally. The Septuagint ἀδικίαν ἐμίσησα καὶ ἐβδελυξάμεν, 'I hate and abominate iniquity.' Other translations render it not so; they expound it so that one kind is put for all the rest, and fitly; for every sin is a falsehood, and often called in this psalm, 'A false way, and a lie,' and will fail and beguile all them who are delighted with it. And the purport and drift is, that we should admit, omit, commit nothing which is contrary to the word of God, which is the great object of a holy man's love.

The points are three:—

Doct. 1. They that love the word of God must hate sin.

Doct. 2. That a slight hatred of a sinful course is not enough, but we must hate and abhor it.

Doct. 3. That among other sins, we must hate falsehood and lying, and all kind of frauds and deceits.

For the first point.

Doct. 1. They that love the word of God must hate sin.

This implieth four things:—

1. That our love must be demonstrated by such effects, otherwise it is but pretended, if we do not avoid what it forbiddeth; for our love to God and his word is mostly seen in obedience and dutiful subjection to him and it; for God's love is a love of bounty, our love is a love of duty. He is said to love us when he blesseth us, and bestoweth on us the effects of his special grace and favour; we are said to love him when we obey him. These propositions are clear in scripture, that our love to God is tried by our love to the word, and our love to the word by our hatred of sin: John 14:21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me;' and ver. 23, 'If any man love me he will keep my words.' On the contrary, our enmity to God and his word is determined by our love to sin. Enmity to God: Col. 1:21, 'Enemies in your minds by evil works.' To his word: Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is not subject to the law, neither indeed can be.' Habitual sin argueth a malice or hatred of God and his holy law; and actual sin, an actual hatred. It is *finis operis*, if not *operantis*; whether a man thinketh so or no, it is the intent of the action; a rebellion or an act of disloyalty against God. Yea, there is not only a virtual hatred in sin, but a formal hatred; not only implied, but expressed: they wish there were not a God to punish them and call them to an account, such a law to forbid such practices as they affect, or that such things were not sin. Well, then, it is not some kind of pleasure in the study of the word will show our love to the word, but an impartial, entire, and uniform obedience, strictly abstaining from such things as it forbiddeth, and carefully practising what it requireth at our hands.



2. That our hatred of sin must flow from such a principle. A man may hate sin upon foreign and accidental reasons, and so that abstaining from sin is not a true hatred, but a casual dislike; as when we forbear some sins, but retain others that suit better with our condition, callings, employment, temper, or because of some difficulty in compassing, shame in practising, or repugnant to our natural temper. No; it must be out of a principle of love to God: Ps. 97:10, 'Ye that love the Lord hate evil.' So Ps. 119:113, 'I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love.' A hatred of sin arising from love to God and his word is the only true hatred; that is hatred of sin as sin, as it is ἀνομία, 1 John 3:4, 'A transgression of the law;' as it is ingratitude to God, contrary to our obligations to him, not only as destructive to ourselves; not principally timore poenæ, but amore virtutis. The word of God furnisheth us with divers reasons and arguments to move us to hate sin. They all have their place, but some are more noble and excellent than others; as when a man hateth sin because God hath forbidden it. True hatred cometh from a love of the contrary; therefore he that hath a vehement love to the law hateth all things which are contrary to it: Mat. 6:20, 'He will hate the one, and love the other.' There is no serving two masters; love to the one enforceth hatred of the other. To love the good and hate the evil are inseparable.

3. The more we hate sin the more prepared we are to love the law. A carnal heart hateth the law: John 3:20, 'He that doeth evil hateth the light;' and Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is not subject to the law.' He that doth not hate sin hateth the word of God. We cannot delight in it till our affections be purified and sanctified. Men's evil practices and dispositions cause them to hate the light; it is a reprovng light. Can sore eyes delight to look upon the sun? or an unsound heart delight in that which will so ransack and search the conscience?

4. According to the degree of love, so will the degree of our hatred be. They that have the highest love of the law will have most hatred of sin; they hate every lesser contrariety, a vain thought, Ps. 119:113. They do not only hate open and scandalous sins, but sin carried on in a more close and cleanly manner; yea, they groan under the relics of corruption, and feel it a heavy burden: Rom. 7:22–24, 'For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members;' and then, 'O wretched man that I am!' Next to the object of our affection, the principle or spring of it must be regarded; and next to the spring and rise of it, the degree must be looked after, that we love the good and hate the evil proportionably; that is to say, that our hatred must be proportionable to the evil of the thing hated, and our love to the good of the thing loved. And indeed, where the one is the other will be; where a great love, a great hatred; where a little love, a little hatred: Ps. 119:127, 128, 'I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold; therefore I esteem thy precepts in all things to be right, and hate every false way.'

Use. Well, then, if we would show our love to the word, we must truly, sincerely, and constantly turn from all known sin with detestation and abhorrence; for hatred of sin is an infallible evidence of love to the word. Now hatred of sin, if it be right—

1. It is universal, εἰς τὰ γένη, to the whole kind; as Haman thought scorn to lay hands upon Mordecai alone, but sought to destroy the whole race of the Jews, Esther 3:6. One sin is as inconsistent with the love of God as another. There may be as much contempt of God's authority in a sin of thought as in a sin of practice, in a small sin as in a greater. There may be much crookedness in a small line, and in some cases the dye is more than the stuff: 'I hate every false way.' It

is twice repeated in this psalm, in ver. 104, and ver. 128. To hate what God hateth: Prov. 8:13, 'The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.'

2. It is implacable; it aimeth at the utter extirpation and expulsion of sin. They seek to remove the guilt, to weaken the inclination; they groan sorely under the very being of sin, that anything of sin is left: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' Rom. 7:24.

3. It is still growing. At first it is a dubious case. Men that are convinced have some mind to let sin go, or a wish that Christ would save them from it; but it is with such reserves, that they have rather a mind to keep it than let it go; as Pharaoh had no mind to dismiss Israel, and therefore stood hucking with God; or as David, when he sent out forces against Absalom, yet 'be tender of the young man.' Pleasing lusts, we have but a remiss will against them; our love to it is greater than our dislike of it; therefore so unstable, James 1:8. But when the soul is converted, the soul is armed with a resolution, 1 Peter 4:1. Then the love of sin is weakened in their hearts, and the strength and vigor of it abated; the soul is armed with a serious purpose to give it up, and shake off this servitude, in the confidence of that grace which is purchased for them by Christ's death; there is a godly inclination and bent of soul to live unto God. Again, as our communion with God and sense of his love is increased in us, so our hatred of sin groweth more keen and fierce. When God had told what he would do for Ephraim, 'What have I any more to do with idols?' Hosea 14:8. I have had too much to do already. What! any more? In what proportion there is a sense of God's love, in the same proportion a hatred of evil. Moses, when he had talked with God in the mount, at his return he is full of indignation, and broke the tables. So those that have had sweet communion with God have a more severe displicency against their corruptions, and there is a

more lively principle at work in their hearts, for the expulsion of them. Every act of kindness on God's part layeth a new obligation, and their hatred is awakened by the holy use of the ordinances.

4. The constant discoveries of hatred against sin are watching and striving against it; they are ever careful that they may not offend God: Acts 24:16, 'And herein do I exercise myself, to keep a conscience void of offence both towards God and men;' and keep striving, and a serious resistance, even when they are foiled: Rom. 7:15, 'The evil that I hate, that do I.' A Christian always hateth sin, though he doth not always prevail against it. In sins of daily infirmity, striving is conquering; but in other sins, they prevail against them by degrees; sin doth not carry it freely, nor reign in them: 'For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace,' Rom. 6:14.

Doct. 2. That a slight hatred of a sinful course is not enough, but we must hate it and abhor it: Rom. 12:9, 'Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.' Hate it as hell, as the word signifieth. We do too coldly speak against evil, too slackly follow after that which is good. If our pursuit after God were more earnest, and our hatred of evil more serious and severe, we should be other manner of Christians than we are. There is a twofold hatred—(1.) The hatred of offence and abomination; (2.) The hatred of enmity and opposition. By the one our hearts are turned from sin, by the other turned against it. Now both these are necessary for a Christian that would be safe. Hating and abhorring implieth not only a naked abstinence, or a simple refusal, but an enmity; not a forbearing the act, but a mortifying the affection. We must not only leave off evil, but abhor it; and not only abhor it, but pursue it with a hostile hatred, purposing, watching, striving, praying against it, thwarting the flesh, and contradicting the motions thereof.

Reason 1. It is not else a hatred becoming sin, which is so great an evil, so opposite to God's law, and derogatory to God's glory, so mischievous to us. There is a great deal of evil in sin, a great deal of evil after sin, that we can never hate it enough. It is the evil of evils, that brought all other evils into the world; it is the violation of a righteous law, 1 John 3:4; a contempt of God's authority: Exod. 5:2, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?' Ps. 12:4, 'Our tongues are our own; who is lord over us?' It is a defacing of his image, and a casting off the glory and honour of our creation: Rom. 3:23, 'We have sinned, and are come short of the glory of God.' Ps. 49:12, 'Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish.' A despising of his power by a silly worm, as if we could make good our party against him: 1 Cor. 10:22, 'Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?' It separateth from communion with God: Isa. 59:2, 'Your iniquities have separated between me and you.' It preferreth base satisfactions before the enjoyment of him: 2 Tim. 3:4, 'Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;' as if the base and brutish pleasures of the flesh were to be preferred before the love of God.' This and much more may be said of sin; and is any hatred too great for it? Ps. 101:3, 'I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.'

Reason 2. No other hatred will serve the purposes of grace. A love that is cold will soon fail; so also will a hatred. Where our zeal is not set against sin we soon fall into a liking of it; therefore the soul is not sufficiently guarded by a slight hatred. If sin be not detestable, it will soon seem tolerable. There is a brabble between many and their lusts, and in all haste sin must be gone; but the quarrel is soon taken up, and sin stayeth for all that. Where the enmity is not great, a man's agreement with sin may be soon made. Therefore not only an offence, but a hostile hatred is required, such hating and abhorring

as will not admit of reconciliation. Like the hatred of Amnon to Tamar, 'The hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he loved her,' 2 Sam. 13:15; he hated her with hatred greatly. Did we more strongly dissent from sin, it would not so easily prevail over us. Sin dieth when it dieth in our affections, when our hearts are set against it: 'Get you hence,' Isa. 30:22. Get you gone; be there from henceforth an utter divorce between me and you. This is to hate and abhor.

Use 1. To show us the reason why so many are entangled again in the sins they seemed to renounce and forsake. They have frequently resolved to forsake their sins, but these resolutions have come to nothing; they have striven against them, but as a great stone that hath been rolled up hill, it hath returned upon them with the more violence; or as in rowing against the stream, when the tide hath been strong against them, and they have been driven the more back, and therefore are discouraged. Yea, they have prayed, and found little success, and therefore think it is vain to make any further trial. What shall we say then to these? If the premises were clear, yet the inference and conclusion is wrong and false; for we are not to measure our duty by the success, but God's injunction. God may do what he pleaseth, but we must do what he hath commanded. Abraham obeyed God, not knowing whither he went, Heb. 11:8. Peter said unto Christ, 'We have toiled all night, and have caught nothing; nevertheless at thy command we will cast forth the net.' Though the first attempt succeed not, yet afterwards sin may be subdued and broken. In natural things we do not sit down with one trial or one endeavour, but after many disappointments pursue our designs till we complete them. A merchant will not leave off for one bad voyage, nor an ambitious man because his first essays were fruitless; and shall we give over our conflicts with worldly and fleshly lusts? That showeth our will is not fixedly bent against them, because we cannot

presently subdue them. 'He that will be rich,' 1 Tim. 6:10. If you had such a will to be holy and heavenly.

2. There is a fault in these purposes, in these strivings and prayers; they do not come from a heart thoroughly set against sin.

[1.] These purposes are not hearty and real, and then no wonder they do not prevail. There may be a slight purpose, and there is a full purpose, Acts 11:23. If thy purposes were more full and strong, and thoroughly bent against sin, they would sooner succeed. Is it the fixed decree and determination of thy will? When you are firmly resolved, your affections will be sincere and steadfast, you will pursue this work close; not be off and on, hot and cold, unstable in all your ways; your full purpose, or the habitual bent of your hearts, are known by your drift and scope. Or it may be this purpose may be extorted, not the effect of thy judgment and will, but only thy conscience awakened by some present fear. Many are by some pangs and qualms of conscience frightened into some religiousness; but this humour lasts not long: Ps. 78:35–37, 'And they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High their redeemer; nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied to him with their tongues; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.' In their dangers they remembered God, but their hearts were not right with him. Ahab, in his fears, had some relentings; so had Pharaoh. The Israelites turned to the Lord in their distress, but they turned as fast from him afterwards; resolves not of love, but fear. So are these resolutions wrested from you by some present terrors, which, when they cease, no wonder that they are where they were before. Violent things never hold long; they will hold as long as the principle of their violence lasteth. Or it may be you rest in the strength of your own resolutions. Now God will be owned as the author of all grace, who reneweth and quickeneth every

affection in us; still we must have a sense of our own insufficiency, and resolve more in the strength and power of God, and rely upon the grace of Jesus Christ, by his Spirit mortifying the deeds of the body, as knowing that without him you can do nothing, neither continue nor perform our resolutions. Men fall again as often as they think to stand by their own power. There is much guile and falsehood in our own hearts; we cannot trust them. The saints still resolve, God assisting: Ps. 119:8, 'I will keep thy precepts; oh, forsake me not utterly;' ver. 32, 'I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.' They beg God to keep up their inclination and bent against sin: ver. 36, 'Incline my heart to thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.'

[2.] As to striving. Let us examine that a little; if it be so serious, so diligent, so circumspect as it should be. Certainly that is no effectual striving when you are disheartened with every difficulty; for difficulties do but influence a resolved spirit, as stirring doth the fire. No question but it will be hard to enter in at the strait gate, or walk in the narrow way. God hath made the way to heaven so narrow and strait, that we may the more strive to enter in thereat, Luke 13:24. Now shall we sit down and complain when we succeed not upon every faint attempt? Who then can be saved? This is to cry out with the sluggard, 'There is a lion in the way.' should a mariner, as soon as the waves arise, and strong gusts of wind blow, give over all guiding of the ship? No; he is resolved upon his voyage. To give out upon every difficulty is against all the experience and wont of mankind. Again, this striving and opposing is but slight, not accompanied with that watchfulness and resolution which is necessary. Many pretend to watch against sin, yet abstain not from all occasions of sin. If we play about the cockatrice's hole, no wonder we are bitten. Never think to turn from thy sins, if thou dost not turn from the occasion of them: Prov. 4:15, 'Go not in the way of evil men, avoid it, pass not by



it, turn from it, and pass away.' This is a practice becoming the hatred of sin. Evil company is a snare. If thou hast not strength to avoid the occasion, which is less, how canst thou avoid the sin, which is greater? He that resolveth not to be burnt in the fire must not come near the flames. Job made a covenant with his eyes, Job 31:1. Our Saviour taught us to pray, 'Lead us not into temptation.' He doth not say, into sin. Temptation openeth the gate to it. Certainly it argueth a hankering of mind when we dally with temptations; as the raven, when he is driven from the carrion, loveth to abide within the scent of it, so they have an inclination to sin when they forbear the practice of it.

[3.] For praying. We oftener pray from our memories than from our consciences, and from our consciences enlightened than hearts renewed by grace. Prayer, as it is the fruit of memory and invention, is but a few slight and formal words said of course, a body without a soul; as dictated by conscience, it may be retracted by the will, at noli modo. Austin, when he prayed against his youthful lusts, timebam ne me excluderet Deus, was afraid lest he should be heard too soon; at best but half desires, faint wishes, like Balaam's wish to die the death of the righteous. The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing. God never made promise that lazy wishes should be satisfied. If you pray against sin with your whole heart, he will hear you. The great fault is the want of this thorough hatred of sin.

Use 2. Take heed of two things:—

1. A secret love to your sins.

2. A remiss hatred against them.

1. A secret love to sin. Job speaketh of some that hid sin as a sweet morsel under their tongues, Job 20:12, loath to let a lust go; and

David of regarding iniquity in our heart, Ps. 66:18. First there is a secret liking of sin, which in time will prove baneful to the soul; some lust is spared, and continueth unmortified. It doth not remain so much, as it is reserved, and there keepeth possession for Satan. This will in time eat out all our other virtues, and bring a stain upon those good properties wherewith God hath endowed us. Sin was never heartily cast out, therefore they are in time ensnared again, and drawn away by some sensitive lure.

2. A remiss hatred of sin. No; there must be a total and full aversion. Hatred and indignation is the soul's expulsive faculty; it cannot be kept in good plight without it. It is the lively and active principle which sets the soul a-work, in avoiding what is hurtful to the spiritual life: it concerneth us to keep it up in strength and vigour. The reason why even believers do so often sin through weakness is because the will doth not so strongly dissent as it should. Though we do not deliberately give our assent, it should more potently awaken our displeasure. But certainly the reason of wilful sin is want of a strong hatred. Though convinced of evil, yet we go on like a fool to the correction of the stocks, Prov. 7:22.

Doct. 3. That among other sins, we must hate falsehood and lying, and all kind of frauds and deceits.

1. I shall open the particular notion of lying in the text.

2. Show you the reasons against it.

First, To open the particular notion of lying.

1. In the vulgar acceptance and sense of it, we take it to be speaking an untruth, or that which is false, with an intention to deceive. Now this is a sin contrary to the new nature: Col. 3:9, 'Lie not one to

another, since ye have put off the old man with his deeds.' It is not only contrary to that natural order which God hath appointed between the mind and the tongue, but to that sincerity and true holiness which is our great qualification and the fruit of regeneration. Therefore God saith, Isa. 63:8, 'Surely they are my people, children that will not lie.' God presumeth that his people will not deal falsely, but speak as they think, and think of what they speak as it really is; and that Christians will not deceive and circumvent others, since they are members of the same mystical body, and should seek one another's welfare, as much as they do their own: Eph. 4:25, 'Wherefore put away lying; speak every one truth with his neighbour; seeing ye are members one of another.' No; it is more unseemly in a Christian, more inconsistent with grace. In short, no sin maketh a man more like the devil: John 8:44, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it.'

2. Concealing the truth which should be confessed. God would not have his people hide themselves in necessary truths; he would have them believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, Rom. 10:9, 10. And Christianity is called a confession, Heb. 3:1; and all Christians are saved either as martyrs or as confessors.

But how far we are to confess lesser truth is a great case of conscience. Certainly we must do nothing against a truth, not appear in the garb of a contrary party, nor must we lie hid when God in his providence crieth out, Who is of my side, who? We read of some, John 12:42, who 'believed in Christ, yet they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.' Faith is in a very weak condition

when confession is not joined with it, when men will not own Christ in troublous times, and appear in their own shape. Men that have much to lose have many worldly considerations; they think these lose more than they can gain, and lose by the praise of God rather than the praise of men. Now the sincere Christian saith in these cases, 'I hate and abhor lying.'

3. It is contrary to that obedience to God which we do profess. There is a practical lie as well as a virtual lie, when our practices do not correspond with our profession; there is a lie acted, as well as a lie told. So Ephraim is said to compass God about with lies, Hosea 11:12. To say we have fellowship with God, and walk in darkness, is a lie, 1 John 1:6, a lie that tendeth to the disgrace of religion, in opprobrium Christi: 1 John 2:4, 'He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.' So he that speaketh much of the Spirit, and walketh after the flesh.

Reason 1. God is a God of truth. God cannot, nor will not lie, and his people must be like him.

Reason 2. His word is the word of truth, his law requireth truth; and all falsehoods and deceits are contrary to that justice and charity which it establisheth. His gospel is a gospel of truth: Eph. 1:13, 'After ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.'

Reason 3. He requireth and worketh truth in the reins and inward parts: Ps. 51:7, 'Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts.'

Use. Oh! then, hate and abhor lying. You cannot be accepted of God else: Jer. 5:3, 'O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth?' You cannot have grace in your own hearts: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'This is our rejoicing, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our conversations in the world;' nor long continue undiscovered before men: Prov. 26:26,

'His wickedness shall be showed before the congregation.' Let us not lie to God in our promises we make to him: Ps. 78:34–36, 'When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned and inquired early after God; and they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High their redeemer: nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues.' In your worship, do not compass him about with lies, complain of burdens which you feel not, express desires which you have not. In your profession, do not make it a veil and cover for your lusts. A wicked or carnal design is inconsistent with uprightness of heart. As to men, abhor all false and deceitful practices and speeches. When the apostle biddeth us abhor that which is evil, he first saith, Let love be without dissimulation, Rom. 12:9. You are not to live by interest, but by conscience. Therefore abhor all hypocrisy, falsehood, treachery, which are unworthy any ingenuous man, much more a Christian.

## **SERMON CLXXVIII**

**Seven times a day do I praise thee,  
because of thy righteous judgments.—  
VER. 164**

IN these words the man of God giveth further proof of his love and delight in the word, by praising God for that benefit.

His praise is illustrated—

1. By the frequent repetition of that duty, seven times a day do I praise thee.

2. The subject-matter, because of thy righteous judgments, i.e., God's dispensations agreeing with his word.

First, The frequency of the duty, 'seven times a day;' that is, very often; numerus definitus pro indefinito, a number certain put for an uncertain. Seven is often used for many, as Lev. 26:18, 'I will punish you seven times more for your sins;' that is, not exactly seven, but many and divers times: Prov. 24:16, 'A just man falleth seven times a day, and riseth up again: Prov. 26:25, 'There are seven abominations in his heart;' 1 Sam. 2:5, 'She that is barren hath borne seven, and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.' So here, I give thanks to thee as often as I meditate of them. Some of the Jewish rabbis stick in the very literal number, seven—twice in the morning, before the reading of the law, and once after it, and at noon, and so in the evening as in the morning; so Rabbi Solomon. Indeed elsewhere, Ps. 55:17, 'Evening and morning and at noon will I praise the Lord;' but whether with such scrupulous observation of hours is not certain.

Secondly, The subject-matter, 'Thy righteous judgments,' whereby is meant—

1. God's most righteous laws and precepts, called the ordinances of judgment and justice, Isa. 58. We cannot sufficiently bless God for the benefit of his word.

2. The dispensations of his providence suiting therewith, whether they concern us or others. The word is fulfilled in the punishment of the wicked, and in giving the promised reward to the righteous. All God's dealings are righteous judgments, and matter of praise is still offered to us from the comforts and blessings of his providence. There is no question of that; the smallest of his mercies should not be overlooked, though notable mercies should be continually remembered, Ps. 68:19. Not only daily benefits, but great

deliverances are a standing ground of thanksgiving: Ps. 66:2, 'Sing forth the honour of his name, make his praise glorious, show forth his salvation from day to day;' especially now the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the great salvation is more clearly revealed, we should never think of it, nor read it, nor hear of it, without some considerable act of joy and thankfulness. Again, so for the dispensations of God to others, in protecting his people, in punishing his enemies. It is a great confirmation of faith to see promises and threatenings fulfilled on others, how punctually God maketh good his word to all that trust in him, Ps. 18:30; on all those that reject it and despise it: 'As we have heard, so have we seen,' Ps. 48:8. They that believe the word of God, and do mark what is foretold in the word, shall find the event and work of providence suitable to the prediction.

3. God's righteous judgments afflicting of us doth also yield matter of praise, as they work together for good to such as love him, Rom. 8:28; and the saddest corrections afford necessary and profitable instructions: Ps. 94:12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and teachest him out of thy law;' Ps. 119:71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes;' though not barely for the afflictions themselves, yet for their fruit and issue, that our souls are bettered and humbled by them, and as we see the faithfulness of God in them.

Doct. That the people of God should never cease lauding and magnifying the name of God because of his righteous judgments.

David was never weary of praising God; every day he praised God, and often every day: love sweetened it to him. We shall praise him evermore in the world to come, there it will be our sole employment; but even in this world we should not count it a burden, but praise

him yet more: Ps. 71:14, 'I will yet praise him more and more,' still magnifying his greatness.

Here I shall speak—

1. Of the duty, that we should praise God.
2. Of the continuance, that we should not cease praising God.
3. The grounds of it in the text, because of thy righteous judgments.

First, The duty.

Secondly, The motives to it.

First, The duty, and there we have—(1.) The nature of it; (2.) The grounds of it; (3.) The formality; (4.) The fruit of it.

1. The nature of it. There are three words used in this matter—blessing, praising, giving thanks. Sometimes they are used promiscuously, at other times there is a distinctness of notion to be observed. Blessing is used: Ps. 103:1, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul.' Blessing relateth to his benefits; it respects the works of God as beneficial to us; his mercy, love, and kindness to us. We bless him who hath blessed us, Eph. 1:7. Praise relateth to his excellences, as we may praise a stranger for his excellent endowments, though we are not benefited by them: Ps. 111:1, 2, 'Praise ye the Lord; I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation: the works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.' It is a great part of our work to praise the Lord; not that he at all needeth it, for he is infinitely perfect, but he deserveth it, and by this means we testify our love and reverence of him, and strengthen our own dependence on him, and gain others to him, when we speak good of his name. The other word



is thanksgiving: Ps. 107:1, 'Oh! give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good.' This differeth from the two former, because praise may be expressed in words, gratitude and thankfulness in deed; also it hath respect to benefits as well as blessings; but we show our gratitude by obedience. But these are often coincident; indeed, there is a mixture of all in the true praising of God; excellences and benefits are to be acknowledged with heart, mouth, and life.

2. The grounds of it. Faith and love must be at the bottom of our praise, if we would not have it slight and formal; for the more lively apprehensions we have of God's perfections, which is the work of faith, and the more sensible of his goodness and mercy, which is the work of love, the better is this service performed. Therefore, unless these praises flow from a believing, loving soul, they are but an empty prattle and a vain sound. Faith is necessary, that is the eye of the soul to see the invisible one, Heb. 11:27. It giveth us an apprehension of the Lord's excellences in order to love and trust. So also, in order to praise, faith sets us before the throne, and doth withdraw the veil, and showeth us the eternal God, who liveth and reigneth for ever, dispensing all things powerfully, according to his own will: that is all the sight we have of God in this life—a nearer vision is referred to our future glory; here we see him by faith. Again, love, or a deep sense of the goodness of God, which enlargeth the heart towards him, and forceth open our lips, that our mouths may show forth his praise, Ps. 51:15. There he meaneth God's giving a sweet and renewed sense of pardoning mercy: Ps. 63:3, 'Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.' An intimate sense of the Lord's love sets the tongue a-work to speak of it. Praise, then, is the result of faith and love. None else do it seriously, delightfully, but where these graces reign and prevail in the heart.

3. The formality of it is an acknowledgment of the divine virtues, benefits, and perfections, manifested to us in his word or works, or both. These must be acknowledged by some outward expression: words, whereby we express our inward thoughts and apprehensions. Our tongues are called our glory: Ps. 57:8, 'Awake up, my glory;' Ps. 16:9, 'My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth.' When that scripture is quoted, Acts 2:26, it is said, 'My tongue is glad,' ἡγαλλιάσατο ἡ γλῶσσά μου. So the Septuagint. So called, not only as speech is our excellency above the beasts, but because God is thereby glorified and praised; given us to this end and purpose, to bless God, James 3:9. As our understanding was given us to know God, and think on him, so our speech to speak of God, to declare his excellent perfections, and to stir up others to praise him with us.

4. Holiness, the fruit of it; for as Job said, the sides of the poor blessed him, Job 31:20, so must our lives praise God, 1 Peter 2:9, show forth his virtues, not in word only, but in works. Our lives must be a constant hymn to God, though we should be silent. We remember the Lord's excellences, that we may imitate them, and express them to the life. The children of God serve only for this use, to represent God to the world, as the image in the glass representeth the person that looketh in it. So Isa. 40:21, 'This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise.' The impression of all the divine attributes and perfections must be left upon us, and copied out by us, plainly represented in our wisdom, purity, faithfulness, and godliness

Secondly, The motives, because there is no part of God's worship to which we are more indisposed. Self-love will put us upon prayers and supplications, but love of God upon praises. We are inclined to the one by our own necessities, but we need to be stirred up to the other by pressing arguments. I will only mention those which are heaped

up together in one place: Ps. 147:1, 'Praise ye the Lord, for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is comely.'

1. It is good and profitable, a piece of service acceptable in God's sight: Ps. 50:23, 'Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me.' It is a part of that spiritual worship required under the gospel, beyond all the sacrifices of the law. In other duties we expect something from God, but in this we bestow something on him.

All God's praises are a believer's advantage; every attribute is his storehouse: 'This is my beloved and my friend,' Cant. 5:16; Ps. 135:5, 'For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.' Yea, it is profitable as it is acceptable: Ps. 67:5–7, 'Let all the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee; then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our God, shall bless us; God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.' Pliny telleth us of a fountain that would rise, and swell, and overflow, at the playing of a pipe or flute, and when that ceased, would stop again. The fountain of mercy riseth, and swelleth, and overfloweth with new supplies of mercy when we praise and acknowledge the old.

2. It is pleasant and delightful, full of sweet refreshment. He that knoweth not this work is pleasant is unacquainted with it; for this ravishing, transporting joy is matter of experience. When is the gracious heart more delighted than when it feasts with God? All acts of obedience have a pleasure accompanying them, especially acts of worship, being the nobler part of the spiritual life; and among them praise: Ps. 135:3, 'Sing praises unto his name, for it is good and pleasant.' It is our duty in heaven to praise God, when we are in our highest felicity; therefore this is a work wherein we should rejoice to be employed. It is our reward rather than our work, the heaven that we have upon earth; and nothing so fit to cheer up the spirit as to

remember what a God we have in Christ. The very nature of it hath allurements enough to a gracious heart: Ps. 92:4, 'For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy works;' when God blesseth our meditations of his works with gladness.

3. It is comely and honourable to be about the employment of angels, to be heralds to proclaim the Lord's glory; nothing so comely for us as creatures, who have our whole being from him. As new creatures, we are set apart to be to the praise of his glorious grace in Christ, Eph. 1:12. It beareth all men as a debt, which they owe to God, though the wicked have no power to perform it. Indeed the new song doth ill become the old heart; but when there is an obligation and a capacity, then it is comely indeed. It becometh them to pay, and God to receive it from them: Ps. 33:1, 'Praise is comely for the upright.' All are bound to praise God, yet none will do it cheerfully and acceptably save the godly: they have obligations above all people in the world; they have a capacity and a heart to do it, and from them God most expecteth it.

Secondly, The continuance, that we should never cease praising God. David saith here, 'Seven times a day,' which is the number of perfection; and elsewhere you shall find equivalent expressions: Ps. 34:1, 'I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall be continually in my mouth.' So Heb. 13:15, 'Let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually, giving thanks unto his name.' So Eph. 5:20, 'Giving thanks always unto God for all things.' What is the meaning of these extensive particles, 'continually,' 'always,' 'and at all times'? I answer—It is not to be understood as if we were without intermission to be employed in the actual exercise of formal and distinct thanksgiving. No; there are other necessary duties, which sometimes must divert us from it; but the meaning is—

1. That there is continual occasion of praising God. God is continually beneficial to us, blessing and delivering his people every day, and by new mercies giveth new matter of praise and thanksgiving. And there are some standing mercies which should never be forgotten, but be remembered before God every day, as redemption by Christ, with all the abundant benefits; and therefore the gospel church is represented by four beasts, or four living wights, together with four-and-twenty elders, who 'rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty,' Rev. 4:8. This is spoken to show that matter doth still continue of lauding and blessing God; and David saith, Ps. 71:8, 'Let my mouth be filled with thy praise, and with thine honour all the day.' There is no moment of time wherein we are not obliged to praise and glorify God.

2. This must be understood of the preparation of the heart without intermission. We must cherish that disposition of heart which is necessary for it. A habit of thankfulness, a heart deeply affected with the Lord's excellences and mercies, should ever be found in us, and never laid aside; the instrument must be kept in tune, though it be not always played upon. David saith, Ps. 57:7, 'My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing, and give praise.' There must be a prepared heart, or a fixed purpose to praise the Lord. A renewed sense of God's favour, and fresh experience of his goodness to us, do draw forth this preparation into act; yet the preparation must still remain with us, and we are to watch against dulness and indisposedness for this holy work. This preparation is more or less at times, for special mercies do raise, enliven, and inspirit the heart; but some measure of a thankful disposition, or bent and inclination to praise God, must never be wanting. As the Vestal fire among the Romans was ever kept in, on special occasions it was blown up; so there should be a habitual frame of heart to praise God at all times, but

upon some special occasions it must more especially be excited and stirred up to it.

3. We must keep a constant course, and certain order of worshipping and praising God, both in public and private. In scripture they are said to do a thing always who do it upon stated occasions; as Mephibosheth did eat continually at David's table, 2 Sam. 9:13; not as if always eating, but at the eating times; and the disciples are said to be continually in the temple, praising and blessing God, Luke 24:53; that is, at the appointed times of worship. So we are to set forth certain times to bless and praise the Lord, who is continually good to us; especially on the sabbath. See the 92d psalm, the title, with the first verse, 'It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High!' We are not to omit any occasion of formal and direct thanksgiving; acknowledge mercy and faithfulness, the two pillars of our confidence; as it is to be done constantly, which the former head called for, so frequently, that is, we must take every just occasion to perform it, let no special opportunity pass. The Lord's mercies are new every moment, Lam. 3:21, and he loadeth us with his benefits daily, Ps. 68:19. Therefore as God's hand is ever open to bless, so should our mouths be ever open to praise; and we should never go from this exercise nisi cum animo revertendi, but with a purpose to return to it again. We have poor temporary affections towards God, and are very rare and infrequent in these duties; though we are daily receiving more and more benefits, yet we are slow and backward to this work. Every hour, every minute, every moment, God is obliging us to it anew; therefore we should say, 'I will praise him more and more.'

Thirdly, The ground of praising mentioned in the text, 'Because of thy righteous judgments.' Here observe—

1. The term is one of the notions by which the word of God is expressed. Surely all kind of mercies are the matter of praise, especially spiritual mercies; and among these, his word, for this is a great favour in itself; the church can as ill be without it as the world without the sun. Ps. 19, he compareth the sun and the law together. This is a peculiar favour: Ps. 147:19, 20, 'He hath given his word to Jacob; he hath not dealt so with every nation; praise ye the Lord.' The benefit of the scriptures is a precious gift of God to the church, and so it should be valued and esteemed; not counted a burden, as it is to them who are wholly earthly, and mind not heavenly things. Alas! what should we do without this help to ease our burdened minds, to understand God's providences, and learn the way to happiness, without these pure precepts and heavenly promises? What is it that raiseth in us the joy of faith, the patience of hope, that directeth us to a straight and certain way to glory, but the word of God? This is the book of books, the food and comfort of our souls: Ps. 56:10, 'In God I will praise his word, in the Lord I will praise his word.' The best hold that faith can have of God is by his word. Let us own his word, and then, whatever his dispensations be, we have cause to praise him; here is a sure hope to fix upon, and a sure rule to walk by. It cannot be told in a breath what benefit we have by it: here is matter of glorying, and firm confidence; we need not fear men or devils as long as we have such a firm bulwark to secure us: here we have God's will made known, to give us notice of a blessed estate, and God's promise to give us an interest in it.

2. It noteth the dispensation of his providence, fulfilling his promises unto the faithful, and executing his threatenings on the wicked. He is the same in his works that he is in his word. His judgments are declared in his holy word, and executed in his righteous providence; and therefore it is said of them that have not his word, Ps. 147:20, 'As for his judgments, they have not known them; praise ye the Lord.'

Where they have not his word, the Lord's dealing with men in justice and mercy, and the course which he observeth in ruling the world, is not understood; it lieth much in the dark, so that his providence is complicated with his word; and as it is the sentence of his word executed, is matter of praise. Well, then, we must praise God for his righteous government of the world, according to his word; whether it concern the church in general, or us in particular: Rev. 16:7, 'True and righteous are thy judgments.' But because particular providences come nearest home, and do most affect us, I shall instance in them:—

[1.] Let me show you how we should praise God for his favours, and fulfilling of promises to us, and hearing our prayers, and remembering us for good in our low estate. Joshua leaveth this note when dying, Josh. 23:14, 'I am going the way of all the earth; and ye know in all your hearts and all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord hath spoken to you; all are come to pass, not one thing hath failed thereof.' Trust God, and try him, and you will return the same account with this, which was the result of all his experience. And Solomon taketh notice of God's fulfilling promises, 1 Kings 8:20, 24, 'And the Lord hath performed his word that he spake; who hath kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him; thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand.' There is none of any acquaintance with God but find much of this. Now they should therefore praise the Lord, and love him; so David, Ps. 116:1, 'I will love the Lord, who hath heard the voice of my supplication.' When we have put promises in suit, and challenged God upon his word, he hath stood to it, justified our confidence; every fresh experience in this kind should excite new love and praise.

[2.] In time of affliction, when divine dispensations go cross to our affections, and it may be to our prayers, yet even then should we



praise the Lord. Job when the Lord had taken away, he blesseth the name of the Lord, Job 1:21. The Lord is worthy of praise and honour when he giveth and when he taketh away, when he emptieth and when he filleth us with blessings. A child of God is of a strange temper; he can fear him for his mercies, Hosea 3:5, and praise him for his judgments, as in the text. It argueth a great measure of grace to give thanks to God at all times and for all things: 1 Thes. 5:17, 18, 'Rejoice ever more; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks.' Simply we cannot give thanks for afflictions as afflictions, as we cannot pray for them, nor joy in them, but as they are a means of good to us. A thankful frame of heart bringeth meat out of the eater, encouragement out of the saddest providences, and taketh occasion to lift up itself in the praises of God even from those things which are matter of greatest discouragement and heartless dejection to others. It seeth the hand of God working for good to him. And then, on the other side, an unthankful, repining, murmuring spirit soureth all our comforts, is ever querulous, whether crossed or pleased; it entertaineth crosses with anger, and blessings with disdain. It is hard to be in any condition on this side hell wherein we have not cause to praise God; even in great calamities, either for their fruit and issue, as our souls are bettered and humbled by them: Ps. 119:65, 'Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, according to thy word.' Wherein? In giving him faith, and sensible and seasonable correction, ver. 67; and presently, 'Thou art good, and doest good,' ver. 68. Or else for their mitigation, as to deem them not insupportable, 1 Cor. 10:13; that we are not consumed, Lam. 3:22; that not to the full merit of our sins: Ezra 9:13, 'Thou hast punished us less than we have deserved;' that comforts come along with them; that our afflictions do not exceed the measure of our comforts, 2 Cor. 1:5; that we have a good God still, who knoweth how to turn all to our advantage. Let us be persuaded he is well affected to us in Christ, and we will take anything kindly at his hand. All this is spoken that poor murmuring

souls may not set out from so blessed a work; yea, when other arguments fail, we may see the wisdom, justice, and faithfulness of God in his sharpest corrections: Ps. 119:75, 'I know that thy judgments are right, and in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.' It is a great honour to God to speak good of his name when his hand is smart upon us.

Use. Let me press you now to three things:—

1. To the work.
2. Frequency and constancy herein.
3. To suit often God's word and works together.

First, To the work of praising God. Many are often complaining or begging, but seldom praising or giving thanks. Oh! surely this should be more regarded, not always taken up with complaints against ourselves, and supplications for mercies; but should some time give thanks, and praise the Lord; it is the noblest part of our work, it is nearest the work of heaven. As love is the grace of heaven, so praise is the duty then in season. It is good to be preparing, setting our hearts in order for our eternal estate; it is the work of angels; when we praise God, we do the work of angels. The angels, according to the opinion of the ancient Hebrews, do every day sing praises to God, and that in the morning; which they gather because the angel said to Jacob, Gen. 32:26, 'Let me go, for the day breaketh;' which place the Targum of Jerusalem thus explaineth, Let me go, for the pillar of the morning ascendeth, and behold the hour approacheth that the angels are to sing. However that opinion be, sure we are that the angels ever bless God, and laud his holy name: Isa. 6:1–3, the angels cried one to another, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.' They were blessing God for creation; then the morning

stars sang for joy, Job 38:4–6, for the nativity of Christ, Luke 2:13, 14. They apprehend more of God's excellency and perfection in himself and in his works than we do, and are more sensible of his benefits than we are. Now if this be the work of angels, the highest and greatest of them, surely this work should be more prized by us. It is nobler than other duties; we serve God in our callings, but this work is a part of our misery, this burden was laid upon Adam after his fall, that in the sweat of his brow he should eat his bread, Gen. 3:19. Though honest labour be a part of our obedience, yet it is also a part of our trouble and exercise. There are works of righteousness; as to give every man his due, these are good works; but they concern the benefit of man, the good of human society; whereas praise is more immediately directed to the honour of God. There are works of mercy, to relieve the poor, to help the distressed, to support the weak, to comfort the afflicted; these are good works indeed, and a very noble part of our service, to be reckoned to our thank-offerings as praise: Heb. 13:15, 16, 'By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name: but to do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' It is godlike to do good, and a more blessed thing to give than to receive, Acts 20:35; as God giveth to all, and receiveth of none; but still this redoundeth to men. There are opera cultus, the fourth sort of works, works of worship; internal, as humbling our soul, repenting of our sins, and asking pardon; these are good works indeed, but such as imply our misery and imperfection. External, as prayer, hearing, and reading, and other acts of communion with God; but when we give thanks, this is more noble. In other duties, God is bestowing something on us; but here, in our way, we bestow something upon God. In prayer, as beggars; in hearing, as scholars and disciples, we come to expect something from him. Here we come to put honour upon God; in our way it is a kind of recompense, or paying our debts to him, by word or deed.

Now the reasons why men are so backward to this work are—

1. Because we have so little of the love of God. Self-love puts us upon supplication, but the love of God upon praise and thanksgiving. It is a token of great love to praise God without ceasing. We are eager to have blessings, and then forget to return and give God the glory.

2. And partly neglect of observation. We do not gather up matter of thanksgiving: Col. 2:4, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same, with thanksgiving.' We should continually observe God's answers and visits of love, manifestations of himself to the world. The reason, then, why we have no more pleasure in praising God is, because we observe not so heedfully as we should his mercy and truth fulfilled.

Secondly, To frequency and constancy therein. Frequency in this duty doth not beget a satiety and loathing, but rather a greater delight to continue in it. But here arise two questions:—

Quest. 1. What time must be necessarily spent in acts of worship and adoration, prayer, praise, and immediate converse with God?

Ans. 1. It is a truth that our whole time must be given to God, for a Christian is a dedicated thing, a living sacrifice, Rom. 12:1. Now the beast offered in sacrifice with all the appurtenances was God's; a Christian, by the consent of his own vows, is not master of anything. After a vow of all, we must not keep back part, as did Ananias and Sapphira. A Christian hath given his whole self, time, and strength to God.

2. Though our whole time be given to God, yet for several uses and purposes. God's service is not of one sort, and he is served in our callings as well as in our worship. Man in paradise was to dress the garden, Gen. 2:15, as well as to contemplate God. Common actions

may become sacred by their end and use: Isa. 23:18, 'And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord.'

3. These several duties must not interfere and clash one with another, for God's commands are not contrary, but subordinate. We must not so attend upon religion as to neglect the service of our generation, as instruments of God's providence; nor suffer the lean kine to devour the fat, the world to encroach upon religion.

4. The particular seasons for each duty are not determined and set down in scripture.

[1.] Partly because God trusteth love, and will see whether we have a mind to cavil and wrangle and dispute away duties, rather than practise them.

[2.] And partly because he would leave something to the conduct of his Spirit, and the choice of spiritual wisdom: Ps. 112:5, 'A good man will guide his affairs with discretion.'

[3.] And partly because men's occasions and conditions are different, and he would not have his law to be a snare.

[4.] And partly because there are so many occasions to praise God, that if we do not want a heart, we will be much and frequent in this duty.

5. Though there be no express rules, there is enough to prevent carelessness and looseness. God calleth to us in very large and comprehensive terms, 'always,' 'continually,' 'and in everything.' The example of the saints who night and day were praising God: 'Paul and Silas at midnight sang praises to God,' Acts 16:29. So Ps. 119:62, 'At midnight will I rise to give thanks to thee, because of thy

righteous judgments.' And in the text, 'Seven times a day.' Besides, there are daily solemn services, personal and domestic, to be performed, Mat. 6:11; 'Watching daily at my gates,' Prov. 8:34. Morning and evening they were to offer a lamb, Num. 28:4.

6. There are general hints and limits enough to become love: Ps. 71:14, 'But I will hope continually, and will praise thee yet more and more.' Enough to keep the heart in good plight, and maintain faith and hope in God, and keep up a spiritual intercourse of communion with God by daily offering up prayers and praises to him.

Quest. 2. Whether it be convenient to state and fix a time?

David had his set times, so had Daniel; and surely, all occasions, opportunities, and abilities considered, it may be a help to us, and make the spiritual life more orderly, to have set, stated, fixed times for the performance of this duty.

Thirdly, To suit God's word and works together, laws and judgments: Rom. 1:18, 'God hath revealed his wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness;' Heb. 2:2, 'Every transgression and every disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' Deliverances and promises fetch all out of the covenant: Ps. 128:5, 'The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion;' that relateth to the covenant made to the church; this checketh atheism, sweeteneth our duties, allayeth our fears, and resolveth our doubts, and helpeth us in the delightful exercise of praising God.

## **SERMON CLXXIX**

## **Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.—VER. 165**

ALL that live in this world find this life a warfare, Job 7:1; much more must the godly expect difficulties and conflicts: Ps. 34:19, 'Many are the troubles of the righteous.' To the eye of flesh, no condition seemeth worse and more obnoxious to misery than the condition of those that serve God; yet in reality none are in a better estate; whatever happeneth, they are at peace, built on the cornerstone which God hath laid in Zion, and therefore in all the commotions and troubles of the world they are safe. This is that which David here observeth.

In the former verse he had told us that it was his custom to praise God seven times a day for his righteous judgments, and now he showeth the reason, namely, from the ordinary course and tenor of these judgments, or dispensation of his providence, which was to give peace to them that keep his law, 'Great peace,' &c.

In these words you have—

1. A privilege, great peace have they.
2. The qualification, that love thy law.
3. The effect, nothing shall offend them.

Let me open these branches.

First, The privilege is peace, and that is threefold—(1.) External; (2.) Internal; (3.) Eternal.

1. External, in the house, the city, or country, and societies where we live. In this sense it is taken, Ps. 122:6, 7, 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee; peace be within thy walls.' Now this is not all that is meant here, for this is a common benefit, though often vouchsafed for the sake of them that love God; as music cannot be heard alone, though intended but to one person, yet others share with him in the benefit of it. Or if you understand it of his own personal peace, or being at amity with men, they do not always enjoy that. God's best children are often forced to be men of contention, that is, passively; they are contended with and troubled in the world, Jer. 15:10. And therefore the apostle saith, Rom. 12:18, 'If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.' It is not always to be had, but we should endeavour to live in peace with all men.

2. There is internal peace, arising either from justification, Rom. 5:1; or sanctification: Isa. 32:17, 'The fruit of righteousness is peace;' or from contentment with our condition, Phil. 4:7. By justification we have peace, when God is reconciled and made a friend; by sanctification we have peace, when we walk evenly with God; and by contentment we have peace, when our affections are calmed and rightly ordered, or set upon more worthy and noble objects, so that we are not troubled at the loss of outward things. These are the ingredients necessary to eternal peace, which is, I suppose, principally intended here—inward comfort and contentment of mind.

3. There is eternal peace, that happy and quiet estate which we shall enjoy in heaven, when we are above all desertions, temptations, and the trouble of hostile incursions, when we shall never have frown more from God's face, when our sun shall always shine without cloud or night, when our strife is over, and our enemies that do infest us



now are all overcome. There is no Satan to tempt us, no serpent in the upper paradise, no world to trouble or divert us; for all the wicked are bound hand and foot, and cast into unquenchable fire; there is no flesh to clog us, for all is perfect. This glorious estate is called peace in scripture; as Rom. 2:10, 'God will give glory, honour, peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile;' and Rom. 8:6, 'To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.' By death is meant the torments of hell, and by life and peace the joys of heaven. And, speaking of the blessedness of those that die in the Lord, he saith, Isa. 57:2, 'They shall enter into peace.' Now this cannot principally be intended here, for the man of God speaketh of what we have, not of what we hope for; and he speaks of God's righteous dispensations here in the world, for which he praised him; and therefore it is meant of our peace here; but yet it is the sense of peace and happiness we shall have in heaven that hath an influence upon the tranquillity of our hearts and minds here.

Secondly, Let me a little explain the qualification, 'that love thy law.' The word 'law' is sometimes taken in a limited sense for the decalogue or moral law; or else, more generally, for the whole doctrine of the covenant, the whole tenor of religion, law, and gospel. So here and elsewhere; as 'The isles shall wait for thy law,' Isa. 42:4; that is, shall readily receive and embrace his doctrine. So Dan. 6:5, 'We shall not find occasion against this Daniel, unless we find it in the law of his God;' that is, in his religion. So Ps. 1:2, 'But his delight is the law of the Lord.' By the law of the Lord is meant the whole word of God. Well, now, it is said they love his law; not only keep it, but love it. A child of God is sometimes described by his faith, sometimes by his hope or by his fear, but more often by his love, that commanding and swaying affection that sets the whole soul a-work. They love thy law; there is emphasis in that.

Thirdly, Here is the consequent, 'Nothing shall offend them.' The Septuagint renders it οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτοῖς σκάνδαλον, they have not scandals, they have their troubles, but no stumbling-blocks: 1 John 2:10, 'There is no occasion of stumbling in them.' There is the same word used there which the Septuagint useth here. Scandal is either active or passive, given or taken; that which is taken out of weakness, as young professors, or out of pride and malice; they interpreted many things in a worse sense when they knew it might be interpreted in a better. Now, nothing shall scandalise them. Peace with God prevents the scandals of weakness, and love to the law prevents scandals out of pride and malice. Nothing shall scandalise them. Many things are apt to scandalise men, as God's judgments, for which David did so often every day and so solemnly praise God. But they that love his law, and thereby obtain great peace, they will not stumble at God's dispensations, let them be never so cross to their desires and expectations, because they have a sure covenant, that is, a sure rule, and sure promises. They are not scandalised by the miscarriages of men; they can distinguish between the art and the artificer; if the artist fail, the art is not to be blamed. The reproaches that are cast upon the ways of God, it doth not offend them, for they have found God in that way others speak evil of. Gold is gold though east into the dirt; dogs will bark at the moon when it shineth brightest. Would any man be troubled if a cripple mock him for going uprightly? Shall we leave the ways of God, wherein we have found comfort and peace, because others speak against them? He is not offended at this. But that which is meant here is such an offence as turneth them from God, otherwise a good man may fall and stumble, but not into final apostasy, and he is usually kept from lesser offences. A child of God may be offended in lesser cases, but not so offended as to fall and break his neck.

But why is it called great peace? It noteth the excellency of this kind of peace; it is not only peace, but great peace, such as is rich and glorious: Phil. 4:7, 'A peace that passeth all understanding;' or it may note the degree and quantity of it, abundance of peace, as it is, Ps. 29:11, and Ps. 72:3; I speak peace to them that are afar off; or peace like a river, Isa. 48:18, or pure peace.

Three points I shall handle—

Doct. 1. That it is the property of God's children to love his law.

Doct. 2. Those that love the law shall have great peace.

Doct. 3. This blessed peace maketh a man hold on in the way of obedience, whatever impediments, stumbling-blocks, or discouragements he meets withal.

First point, That it is the property of God's children, not only to keep his law, but to love his law.

This is often spoken of in this psalm; now I prove it thus:—

Reason 1. They love God, and therefore they love his law: how doth that follow? The love that passeth between God and us is not an arbitrary love of equals, but the necessary dutiful respect that inferiors owe to their superiors, such as children owe to their father, servants to their master, subjects to their prince and governor. Therefore it is not a fellow-like familiarity, but a dutiful submission and subjection to God's authority; and therefore, if we love God, we will love his law. It is God's condescension that he will use us like friends in regard of communion, and converse with us, as Abraham was called God's friend, James 2:23; yet we are but servants, though we are used like friends, and there is a debt and bond of duty lying

upon us; and so if we bear any respect to God, it must be determined by our respect to his laws, and demonstrated by our obedience to them, not by acts of ordinary courtesy and kindness. This is often spoken of: John 14:15, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments;' and ver. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me;' John 15:14, 'Ye are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you.' Though none condescendeth to such acts of kindness and friendship as God in Christ hath done, yet still he standeth upon his sovereignty: 'If ye love me, keep my commandments.' God's love to us is indeed a love of bounty, but our love is a love of duty and service. I have not yet done with this reason. It necessarily follows from the love of God, though you abstract him from the notion of a sovereign and lawgiver, and should love him only because of the excellency of his nature. Now thus I argue: The same reasons that carry us to love God, do carry us also to love his law; for he that loveth God, will love anything of God, wherever he finds it. He will love his word, he will love his saints; but chiefly his word, for that is most to be loved, because that hath most of God in it. The law is a copy of his holiness; the tract of God is in the creatures, there is his vestigium. His image is in his saints, they resemble his divine qualities, but his most lively print and character is upon his word. The image of God in his saints is obscured by their infirmities, but the law of God is perfect, there is no blemish there; this is the fairest copy and draught of his holiness. Nay, once more, in this argument abstract the consideration of his authority and the perfection of his being, yet our obligations to God as our benefactor will enforce this love to his word, and make it sweet to us, because it is the letter of our friend and benefactor, and the signification of his will to whom we owe life and breath and all things; and therefore, though the law did not deserve to be loved for its own sake, yet it should be sweet for his sake from whom it cometh. He hath evidenced much love to us, as we are creatures; but much more love in Christ, as we are sinners;

and it should be acceptable to us upon his account. Love and gratitude will constrain us to do his will and regard his commands, 2 Cor. 5:14. If we have any sense of our great obligations to him, it must needs be so.

Reason 2. God's children find such an excellency in his law that they must needs love it. As it is—

1. A plain clear word, that doth fully discover the will of God, and not leave duty to our own uncertain guesses. It puts duty into a plain stated course, how we may come to be blessed for ever more; Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.' Light is pleasant, but darkness is uncomfortable. When Aristotle was asked why all men do love the light, his answer was, That was the question of a blind man; sense discovereth sufficiently why we should love the light. Certainly if you ask why men do not love the word of God, it is because the god of this world hath blinded their eyes, 2 Cor. 4:4.

2. It is a good word, because it is suited to our necessities; so we read, Heb. 6:5, 'If so be ye have tasted the good word.' Is food good when a man is hungry? Is drink good when a man is thirsty? Then the word of God is good, for it suiteth with the necessities of our souls, as these things do with our bodies: 1 Tim. 1:15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' The gospel is a doctrine fitted for hungry consciences. If our inward senses were not benumbed, and we were not so Christ-glutted and gospel-glutted as we are, oh! how precious would these tenders of grace be to our souls!

3. It is a pure word; so David gives the reason in the 140th verse of this psalm, 'Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.' Hypocrites will now and then relish the comforts of the gospel, be affected with the word, because it speaketh such good things to poor

sinner; but God's children love the word for its purity and holiness. It meeteth with every sin, and directeth them to every duty necessary for the enjoyment of the blessed God. It is not comfort only must draw our love, but holiness. This argueth the life and power of grace, when we would not have the law of God less strict and holy than it is, but love it for this very reason, because it is pure, strict, and holy. You would not think a beggar loves you because he liketh your alms, but he is loath to stay with you for your service, and live under the orderly government of your family. Most men's love to the word is such, they delight in the comforts of it as an alms, but they hate the duty of it as a task; they had rather let the duties of it alone, if it could be without danger, and forbear them if they durst. Oh! but when your hearts consent to the purity of the law, and you would choose that life which it points out unto you rather than any life in the world, or the most absolute freedom that the heart of man can imagine, so that you love your master the more because he hath appointed you such work, this is true affection to God and his word: you had rather live in holiness than sin, if you had your freest choice; it is a sign then you love holiness for holiness' sake, and admire that in the word which is most worthy, its strictness.

4. It is a sublime word: ver. 129, 'Thy testimonies are wonderful, therefore doth my soul keep them.' Here are excellent truths, glorious mysteries, fit to exercise the sharpest wits in the world, a study fitter for angels than men, 1 Peter 1:12. I do not speak this to stir up curiosity, which is a moral itch, a lust of the mind, and nothing more opposite to true love than lust, but to raise men to a due esteem of the scriptures, which they are wont to contemn for their simplicity and plainness; it is full of high mysteries, though it may be read with profit by simple people, or any who desire knowledge. Sensual men, that are drowned in worldly delights, only look to the comfort of the animal life, and value all things as that is

gratified; but those that look to the spiritual life, and the ennobling of their souls, they will find the only sublime wisdom in the word of God: Deut. 4:6, 'Keep these statutes and do them; for this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' What pitiful notions had the philosophers, and the wisest of the heathen, concerning God, and angels, and providence, and the creation of the world, and the souls of men, and the happiness of the other world, and the way to attain it! When the heathen came to be first acquainted with the Jews, they wondered at their wisdom and skill. These things would beget admiration in us if we did meditate on them, and contented not ourselves with a slight and customary rehearsal of them. Here are deep mysteries to exercise the greatest wits, and therefore consider them more.

5. It is a sure word: Ps. 19:7, 'The testimonies of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.' These directions may be safely relied upon, and will not disappoint us; for they are not the guesses of deceived men, nor the collections only of the most observing and wisest men, or the result of their infallible experiences, but inspiration of the infallible God; and therefore a sensible heart, that knoweth what it is to live in a troublesome world, and hath been exercised with doubts, knoweth the comfort of a sure rule and sure promises. Oh! what a comfort is this in the midst of the uncertainties of the present life!

Reason 3. There is no keeping the law without loving the law. There is a keeping the commandments by way of defence, and by way of obedience; a keeping of them by way of preservation, when we will not suffer them to be violated or wrested from us by others; and a keeping of them by way of observation, when we are mindful of them, are careful to observe them ourselves. This latter is the meaning of the scripture notion of keeping the law. Now this cannot

be without love; nothing can hold the heart to it but love. What bonds will you cast upon yourselves! But if a temptation come, you will break them all, as Sampson did the cords wherewith he was bound. It is not your promises, vows, covenants, resolutions; not your former experiences of comfort, when put to no trial; all is nothing to love. To evidence this to you, three things are needful—labour, valour, and self-denial.

1. To keep the commandments is a laborious thing, and requireth great diligence. Now love is that disposition that maketh us laborious and diligent. If anything keep a man to his work, it is love. Labour and love are often put together: Heb. 6:10, 'God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love;' 1 Thes. 1:3, 'Your work of faith, and labour of love.' It is not a slothful and idle affection, but will make a man take any pains, and endure any toil, nescit amor molimina—love never findeth difficulties. The reason why they object difficulties is because they love not. The church of Ephesus, when she lost her first love, she left her first works, Rev. 2:4. Our Lord Jesus, when he had work for Peter to do, gage his heart upon this point: John 21:15, 'Simon Peter, lovest thou me? feed my sheep, feed my lambs.' No man can endure the toil of the ministry, and the many troubles and difficulties he meeteth with in the discharge of it, without love to Christ. It is love sets all the wheels in the soul a-going.

2. To keep the commandments requireth spirit and courage, not only the labour of an ox, but the animosity and courage of a lion; for we are not only to work, but fight and contend for our duty against the enemies of our salvation. Now the most valorous and courageous affection is love. A cowardly lover is a monster, one that hath all liver and no heart. The poets in their fictions ascribe the valour of the person whom they would represent as noble and heroical to the



strength of their love. Certainly the heroic acts of the martyrs came all from love. Others will not be at the charge of keeping the commandments of God that lie cross to their profits and pleasures; but love will cause us to do the will of God, whatever it cost us. Yea, it is loath to serve God with that which cost nothing: Cant. 8:6, 7, 'Love is strong as death, many waters cannot quench love.' Death conquereth the stoutest, but cannot conquer love: 'They loved not their lives to the death,' Rev. 12:11. The waters of affliction cannot quench it, no threatenings, no promises can quench it. Love will not be bribed from Christ, nor frightened from Christ. You will be assaulted on both sides, with hopes and fears, but nothing shall fright or allure the soul from Christ.

3. To keep the commandments there needeth much self-denial and submission, that he may have a heart to stoop to the least intimation of the will of God, though it be against your own will, and against your own carnal sense and inclination and interest. A man can never keep the commandments till he thus deny himself; therefore the world wondereth what is the reason that men do so submit against their humour and interest. And say, If this be to be vile, I will be more vile; as holy David said: nothing can do this but love. When a man loveth you, you have the keys of his heart, you can open and shut it when you please. Sampson like a child submitted to Delilah, because of his love to her. So Gen. 34, Hamor and Shechem submitted to any terms, to be circumcised, because of the delight the young man had to Dinah; the father loved the son, and the son loved Dinah, and therefore both submitted to that hateful, painful ceremony. Jacob's service for Rachel seemed but a few years because of his love to her, Gen. 29:20. So if we love the law of God, we will submit to the duties of it, against the hair and bent of our hearts.

Use 1. Examination.

1. Do we receive the truth of God in the love thereof? Do we embrace the offers of Jesus Christ heartily? Acts 2:41, 'They received the word gladly.' Do you keep up your relish of the gospel, delight to hear of Christ, to read of Christ, to meditate of Christ, and the doctrine of salvation? not one part, but all? Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of God;' the whole law. Ungodly men will catch at promises, seem to show a love to these, but grudge at the mandatory part of the word. Do you delight when it is pressed upon you, when you are warned of your danger? know most of your duty, and the way how to attain your blessedness? Do you love it most when you feel the tragical effects of it? As the apostle saith, 'The commandment came, and sin revived, and I died.'

2. Do you heartily take Christ's yoke upon you, and frame yourselves to practise what he hath required of you? They that love the law cannot rest in mere speculations, and be careless in the duties required of them. Love cannot be hidden, but it will break forth into action. If it be in your hearts, it will break out in your lives: Ps. 40:8, 'The law of God is in my heart.' You will make conscience of duty, 1 John 2:4. Love is found to be solid and real when we are tender of Christ's laws; in vain else do we talk of the new birth, of the work of grace, or having an interest in Christ, and the like, unless we keep his law.

3. Do you practise it willingly, and without grudging? 1 John 5:3, 'His commandments are not grievous.' They that love the law will not count the work tedious. God doth not look to the work, praying, hearing, strict observing his ordinances, or Lord's day; but minds the will for the deed, not the deed for the will, whether willingly or unwillingly. God dealeth with us as rational creatures. If your ox draw your plough, and your ass carry his burden, you care not much whether it be done willingly or unwillingly; but God dealeth with us

as obliged, and looketh that love should constrain us, and influence our actions; and God dealeth with us as renewed creatures, that have a suitableness to their work, Heb. 8:10; Ps. 40:2, when rather from him than with him he delights greatly in God's commandments; Ps. 112:1, delights to know, believe, and obey God's word; and God expects it from us, because of the pleasures that do accompany well-doing, Prov. 3:17. The speculation of a worthy truth affects the mind, but practice doth more, as more intimately acquainted with it.

Use 2. It shows—

1. How far they are from the temper of God's people that dispute away duties rather than practise them, cavil at their work rather than readily accept it.

2. They do not love the law that are always full of excuses, and pretend occasions to neglect the service of God; excuses are always a sign of a naughty heart. The sinner's non vacat is indeed non placet: Luke 14:18, 'They all began to make excuses.' If we did not want a heart, we should not want an occasion to manifest our respects to God.

3. It shows how far they are from the temper of God's people that are easily discouraged with difficulties; love will make us break through all, 2 Cor. 5:14. Love hath a constraining force, counts nothing too dear to be parted with for God's sake; they that are weary of well-doing, they are out of their element; as they in Malachi inquired, When will the sabbath be over? They that brought but a sorry lamb, cried out, Oh, what a weariness! Again, they that love the law are not troubled about the strictness of the law, but the unsuitableness of their own hearts. God's children are grieved for that weariness and uncomfortableness they find in God's service, glad of any enlargement of heart. Lust is grievous, but not the commandment:

Rom. 7:24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me (not from the law, but) from the body of this death?' But others, when the truth shineth round about them, they receive it not in the love thereof.

Doct. 2. Those that love the law shall have great peace. Let me prove this.

1. They shall have peace.

2. Great peace.

First, They shall have peace.

1. Because the God of peace is their God; they are assured of his love and favourable acceptance. *Tranquillus Deus tranquillat omnia*—if God be with us, who can be against us? If he smileth on us, it is enough, though all the world should be against us; for it is God's wrath that maketh us miserable, and God's love that maketh us happy.

2. Jesus Christ, who is the Prince of peace, is their Saviour, Isa. 9:9. He hath made articles of peace between God the Father and us, and drawn them into a covenant of grace, called the covenant of his peace, Isa. 54:10; and this founded upon his blood, which is the price given to purchase our peace, and to set all things at rights between God and us, Col. 1:20; Isa. 53:5. Having made peace between God and us. No less would serve the turn completely to satisfy the justice of God for our wrong, and to purchase his favour for us.

3. The Spirit, who is a Spirit of peace, Gal. 5:22; it is one of his fruits; he worketh it in us as a sanctifier and as a comforter.

[1.] As a spirit of sanctification he doth dispossess Satan, and subdueth that rebellious disposition that is naturally in us against God, and maketh us accept the offer of friendship and reconciliation with God, and to yield up ourselves servants to righteousness, unto holiness, and then accordingly to walk as people that are at amity with God.

(1.) Your first resignation in faith and repentance is a ground of peace, and wrought in us by the Spirit: Rom. 15:13, 'Now the God of peace fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.' Together with our faith, and in and by our faith, the Holy Ghost worketh this joy and peace! When we come to sue out our pardon in his name, to receive the atonement, and to resign up ourselves to God's use, then is the foundation laid: 'Give the hand to the Lord,' 2 Chron. 30:8.

(2.) This peace is confirmed by holy walking in the Spirit, or perfecting holiness through the power of the Holy Ghost: Gal. 6:16, 'As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them;' Jer. 6:16, 'Ask for the good old way, and walk therein, and you shall find peace to your souls.' Keep close to God and you will have peace, otherwise not. Peace with God and thine own conscience is a very tender thing; you had need be chary of it. If you grieve the Spirit, you will find it to your bitter cost. When sinful dispositions are indulged and nourished, our peace is beclouded, and hangeth on uncertain terms.

[2.] As a comforter, whose office it is to give us a sense of God's love, and to help conscience to judge of our state and actions. The Spirit representeth God as a Father, and showeth us what things are given us of God, and dissipateth and scattereth all the black thoughts that are in the soul: Isa. 57:19, 'I create the fruit of the lips to be peace.'

Peace is a sovereign plaister, God maketh it stick, and then all the world cannot deprive them of this peace. Creation and annihilation belong to the same power; the world can never give, nor take; it is God's work, and he will maintain it.

Secondly, It shall be great peace, as to the nature and degree of it, as was before explained.

1. For the nature of it; it is not an ordinary peace, but of a higher nature: John 14:27, 'My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you: let not your hearts be troubled.' Wherein doth it differ from the world's peace? The world's peace is oftentimes in sin, a concord in evil, a lethargy portending sadder troubles; but this is a holy peace. Prov. 3:17. That is a crazy peace that is soon broken and distorted, depending on the uncertainty of present affairs and the mutable affections of men; the more secure they are, the sadder trouble at hand: but this is an everlasting peace, which we have now in the way, and shall have in death, and then for ever. The world's peace is outward; it is but at best a freedom from outward troubles, when they are at enmity with God; but this is a peace with God himself, Prov. 16:7. The world's peace pleaseth the outward man, but this is a solid soul-satisfying peace, a peace that guardeth heart and mind, Phil. 4:7.

2. For the degree, it is many times in a great measure enjoyed; it may be more or less, as an interest in God's favour is more or less in us. And it is not perfect in this life; there may be clouds and interruptions, but as our holiness increaseth, so doth our peace; a little holiness, a little peace; but they that love thy law, have great peace.

Object. How have God's children great peace? None seem more troubled and harassed with outward afflictions, nor walk more

mournfully than they do.

Ans. It is true this peace doth not exclude trouble from carnal men in the world; they may have little outward peace, yet they shall have as much of that as God seeth good for them, Job 5:23, 24; but inward peace, which is peculiar to them. They have God for their friend, are quieted with a true sense and apprehension of his love and favour to them. It is true, as to this inward peace, God's children may sometimes be without it; they that love the law have a greater sense of sin than others. Wicked men swallow sins without remorse; but they are very apprehensive of displeasing God. But we must distinguish between the time of settling this peace, and when it is settled. For a time they may walk sadly; their peace is not grown up; light is sown for the righteous. Many times they sow in tears, but reap in joy. Sometimes their love to the law is intermitted, so their peace may be interrupted: But their worst condition is better than a carnal man's best, as the darkest cloudy day is brighter than the brightest night; there is some comfort and staying upon God in the worst condition.

Use 1. Let us from hence see the sad condition of carnal men. This clause, 'love thy law,' is exclusive, and confineth it to one sort of men. The unjustified, the unsanctified want this peace. God saith of them, they should not enter into my rest, Ps. 95:11. The rest is begun in this life in reconciliation with God and peace of conscience, and perfected in an everlasting refreshment in that to come. Their sins are not pardoned, and therefore continually fear; they have often refused God's peace, and therefore cannot enjoy comfort with any security, nor bear troubles with any patience and quiet of mind, nor come into God's presence with any cheerfulness, nor wait for eternal rest with any certain hope: 'There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,' Isa. 48:22; Ps. 57:20, 21. It is not allowed to wicked men, nor

vouchsafed to them. It is true they may have a peace, but it is either in sin or from sin; they do not mind the condition of their souls, a blind presumption that merely cometh from God's forbearance, or worldly happiness in prosperity. Carnal men seem to be in as great quietness as the children of God; as the deep sea in a calm, which seemeth to be as quiet as other waters, until a storm and tempest doth arise, then troubled, and cannot rest.

Use 2. To persuade us to love the law of God by this argument, because we shall have great peace; for the promise is made to this love.

But you will say, How must we show love to the law of God, that we may obtain this effect?

I answer—Practise the duties it calleth for in order to peace.

1. Accept the articles of peace, that are proclaimed between God and mankind in and through Christ. Eph. 2:17, there is peace preached, not only to them that are afar off, but to them that are nigh; there is not only a price paid, but an offer made. Embrace it, lay hold upon it by faith; God is in good earnest with you, 2 Cor. 5:20. Oh! love this good word; it is the gladdest tidings that ever sounded in the ears of lost sinners. Now is your time, agree with your adversary while he is in the way, before you be cast into prison, Luke 12:58. If you lose this opportunity, and do not embrace the offered friendship, God will be exceeding angry: Heb. 2:3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' 2 Chron. 30:8, 'Therefore give the hand to the Lord.'

2. Perform the duty of thankfulness which God requires, Mat. 11:29. Peace is the fruit of sanctification, as well as justification; it is not to be found elsewhere, Isa. 32:17.



3. Be much in communion with God and trading with heaven: 'Acquaint thyself with God,' Job 22:21.

4. Be tender of your peace, when it is once settled, of doing anything that may cause war between God and the soul, Ps. 58:8. Take heed of venturing your peace for the vanities of the world, those sinful and foolish courses which will lay you open to God's wrath and displeasure: Ps. 37:11, 'The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.'

## SERMON CLXXX

### **Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.—VER. 165**

I NOW come to the effect, 'Nothing shall offend them.' The Septuagint, οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτοῖς σκάνδαλον, there is no scandal in them. The apostle John applieth the same phrase or form of speech to him that loveth his brother, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῷ σκάνδαλον, there is no occasion of stumbling in him. The meaning is, they shall not be in danger of those snares and temptations which the world is full of, and which frequently bring other men to sin and ruin; or nothing shall wound or hurt them, or cause them to fall in their journey to heaven.

Doct. That the love of God's law is a great means to carry a believer straight on his way to heaven, whatever temptations he hath to the contrary.

Here I shall inquire—

1. What scandals and offences are.

## 2. How a believer is preserved.

First, What scandals and offences are? I answer—Scandals literally signifieth temptations, or inducements to sin, any stumbling-block or hindrance laid in a man's way, by which the passenger is detained or diverted, or at which, if he be not careful, he is apt to stumble or fall. Spiritually it signifieth anything that may discourage or divert us from our duty to God, or may occasion us to fall, to the great loss or ruin of our souls.

Now, concerning these scandals or offences, I shall give you these distinctions. With respect to the subject, there are three sorts of scandals:—(1.) Taken, but not given; (2.) Given, but not taken; (3.) Both given and taken.

1. There is offence taken where none is given. Thus Christ himself, in his person, sufferings, doctrine, may be an offence to the carnal and unbelieving world. In his person, as he is said to be, 1 Peter 2:8, 'A stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to them that stumbled at the word, being disobedient, whereunto they were also appointed.' He that is to the believer a corner-stone elect and precious, is to the obstinate prejudiced unbeliever, with allusion to those that travel by land, a stone of stumbling, to those that travel by sea, a rock of offence; his slender appearance was an offence to them. As to his sufferings, it is said, 1 Cor. 1:23, that 'Christ crucified is to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.' They had not a Messiah to their mind, though such an one as the scriptures had before described. His doctrine: Mat. 15:12, 'His disciples said to him, Knowest thou not that the pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?' Again, John 6:61, when they murmured at his saying, 'Except ye eat my flesh, Doth this offend you?' Flesh and blood are apt to stumble in God's plainest ways: at the doctrine of God, which

is strict and spiritual; the worship of God, that is simple and without pomp; the dispensations of God, in chastising and afflicting his people; they are all an offence to carnal and worldly men, and so through their sin prove an impediment to the success of the gospel. But this offence is causeless, and without any just ground; and without special grace, when it prevaieth with men, will prove their eternal ruin and destruction. God never intended to satisfy men's lusts and humours; truth must be taught, whoever be displeased; therefore all our care must be to avoid this kind of offence: Mat. 12:6, 'Blessed is he that is not offended in me,' that doth not stumble at Christ because of the cross, nor the holiness of his doctrine, nor the simplicity of his worship, nor the despicableness of his followers, nor the troubles that attend his service.

2. Offence may be given where none is taken, as when men counsel others to evil, or reproach the holy ways of God; as when Peter dissuaded Christ from suffering: Mat. 16:23, 'Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou art σκᾶδalon, an offence to me.' It was scandalum in se, though not *ratione eventus*,—not that Christ was offended by it; when the heart is guarded against evil counsel, or the infection of evil example. So for reproaches, they are a means of betraying the soul into sin, and prejudicing it against godliness; but the godly are well fortified, they can see loveliness in such ways as are hated and discountenanced in the world. As David: Ps. 119:127, 'They have made void thy law, therefore I love thy commandments above gold, above fine gold;' and Moses, Heb. 11:26, 'Esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.' They are no more moved at the world's scorn than a man that is straight and upright would be at the mocks of cripples because he doth not limp and walk after their fashion; they can see honour in disgrace, and beauty in God's despised ways.

3. Offences also may be both given and taken; as when one provoketh, and another is provoked to evil, enticed by false doctrine, corrupt counsel, or evil example. False doctrine: Mat. 15:14, 'The blind lead the blind, and both fall into the ditch;' not one, but both, the blind follower as well as the blind guide. Or by corrupt counsel, as Ahab was seduced by the false prophets, 1 Kings 22, and Amnon by his friend Jonadab was drawn to incest, 2 Sam. 13:6; he as readily obeyeth the other's wicked counsel, as he was to give it. So for evil example; it secretly tainteth us. The prophet complaineth, Isa. 6:5, 'I am a man of polluted lips, and I dwell among people of polluted lips.' It is hard to avoid the contagion of iniquities with which we do daily and familiarly converse, as to live in an infected air without taint, or to walk in the sun and not be insensibly tanned. We leaven one another by our coldness and deadness in religion. It is hard to be fresh in salt waters, to live among offences and not be offended.

Secondly, With respect to the object or matter of it. A scandal may be given, dicto aut facto—(1.) In word; (2.) In deed.

1. In word, by evil counsel or carnal suggestion: Ps. 1:1, 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.' As carnal friends and parents that relish not the word of life themselves, out of prejudice against godliness and holy zeal, dissuade their children and servants from attending on the exercises of religion, as praying, hearing, meditation, lest they grow mopish and melancholy, and lest a zealous minding God's interest should hinder their preferment, had rather see them lewd than holy; but, Luke 14:26, 'If any man come to me, and hate not father and mother,' &c. Or by atheistical, or obscene and carnal discourse: 1 Cor. 15:53, 'Evil communications corrupt good manners;' Eph. 5:4, 'Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient.'

2. In deed, and so three ways:—

[1.] When they do things that are simply unlawful, and so propagate their sin to others by their example: Prov. 20:24, 'Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man shalt thou not go, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.' The violences and furious passions of anger are so uncomely, that a man would think they should rather affright then allure to imitation; but these things insensibly overcome us, and ere a man is aware, he is tainted.

[2.] By the abuse of Christian liberty to the wrong and hindrance of others in a way of godliness; as Rom. 14:13–15, 'Let no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way: I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean: but if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably: destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died;' 1 Cor. 8:10, 'But take heed, lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak.' We must not commit a sin, or omit a duty to avoid offence; yet in indifferent things we may expect from others what is lawful to do, and forbear it, as conduceth to edification; for we must have a care of offending little ones, and therefore must drive according to their pace, using our liberty as they are able to bear.

[3.] By persecution enforce others against their duty: Mat. 18:6, 'But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe on me, it were better a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the sea;' better he did suffer all extremity. Offending is persecuting, as receiving is countenancing, cherishing, treating them kindly and tenderly. So Mat. 13:21, 'When persecution ariseth by reason of the word, by and by they are offended;' Mat. 24:9, 10. This

opposing, hating, vexing the people of God is one way of offence, and very dangerous to those that practise it, however it succeedeth; for though they be little ones, little in their own eyes, little in the esteem of the world, little in regard of outward interest, and so lie open and liable to offences, little in regard of their spiritual growth, and so apt to take offence, yet they are dear to the great God, who is their patron, and will take their quarrel into his own hands: and it will be a thousand times better they had been the persecuted ones than to be the persecutors.

Thirdly, With respect to the double faculty the devil seeketh to work upon, which is our irascible or concupiscible faculty, our eschewing or pursuing power; the flesh with its πάθη καὶ ἐπιθυμίαι, Gal. 5:24, it is passions and lusts, what we render affections; and those are suited to the temptations that most men are usually overcome by. Such are the terrors and allurements of the world: the terrors of the world, that works upon our passions; the allurements of the world, that works upon our lusts.

1. The terrors of the world are apt to draw men to dislike God, and distaste the way of godliness. Certainly by these the devil seeketh to get us into his power and reach. Therefore it is said, 1 Peter 5:9, 'Whom resist, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.' Satan's temptations are conveyed to the godly through afflictions, hoping by these to prevail with them to make them quit the truth and their duty to Christ, and grow weary of the ways of God; and it doth the more prevail when they think they are the only sufferers. This should not be, for the drift of Christianity is to take us off from the hopes and fears of the world, and a full third part of the scriptures serveth to comfort us in tribulations and afflictions for the gospel's sake; and if we were not exposed to troubles, these would be as unsuitable and

needless as bladders and arts of swimming were to a man that standeth on dry land, and never meaneth to go into the deep waters; but yet they are a usual stumbling-block to those that have not overcome the sensual inclination, and are not dead to a worldly interest.

2. The allurements of the world, or the baits of sense. Present things have a strange infatuation upon us: 2 Tim. 4:10, 'And Demas hath forsaken us, having loved the present world.' The troubles of the world are not so dangerous as the snares of the world. Though many be discouraged by troubles, yet many times others are gained by the patience, courage, and constancy of God's servants in persecutions. The offence may be more easily disproved as not justifiable; for men may have a secret liking of the truth, and a purpose to own it in better times; but by the baits of sense men are inveigled and tempted to dislike religion itself, as contradicting their lusts, and nourish a base opinion of it in their hearts. In troubles and persecutions there is not a dislike of religion itself, but of the hard terms upon which it must be received and cherished. And besides, the mischief is greater. They that cast off the profession and practice of godliness upon some great earthly hopes, involve themselves in a more heinous sin than they that shrink from it out of some great fear; for those things we fear, as afflictions, torments, and death, they are in themselves destructive of our felicity, and therefore it cannot be said how much nature abhorreth them. But those things which we hope for and desire are such that nature may easily and without great inconveniency be without them, as great riches, splendour of life, noble affinities and marriages; for these things are not absolutely necessary to the worldly life, but only conduce to the greater conveniency and felicity thereof. Not our worldly being, but our well-being is concerned in them. Our being may be kept up and supported in a far meaner condition. Thence it is that great dangers, when they

are at hand, and difficulties sustained, and the fear of them, doth often sway us against the conscience of our duty; but if we lose our great worldly hopes, or be cut short in our condition and worldly expectations, it is no great matter. Wise and gracious men may easily bear it with a quiet and well-composed mind. The sin of those that stumble at great and worldly hopes is questionless the greater transgression, for they are only enticed and drawn away by their pleasures and lusts, which all good Christians are obliged to deaden and mortify. But though to fall out of fear be not so heinous a sin, yet a great and heinous sin it is, for grace should govern fear as well as hope. If the coercion and bridling of it be difficult, it doth not excuse a toto, but a tanto only; and it is hard to set a Christian in joint again that is fallen by fear. Witness those terrors that do haunt men when once they are gotten into the snare. As 'Peter went out and wept bitterly;' it cost him much sorrow at heart. Christ is fain to direct a special message to him by name, Mark 16:7. Though it doth not exclude all hopes of repentance and pardon, yet it needeth great mercy on God's part, and repentance on ours. Indeed, the church is bound to consider men's weaknesses, and to judge of the fault according to the violent shock and incursion of the temptation; because we know not our own strength, and how soon we may be surprised in like kind, and need indulgence ourselves, Gal. 6:1. But God is not in our condition, nor obliged to recover all that lapse in this kind, and therefore useth his mercy according to his own pleasure. Sometimes he recovereth them and sometimes not; but for the other temptations, what excuse is it capable of? Heb. 12:16, 17.

Secondly, Let us consider how a believer is preserved. Unsound professors are turned by scandal from the ways of godliness, which they seemed to walk in; but for the sincere believer, there may be many stumbling-blocks laid in his way, but he falleth not at them,



escapeth those heinous sins into which others fall, through his love to God's commandments. Observe here three things:—

1. It is not light, but love that keepeth them from stumbling. The light of saving knowledge is a great matter, for it showeth us a sure rule to walk by, and sure promises to build upon; but love must join with it, to assist us, that we may escape those snares, for many fail because they receive not the truth in the love of it, 2 Thes. 2:10. Till right be turned into love, it hath not such a powerful influence upon us. Certainly a man is better held by the heart than by the head: Rom. 8:39, 'Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' The love of God is not principally taken there in a passive sense, for the love wherewith we are beloved of God; but in an active sense, for the love wherewith we love God. For affliction and persecution do expugn or assault God's love to us, but not our love to God; for this maketh us cleave to him, whatever temptations we have to the contrary. Do but consider what you are to love.

[1.] We are to love God; there it beginneth. Love God once, and then you will take nothing ill at his hands; how smart soever his chastenings be, they come from a God that loveth you, and whom your souls love: Rev. 3:19, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.' Now they will not stumble at God's dispensations, be they never so cross to their expectations and desires. But then—

[2.] We must love the law of God, be satisfied with our duty whatever cometh of it. Next to a sincere love to God, there must be a sincere love to his holy law, as the right way to eternal blessedness, and then temptations will have but little force upon us, for they do not love their duty for foreign reasons, but for its own sake; so that whether it be befriended and countenanced in the world, or hated and despised,

it is all one; they love the law upon its own evidence, as it is recommended by God, and is a sure direction to true happiness: Job 17:9, 'The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.' He meaneth notwithstanding all the troubles and assaults which he endureth; they are not scandalised at God's dealings, or permitting them to be thus dealt with, but do persevere in a course of godliness; this is the way wherein he delighteth.

[3.] He loves the brethren: 1 John 2:10, 'He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.' They, together with us, uphold Christ's interest in the world. The coals, by tying together, inkindle one another, and so are the better kept from having their zeal quenched, or being ensnared by the manifold temptations in the world.

[4.] By this love the love of the world and its prosperity is much abated: 1 John 2:15, 'Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world; for if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' This man cannot part with all when his duty calleth for it. Till we despise worldly things we are still liable to take offence. All our disquiet cometh from too great love of the world, and too little love of the word of God. All this is spoken to show you that it is want of love wherefore men are so easily taken off; and this love beginneth with the love of God, then goeth on to his word, and the obedience it calleth for, and is strengthened by our love to the saints, and is a higher love than that it can be controlled by the love of the world.

2. This blessed peace hath an influence upon it upon a twofold account:—

[1.] This is an experience of the good of that way which the world speaketh evil of. You cannot persuade a man against his experience,

that honey is bitter, when he has tasted the sweetness of it, 1 Peter 2:3. They know the grace of God in truth, they have found much comfort and peace in these ways. Most men know religion and godliness but by hearsay or looking on; the testimony of Christ was never confirmed in them. But these have tried it, and know the good of religion by experience, therefore they cannot be so easily offended as others are, who have only licked the glass, but never tasted the honey. The pleasure they find in the duties and exercises of godliness will with them infinitely outweigh all the transient delights and advantages that are propounded, or offer themselves as the bait to any unlawful practice.

[2.] The particular nature of this experience; it is peace, which doth guard heart and mind, Phil. 4:7, that they are not disturbed or distracted by anything that befalleth them, but enjoy a calm in their souls, whatever storms overtake or befall them in the way of their duty: Eph. 6:15, 'Having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.' This is the gospel-shoe; there is no going to heaven without it; and this is peace, that is, peace with God. When all is quiet within, and the quarrel is taken up between God and us, we can the better bear the frowns of the world. And he calleth it the gospel of peace, because it mainly dependeth on the terms of grace revealed to us in the gospel. The law discovereth the enmity and the breach, but the gospel discovereth how peace may be had. He calleth it also the preparation, ἐτοιμασία, because this peace breedeth a firm and ready resolution to go through all difficulties, crosses, and hardships: Acts 21:13, 'I am ready not only to be bound, but to die at Jerusalem.' Well, then, this is the fruit of peace and friendship between God and sinners. It breedeth a resolution to hold on our way to heaven, notwithstanding crosses and continual hardships, and allayeth the bitterness of all worldly trouble.

3. There is God's providence and care over them, who is concerned in the protection of all that love his law, and take care to love and please him. On the one side, God sometimes threateneth the wicked, that he will lay stumbling-blocks before them, Jer. 6:21, that is, bring those things upon them that shall be a means of ruin to them. On the other side, Jer. 31:9, that he will lead the penitent believer in a straight way, that they shall not stumble. We must not omit God's concurrence, for it is his promise that nothing shall offend them. His people are very near and dear to him. Our Lord telleth us in his discourse against offending them, that 'their angels do always behold the face of his Father which is in heaven,' Mat. 18:10; that is, though the angels be appointed to be their guardians on earth, yet they have their continual returns and recourse to God's glorious presence, to make requests or complaints in their behalf, or to receive commands concerning them; for as God seeth fit they are employed in service for the benefit of those little ones. I remember Solomon saith, Prov. 12:21, 'There shall no evil happen to the just, but the wicked shall be filled with mischief.' We can easily understand that the wicked shall be overwhelmed with God's judgments; but how shall no evil happen to the righteous, since their troubles are many? The meaning of the place is, as Augustine well glosseth, non ut non eveniant, sed ut non noceant—they do not stumble at afflictions, nor are they deserted by God, as others are. God moderateth the evil, 1 Cor. 10:13, or removeth it, Ps. 125:3, or turneth it to good, Rom. 8:28. Now, by this gracious dealing of God, it cometh to pass that nothing doth offend them. Those that depend on the favour of men, and the uncertainties of a worldly condition, how many troubles are they exposed unto! Therefore we should look to our confidence, whether it be faith or security, whether we rest upon a carnal pillow, or the corner-stone which God hath laid in Sion.

Use. It concerneth us all to look to this, whether we love the law so as to have gotten peace of conscience and assurance of God's protection, because of the multitude of scandals, and the trials and exercises we are put upon by God's correcting hand; the prosperity of the wicked; the disgrace that is cast on the stricter ways of God; the world being so full of snares and temptations, that bring men to sin and ruin. *Omnia timeo, saith Bernard, et quæ placeant, et quæ tristentur*—I am afraid of everything, of those things that please us, and those that make us sad. What shall a poor Christian do that he may not miscarry?

1. Be sure that your resolutions for God and the world to come be thoroughly fixed and settled; for you will be distracted with everything if you be not at a point, and have not chosen the better part, and fully fixed your purpose. The apostle telleth us, James 1:8, 'The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' A wavering and inconstant Christian will not know which way to turn himself, being disquieted upon all occasions.

2. They never rightly begin with God that do not sit down and count what it may cost them to be holy Christians: Luke 14:26, 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.' If you have not a preparation of mind to suffer anything rather than part with Christ, you are not fit for his turn; like a man that sets on building, and hath not a stock to hold out; or designeth a war, and is not provideth with all necessaries to go through with it. You must expect temptations and troubles, because they serve to try whether you will hold your integrity; and if God be not sufficient enough to be your portion, never serve him. Never pretend to religion if you do not resolve to renounce all that is precious to you in the world rather than forsake it.

3. Consider the necessity of standing to God's law, whatever persecutions and sufferings you meet with. There is no other way to be saved: John 6:68, 'Lord, whither shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.' Such as have a mind to quit Christ have need to consider where they shall find a better master. Change where they will, they change for the worse. Obedience to the word of God is the only way to eternal life; and whatever law you make to yourselves, God will judge you by his own law.

4. Be established in the peace of God, and never break this peace to obtain your outward peace. What a wound will it be to thy soul! and how shiftless and helpless wilt thou be when, to make thy peace with the world, thou hast broken thy peace with God! Therefore rise up against temptations, as the trees refused in Jotham's parable to be ruler over the rest. Shall I lose my fatness; another, my sweetness, to rule over the trees? Shall I, to please men, put my conscience to a continual torment and anguish? sell the birthright for one morsel of meat? The remembrance will come into your minds, when you had joyful communion with God and his people, whose company you have abandoned; every day of solemn assembly will be a new torment to you.

5. When troubles surprise you, consider how unbeseeming it is to take offence at God's providence. It is an ill sign to be so apt to pick quarrels with God and godliness; it argueth little love either to God or his law; for love thinketh no ill of those whom we love. They are murmurers that said the ways of the Lord are not equal, or what profit is there if we serve the Lord? Mal. 3:14.

6. Consider, the greatest hurt Satan intendeth you is not to hurt your bodies but your souls, to bring you to be offended at the holy and righteous ways of the Lord. He would let you enjoy the pleasures of

sin, to rob you of your delight in God and celestial pleasures; let you have all the world, if it were in his power, Mat. 4:9.

7. Consider how short is the prosperity of the wicked, and those that turn aside to the ways of sin, Ps. 17:14. They shall be cut off, they are soon withered and dried up, and all their outward glory perishes with them. It is a more prudent course to adhere closely to God: Job 5:3, 'I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation.' It is a prediction; he foretold that there was a curse at the root of all his prosperity.

## SERMON CLXXXI

### **Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.—VER. 166**

THE man of God had said, ver. 165, 'Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them;' now he particularly applieth to himself what he had generally spoken before. It is sweet when we can thus comfortably apply promises, and make out our own title and interest. This is David's work in this and the following verses. Here he maketh profession of two things—his hope and obedience; which indeed are the two great things that belong to a Christian; graces much praised and little practised. *Quarum multa sunt elogia, pauca exempla.* They are fitly coupled together in his plea, 'I have hoped, I have done;' for our confidence in God's mercy is no greater than our fidelity in his precepts; and they are both professed before

God, who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins: 'Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.'

Doct. Sound hope of salvation is and must be joined with a care of keeping God's commandments.

1. I shall speak of the several branches of this profession apart.

2. Then of their conjunction.

First, Separately; and there—

First, Of the profession of his hope, 'Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation.'

1. The object and thing hoped for is salvation. Salvation is temporal or eternal, of the body or of the soul. Rabbi David Kimchi understandeth it of the latter, but it seemeth rather to imply help and deliverance out of dangers and distresses. Indeed, neither can be well excluded; not eternal salvation, for without that, temporal deliverance is but a reprieve for a time, not a total exemption from evil: not temporal salvation, because before we come to look for our full and final deliverance, God will try us by the way, and train us up in the expectation of other things; as men learn to swim in the rivers and shallow waters, that afterwards they may swim in the ocean and deep waters. So by expecting lesser things we learn to wait for greater. Both must be hoped for, but with a difference; eternal salvation absolutely, but temporal with submission to God's will. We have not temporal things always in specie, in kind, but sometimes in value, for these things may be recompensed and made up another way; but no recompense can be given us for eternal life. The apostle speaketh with submission as to his temporal case, but is peremptory as to his eternal state: 2 Tim. 4:17, 18, 'Notwithstanding, the Lord



stood with me, and strengthened me, that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me to his heavenly kingdom.' Again, though we are not to neglect the meanest promise, yet our hearts should run more upon the things of another world. A Christian honoureth God by his faith about temporal things, when he will not cast away his hope in the deepest calamities; but much more when the concernments of the world to come are of the greatest force with him, and his heart is wholly taken up about them; 'Looking for the blessed hope,' Titus 2:13; there is the character of a Christian. Peace and freedom from trouble in the world is not the main thing that we should look after, but perfect conformity to God, and full fruition of him. God is the chief good, and the fruition of him as promised is the utmost happiness of the creature. A true Christian hath a greater indifferency to the things of this life; all his business is to get an assurance of a better: he can look through the troubles of the world, and see sunshine behind the back of the storm: Ps. 42:11, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.' But chiefly his hope is laid up for him in heaven, Col. 1:5; his portion is laid up for him, and kept safe for his use in a sure place. Here he knoweth he must be exercised with temptations and crosses. In short, temporal things are desired for the sake of spiritual and eternal, but eternal for themselves; a traveller desireth a horse not for himself, as for the conveniency of his journey; so he expecteth temporal things as helps in his way and passage to heaven. Well, then, salvation is the object of this hope, temporal salvation in order to eternal, that we may have opportunities to glorify God here, and may not faint and be overwhelmed with incident crosses. This sentence is borrowed from good old Jacob: Gen. 49:18, 'I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.'

It is notable Jacob speaketh this when prophetically blessing his children; and when he cometh to Dan, the good old man seemed to be carried beside his purpose, breaking out thus of a sudden, but in spirit foreseeing the miseries and calamities with his posterity should fall into for their idolatry; for Dan was the first tribe that made defection, therefore he opposeth his hopes to his fears. We are told in the general, Lam. 3:26, 'It is good that a man should hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of God;' that is, for deliverance out of troubles. It will be of great use to us in our troubles to look to the issue of them. The Lord doth not wholly cast off his people; when he seemeth to break down the hedge and fence of his providence, and leave them in their enemies' hands, he hath salvation for a hoping people. But mark, it is thy salvation; it is good to come out of trouble upon God's terms, in God's way, and in God's time; others break prison: Ps. 62:1, 'My soul hopeth in God, from him cometh my salvation.' Expect it from God, and him alone.

2. The act of grace, 'I have hoped.' Hope, in the general, is the expectation of some future good; as it is a grace, it is some good thing promised by God: Ps. 130:5, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in thy word do I hope.' 'I am judged for the hope of the promise,' saith Paul, Acts 26:6. So that hope is the expectation of good things promised. Faith and hope do both work upon the promise, but yet they are distinct graces; they differ in their object. The object of faith is larger; the whole word of God is the object of faith. We believe things past, present, and to come, but hope for things to come only. Among things to come, we believe both promises and threatenings, but the object of hope is only things desirable. We believe the torments of hell, but do not hope for them. In the promises, faith believeth the promise, and hope looketh for the thing promised. Faith looketh to the authority of the promiser, and hope to the goodness of the thing promised. Faith begets hope, and then hope

strengthens faith. Faith holdeth the candle to the soul, whereby we see things invisible and to come, and hope maketh this light comfortable and ravishing to us. We have comfort in believing, because hopes of enjoying. To believe eternal life, if we had not hopes to attain it, were a comfortless thing. Faith is before hope, and leadeth us to the object, and hope followeth as faith leadeth. Faith assents to and applieth the promise, and hope waiteth for the accomplishment. There are several sorts of hope.

[1.] There is a vain and groundless hope, the dream of a waking man; as if a beggar should hope for the succession of a crown. So there are some that dream of peace and safety, 'and sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child,' 1 Thes. 5:3. This is an irrational thing.

[2.] There is rational and probable hope, but yet not so firm and certain; it is likely it will be so, but we have no absolute certainty: 2 Cor. 9:10, 'He that plougheth, plougheth in hope; and he that thresheth, is partaker of his hope.' This is necessary for the carrying on of all human actions, that a man should have probable hope of success, for without it there is no labour or rational attempt.

[3.] There is a firm and certain hope, when we have assurance of the things hoped for. So in the commerce between us and God, he giveth us assurance in his promises by his word and oath, that our consolation might be the more strong, when we fly for refuge to the hope that is set before us, Heb. 6:17, 18. There is a blessed and glorious estate reserved to be enjoyed in the heavens; this is set before us, propounded as a prize in the view of the world. Now when we take hold of this, gain a right and title to it, God would have our consolation the more strong, by the assurance he hath given us in the covenant made with us in Christ. Well, then, Christian hope is not a

conjecture or probability, but an assurance. Many times all kind of probability is contrary to God's assurance: Rom. 4:18, 'Abraham believed in hope, against hope.' *Credidit in spe gratiæ, contra spem naturæ.* God's assurance prevailed above natural difficulties; there rational and human hope and divine hope are opposed.

[4.] This assurance admits of degrees, for it may be full or not full: Heb. 6:11, 'And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope to the end.' The full assurance is that which removeth all doubts and fears; and this it may do at some time, and not at another; it may be interrupted, or continue to the end. Now we must give all diligence that it may do so. By slothfulness and negligence it will be lost. Presumption and carnal hope costs a man nothing to keep it, it groweth upon us we know not how; but this certain hope is not kept lively and upon the wing without great zeal and diligence in the spiritual life. Oh! but it concerneth us much so to do. This hope is necessary for us—

(1.) To quicken and enliven our duties. Hope of reward is one of the bands of a man, the weight that inclineth us to all actions; much more doth this great reward which the Christian faith propounds: Acts 26:6, 7, 'And now I stand, and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come; for which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews;' and Acts 24:15, 16, 'And have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.' I run not as one that is uncertain, 1 Cor. 9:26, not by guess, but sure grounds: Phil. 3:14, 'I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' It is great and sure; here is excellency and

certainty. A man that hopeth for anything will be engaged in the thorough pursuit of it.

(2.) It sharpeneth our affections after heavenly things; when we look for them, we will also long for them: Rom. 8:23, 'And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies.' Hope stirreth up serious thoughts of heaven and blessedness to come, and hearty groans after it, and so sets both mind and heart a-work. It sets the mind a-work. A man cannot hope for a thing, but he will be thinking of it; as the scripture speaketh of the labourer, that he lifts up his soul to the hire which he expects. Thoughts will be sent as spies into the land of promise, to bring us tidings thence. And it sets the heart a-longing and groaning that we were at home: Rom. 8:19, 'For the earnest expectation of the creature,' ἀποκαταδοκία κτίσεως, stretcheth out the head, to see if it can spy it a-coming; as when Sisera's mother expected him, she looked through the lattice. There will be strong desires as well as serious thoughts; not glances and hasty wishes, such as worldly persons may have in their serious moods and sober fits; these vanish and leave the heart never the better; but earnest longings, such as settle into a heavenly frame; that taste which they have already maketh them groan for what is behind.

(3.) It sets the heart at rest, and allayeth our disquiets, and fears, and cares, and sorrows, that so we may go on cheerfully in God's service. It is the pleasure of God that the heirs of promise should for a while shine as lights in a corrupt world, and be exercised with all kind of temptations, that his power may be manifested in their weakness. Now, that we may ride out the storm, he gave us hope; not only *veniam sperandi*, leave to hope for his mercy, but *virtutem sperandi*, the grace of hope, strength so to do. And what is the use of it, but to

calm the heart under all distempers? Therefore it is compared to a helmet and an anchor. To a helmet: 1 Thes. 5:8, 'Take to you the helmet of salvation, which is hope.' A helmet is to cover the head; this maketh a believer hold up head in all his straits and troubles. The policy of the devil is to weaken or darken the hopes of eternal life, and then he knoweth he shall the sooner overcome us; therefore the life of a Christian should be to keep on his helmet, to keep his hopes of heaven lively and fresh, and then he will not be dejected. Again, it is compared to an anchor: Heb. 6:19, 'Which hope we have, as an anchor, both sure and steadfast, which entereth into that which is within the veil.' As the anchor holdeth the ship in a tempest, so doth hope keep the mind in a constant temper in the midst of the stormy gusts of temptation, that we dash not against the rocks that would break our confidence and profession: it strengthens and quiets the floating heart of man. Things will end well at last, how blustering and stormy soever the weather be at the present. The floods of temptation and the tribulations of this present life are permitted to invade us, but that God hath given us an anchor, that they shall not drive us from the haven of eternal happiness. Whatever our cross be, immoderate grief for the death of near and dear relations: 1 Thes. 4:13, 'Mourn not as those without hope.' *Cur enim doleas, si periisse non credis? Cur impatienter ferres subductum, quem iterum credis reversurum esse? pro festo est quam putas mortem, saith Tertullian De Patientia.* If for loss of goods and estate: Heb. 10:34, 'And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that in heaven ye have a better and enduring substance.' If a poor man that had all his wealth about him should fall into the hands of thieves and robbers, and be rifled by them, he must needs cry and take on pitifully; for alas! he is altogether undone, and hath nothing left him wherewithal to succour himself and his family. But a rich man, that hath store of money at home, and sure locked up in his chest, will never complain and be much disquieted when he hath twenty or

forty shillings taken from him. For worldlings to rage and take on when they must lose their estates, it is no marvel; those whose portion is in this life, and know no better; alas! for when these things are gone, they have nothing left, and are quite undone. But those that are heirs according to the hope of eternal life, they know they have a better and a more enduring substance; they consider what they are born to, what they shall enjoy when they come home to God, therefore their hearts are calmed and quieted. So if it be the oppression of wicked men, and hard sufferings and persecutions for the gospel: 2 Cor. 4:17, 18, 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' He that hopeth for nothing from God will soon fall off from him, and yield to fainting discouragements; their hearts are turned off and perverted; but when we hope, we do with patience submit to the cross. What troubles will not they undergo that expect undoubtedly their speedy ending in everlasting and endless bliss and happiness? If God hideth his face, that raiseth a storm: Ps. 43:5, 'Why art thou so disquieted, O my soul? still hope in God.' Casting anchor upon the rock, as the crying child falls asleep with the teat in his mouth; or when God delayeth the performance of what is promised: Prov. 13:12, 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.' Expectation is a tedious thing, as smoke to the eyes, and vinegar to the teeth, an ordinary messenger sent on a trifling errand. Now, Rom. 8:15, 'If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it;' 1 Thes. 1:3, 'And patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.' Is a title nothing before possession? It is not a matter of debt. Or is it the fear of approaching death, which is the king of terrors? Prov. 14:32, 'The wicked shall be driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous hath hope in his death.' The wicked, being arrested by death, is hurried away into hell; but the

righteous dismisseth his soul into his Redeemer's hands. Never more cheerful than when our confidence in God's mercy is most put to trial.

Secondly, Here is the profession of his obedience, 'I have done thy commandments.' Here is—

1. The object, thy commandments.

2. The act of duty, done.

1. The object, 'Thy commandments,' quia tua; therefore kept them, because they are thine; things thou hast given in charge. Men were ready to persuade or threaten him out of his duty.

2. The act of duty, 'Done thy commandments:' the act of duty, to do, noteth the substance of the act or omission; the doing things commanded by eschewing things forbidden.

3. The manner of doing, out of knowledge of God's command, and conscience of obeying it, to his glory and our salvation. Now, saith David, 'I have done it;' implying, I have not only care and conscience, but strength and ability, in some measure to do thy will.

But is not this plea a proud word for a creature to say, 'I have done thy commandments'? Who can thus say, and aver it to the face of God?

Ans. There is a twofold keeping or doing of the commandments—legal and evangelical.

1. Legal, when we do them so exactly as is answerable to the rigour of the law, and the rule of strict justice doth require, which exactness is when our obedience is universal in every point, when everything



commanded by God is done by us without failing in one point: Gal. 3:10, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.'

[1.] In all things; and that—

[2.] Continually, in respect of time; from the first minute of our birth till our dissolution; one failing in thought at any time casteth off our plea.

[3.] Full and complete in respect of the degrees and measure of obedience, with the utmost intension and affection of the heart, which the scripture expresseth by all the heart and all the soul. In this sense, never man was able to keep the law, save only the first Adam in innocency, and the second Adam Jesus Christ; and therefore, according to this rigour, there is no hope for us; one sin once committed would undo us for ever, as it did the apostate angels.

2. Evangelical, according to the ἐπιείκεια and moderation of the gospel, that is, when we do the commandments according to those terms of grace which God offereth to us in Christ; that doth, as to obedience, mitigate the rigour of the law in two things:—

[1.] It granteth a pardon of course to some kind of sins.

[2.] Accepteth of repentance after any the most heinous sin committed.

[1.] It granteth a pardon of course to some kind of sins, as sins of infirmity, either of ignorance, which if we had known we would not have committed, or sins of sudden surreption, which escape without our observing of them; or sins of violent temptation, which by sudden assault sway against the right rule before we have time to

weigh both it and ourselves, or in cool blood to think what we are a-doing; such as do not arise out of any evil purpose of the mind, but out of human frailty, and from which we shall never be free as long as we live in this body of corruption, Rom. 7:24,—Paul groaneth under these relics; when what we have done is not out of deliberate consent, giving way to the growth and reign of sin: Rom. 6:14, 'For sin shall not have dominion over you.' Non dixit, non sit, sed non regnet; inest peccatum cum perpetras, regnat cum consenseris, saith Austin. When we give obedience to it, freely, willingly yield up ourselves to be servants of it, then sin reigns. Therefore he doth not say, Let not sin be in you, or tempt you, or please you; but, Let it not reign in you. It is a misery to be tempted, a snare to be delighted, and a forfeiture or renouncing the grace of the covenant to give up ourselves to the full sway of it.

[2.] The gospel doth herein moderate the rigour of the law, because it leaveth a sinner a way and means of recovery, namely, by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, and upon repentance giveth him a pardon, Mat. 9:13. Remission or forgiveness is a privilege of the new covenant; the law knoweth no such matter: Ezek. 18:21, 22, 'But if the wicked shall turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, and not die: all his transgressions that he hath committed they shall not be mentioned unto him.' Well, then, this is to be understood in the gospel sense; it is the plea of a man justified freely by God's grace, and one that is sincere and upright for the main; one that had received grace to be faithful, though not without his infirmities, and did not make a practice to live in any known sin against conscience.

Secondly, We now come to show the connection between these two.

1. None can and do rightly hope for salvation but they that keep the commandments.

2. None do and can keep the commandments but they that hope for salvation.

1. None can and do rightly hope for salvation but they that keep the commandments. That will appear to you—

[1.] Partly because God hath by a wise ordination conjoined means and end, and offered the promises with a qualification: Rom. 2:7, 'To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life.' God hath not simply promised blessedness, but the promise requireth a qualification and a performance of duty in the person to whom the promise is made; and therefore, before we can have a certainty of hope, we must not only look upon the assurance on God's part, but make out our qualification. So Ps. 1:1, 2, 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' So Ps. 119:1, 2, 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord: blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and seek him with the whole heart;' and many such places, which intimate that blessedness belongeth to such as are of a holy heart, and entirely give up themselves to a holy course; that doing the commandments uprightly, and in a gospel sense, is a necessary condition to qualify those persons which shall be saved. And therefore they that live in any sin against conscience may take notice how fearful their estate is for the present, and how needful it is to begin a good course before they can have any hope toward God.

[2.] And partly because true hope is operative, and hath an influence this way. There are two parts in sanctification—mortification and vivification, and true hope hath an influence upon both. Mortification: 1 John 3:3, 'And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, as he is pure;' that when we see God, we shall be like him. He that hopeth for such a pure and sinless estate, either to see God, will he appear before him in his filthy rags? Joseph washed himself when he was to come before Pharaoh; so when to appear before God. What! with this wanton, vain, unclean heart? We are to be like him; is this to be like Christ, where there is such a disproportion between head and members? And if this hope be fixed in our hearts, it will set us a-purifying more and more. So for vivification, it urgeth and encourageth to obedience: Titus 2:12, 13, 'For the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world.' Look backward or forward, it urgeth the heart to obedience. Why backward to the duties of holiness? Shall we be lazy in his work when we expect such a great reward?

[3.] Because there is no such thing to damp hope and weaken our confidence as sin. We cannot trust him whom we have offended freely and without restraint; and therefore, while we please the flesh, we break our confidence. Sin will breed shame and fear, and it is impossible to hope in God unless we serve him in love, and seek to please him. If we feel it not presently, we shall feel it. Sin, that now weakeneth the faith which we have in the commandments, will in time weaken the faith that we have in the promises. Every part of God's revealed will cometh to be tried one time or another. Our confidence in God's mercy is not earnestly and directly assaulted till the hour of death, or the time of extraordinary trial. When the evil day cometh, then the consciousness of my own sin, whereunto we

have been indulgent, will be of like force to withdraw our assent from God's mercies, as the delight and pleasure we took was to cause us to transgress his commandments: 1 Cor. 15:56, 'The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.'

[4.] Because our hope is increased by our diligence in the holy life. This fostereth and augments it: Heb. 6:11, 'And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.' It must needs be so, for since there is a qualification, the more clear our qualification is, the more full is our assurance of hope; and so far as a man neglects his duty, and abateth in his qualification, so far doth his assurance abate. To look on one side of the covenant is a groundless presumption.

2. None do and can keep the commandments but they that hope for salvation. This is plain from the order of the words in the text. First I hoped for thy salvation, therefore done thy commandments; implying that thereby he kept the commandments. Without this none can have a heart or hand to do anything for God. Peccator, saith Bernard, nihil expectat, indeque peccator est; quod bonis presentibus non modo delectus, sed etiam contentus, nihil in futurum expectat—he that looketh for nothing from God can never be diligent in his service, nor faithful and true to him. Hope, it is our strength: Lam. 3:18, 'And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord.' We first begin, continue, and go on with God upon the hope he offereth to us.

Use 1. It reproveth those that hope well, but take no care to do anything for God. Every one will say they must hope in God, but none looketh after this lively and operative hope; their hope is barren and unfruitful. Who are they that can make application of the promises? 2 Tim. 4:8.

Use 2. To persuade us to the coupling of these two. When this conjunction is founded, then are we in a right frame. If we would keep the commandments, we must hope for the salvation of God; if we would hope for the salvation of God, we must keep the commandments. This is most acceptable to the Lord: Ps. 147:11, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, and hope in his mercy.' such as believe, and fear to offend him, they have acceptable communion with him. It is for your comfort, Acts 9:31. It is for the honour of religion on the one side to avoid the carnal confidence of Papists, on the other the cold profession of Protestants, if you hope for temporal deliverance. They that make no conscience of obeying God cannot hope for deliverance from him, for his salvation must be expected in the way of his precepts: Ps. 37:3, 'Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land.' So wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it; then we may commend ourselves and all our affairs to God's care and trust. It becometh them that look for salvation, and to be helped out of their troubles, to be more earnest than others in keeping his law. If you would enjoy the comfortable assurance that you shall be saved at length, live so as you may never mar your confidence: 1 Peter 1:13, 'Be sober, and hope to the end.' Live answerable to your hope, 1 Thes. 2:12. On the other side hope, study promises: Rom. 15:4, 'The God of hope fill you with joy in believing.' He is not only the object, but the author of it.

## **SERMON CLXXXII**

**My soul hath kept thy testimonies, and I  
love them exceedingly.—VER. 167**

THE man of God goeth on in his plea. In the former verse he had spoken of the influence of his hope upon obedience; now of the influence of his love, and so more expressly and directly maketh out this qualification or title to the promise mentioned ver. 165.

Before we go on, let me answer a question or two.

First, How can a gracious heart speak so much of itself, and insist so much upon the plea of obedience? Is not this contrary to our Saviour's doctrine, who, in the parable of the pharisee and publican that went up to pray, Luke 18, taught us to make use of the plea of mercy, not of works?

Ans. 1. As to that part of the scruple which concerneth *περιαιτολογία*, that cannot be imagined to be faulty in David, who was a prophet, and therefore, to instruct the world, propoundeth his own instance, and setteth forth himself as a pattern of obtaining comfort in the way of godliness.

2. As to the plea of works, they may be produced by way of evidence, not by way of merit, as they prove our interest in the promises, not as the ground of self-confidence. The pharisee, he came not to beg an alms, but to receive a debt, and therefore went away without any mark and testimony of the divine favour and approbation. But holy men plead this to God as expecting mercy and favour at his hands; not in regard of any merit in themselves, or of reward deservedly for the same done to them, for they acknowledge all that they do or can do to be but duty, and due debt; but in regard of his gracious promise freely made unto them; in a humble and modest manner they dare appeal to God himself for the sincerity and integrity of their hearts, for serious care and sedulous endeavours to please him, and approve themselves to him.

Secondly, But why is this plea reiterated for three verses together?

Ans. 2. Too much care cannot be used in making out an interest in so sweet a promise; and teacheth us this lesson, that we had need examine again and again before we can put in our claim. Jesus Christ puts Peter to the question thrice: John 21:15–17, 'Peter, lovest thou me?' So here, it was David's plea thrice repeated, for the more assurance: 'I have done thy commandments, my soul hath kept thy testimonies;' and again, 'I have kept thy commandments and thy precepts.' After a believer hath found marks of saving grace in himself, it is wisdom for him to examine them over and over again, that he may be sure they are in him in deed and in truth. The heart is deceitful, our self-love is great, our infirmities many, and our graces so weak, that we should not easily trust the search. Truly such a holy jealousy doth well become the best of God's children, and doth only weaken the security of the flesh, not their rejoicing in the Lord.

In the words you have the testimony of David's conscience concerning the sincerity of his heart, evidenced by two notes:—

1. The sincerity of his obedience, 'My soul hath kept thy testimonies.'
2. His exceeding love to the word, 'I love them exceedingly;' or, if you will, by the manner of his obedience, and the principle of it.

First, The spirituality of his obedience, 'My soul hath kept thy testimonies.' Mark, the notion by which the act of duty is expressed is varied in the former verse. It is 'I have done thy commandments;' here it is, 'I have kept thy testimonies;' Done more expressly noteth his sedulity and diligence; kept his constancy and diligence, perseverance notwithstanding temptations to the contrary. And how kept them? Saith he, 'My soul hath kept them;' not with outward observance only, but with inward and hearty respect. 'My soul,' that



is, myself; a part for the whole, and the better part, 'I, with my soul,' and so it showeth his sincerity. It is a usual expression among the Hebrews, when they would express their vehement affection to anything, to say they do it with their souls; as Ps. 103:1, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul;' and Luke 1:45, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord;' as, on the contrary, vehemency of hatred: Isa. 1:14, 'Your new moons and appointed feasts my soul hateth;' that is, I hate them with my heart.

The note is—

Doct. God must be served with our souls as well as our bodies. David saith, 'My soul hath kept thy testimonies.'

1. Because he hath a right to both, as he made both, and therefore hath required that both should serve him. He that organised the body, and framed it out of the dust of the ground, did also breathe into us the breath of life, and framed the spirit of man within him; therefore since God may challenge all, it is fit he should have the best: 'My son, give me thy heart,' Prov. 23:26. Look upon it; whose image and superscription doth it bear? 'Give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's.' He hath redeemed both: 1 Cor. 6:20, 'Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God both in your body and spirits, which are God's.' Shall we rob God of his purchase so dearly bought? We would not rob a man of his goods, and will you rob God? He challengeth a peculiar right in souls: 'All souls are mine;' and therefore they should be used and exercised for his glory. If we use them for ourselves only, and not according to his direction, we do as Reuben did, that went up into his father's bed. To withhold the heart from God is robbery, nay, sacrilege, which is the worst kind of robbery; for God's right in redemption is confirmed and owned by our personal dedication in

baptism. Once more, God hath right to the service of both body and soul, because he offereth to glorify both, and reward both in the heavenly inheritance. The body and the soul are sisters and co-heirs, as Tertullian speaketh. If we expect wages for both, we must do work with both. If God should make such a division at death as men do all their life to him, can they be happy if any part of them be excluded heaven? If the body and lifeless trunk were taken into heaven, and the soul left in torments, what were you the better? But that cannot be; God will have all or no part; therefore 'your whole spirit and soul and body must be kept blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ,' 1 Thes. 5:23. Otherwise your souls cannot be joined to God in heaven, if they be divided from him on earth.

2. Because this is service suitable to his nature, when we serve him and obey him with our souls. God is an all-seeing spirit, and therefore will be worshipped in spirit and in truth, John 4:23, 24. It is agreeable to his spiritual nature, therefore shows and fashions have little respect with him, but reality and substance; for he searcheth the heart and trieth the reins; it is not the bowing the body, so much as the humble affectionate reverence and submission of the soul. God hath appointed service for the body, and so far as God hath appointed it we must submit to it; but chiefly for the soul, our worship must be chiefly inward, flowing from grace engaging the heart in God's service. Bodily exercise is of little profit; that worship which is most agreeable to God's nature is most pleasing to him: he 'hath not eyes of flesh, and seeth not as man seeth,' Job 10:4. Therefore external duties, without the inward exercise of the Spirit, is scarce worthy the name of worship to God. He is not taken with the pomp of ceremonies and external observances: 1 Sam. 16:7, 'For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.' Men are taken with external pomp and formalities; they suit with their fleshly natures; but the more spiritual the more suitable to

God. That which you do, be it in worship, it is not done unto God, but unto men, when the heart is not in it: Col. 3:23, 'And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.' Without the heart, all that we do is but a mocking of God, giving him the shell without the kernel.

3. Because the soul is the principal thing that swayeth the body, and stirreth it up to all that it doth. It being of itself a senseless block, it followeth the disposition and inclination of the heart. I shall make it good in two considerations:—(1.) It is fons actionum ad extra; (2.) It is terminus actionum ad intra. It is the fountain of all actions that go outward, from man towards God; and the subduing the heart to God's will is the end of all operations inward, from God towards man.

[1.] Fons actionum ad extra, the fountain of all actions that go outward from man towards God. All natural actions proceed from the soul or heart. It is not the eye that seeth, nor the ear that heareth, nor the hand that toucheth, nor the feet that walketh; it is the soul seeth by the eye, and heareth by the ears, and toucheth by the hands, and walketh by the feet. So in all moral actions the heart is all: Prov. 4:23, 'Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.' All our actions proceed thence; all the evil that we do cometh from the heart: Mat. 15:19, 'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.' All that we speak, and think, and do followeth the frame of the heart. This is the burning furnace from whence the sparks fly. The occasion of sin may be without, but the cause of it is ever from the heart. It is the heart that filleth the eyes with wantonness, pride, and fury, and the tongue with blasphemy, slander, and detraction, the hands with blood. So for good actions, thoughts; they come out of the good treasury of the heart: Mat. 12:35, 'A good man out of the good

treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things.' The tap runneth according to the liquor wherewith the vessel is filled; that a man hath laid up in his heart, that he layeth out in his thoughts, and speeches, and actions. It is the heart that enliveneth all our duties, and we act ever according to the constitution of our souls.

[2.] It is terminus actionum ad intra; all actions inward, the aim of it is to come to the heart. The senses report things to the phantasy, the phantasy represents them to the mind, that counsels the heart; so in God's operations upon us, his business is to come at the soul. Wherefore doth he speak, and reason, and plead, but that we may hear? And wherefore do we hear, but that truth may be lodged in the heart or soul? Prov. 4:4, 'Let thy heart keep my precepts; let thy heart receive my words.' Ay! then God's word hath its effect upon us. We are never subdued to God till the heart be subdued. The word for a while may stay in the memory, and it is good when the memory is planted with the seeds of knowledge, as children receive the principles of religion in catechisms; but the end is not there; at length they exercise their understandings about them, when they begin to conceive of what they learned by rote, and afterwards they begin to have a judgment and a conscience. These truths begin to stir and awaken them, but it must not rest there neither; it soaketh further, and wisdom entereth upon the heart, Prov. 2:10. Ay! that was God's aim, to bring the work thither, and then the cure is wrought with man: Rom. 6:17, 'Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you.' So this is the end of all the operations of grace, that the soul and heart may keep God's testimonies. So where is it that Christ would dwell when he taketh up his abode and residence in us? The apostle will tell you: Eph. 3:17, 'That he may dwell in your hearts by faith.' Till he get possession of the heart, all is as nothing. He will not dwell in the body only; that is the temple of the Holy Ghost at large; there is a holy of holies, a more

inward place where he will dwell. He will not dwell in the tongue, or in the brain, memories, or understandings, unless by common gifts. But the heart, the will, and affections of man are the chief place of his residence; there he dwelleth as in his strong citadel, and from thence commandeth other faculties and members. So that the heart is the beginning and ending of the whole work of religion, from thence come all holy actions, and thither tend all holy gracious operations.

4. It is thy hearty soul-service that will only bear weight in the balance of the gospel. There may be many defects in the action, yet if the heart be right, God will accept the will for the deed, and you will find comfort in that another day, when you most need: Isa. 38:3, 'Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart.' Hezekiah had his infirmities and failings, but his heart was upright: Heb. 13:18, 'Willing in all things to live honestly;' that is a gospel good conscience, and will yield comfort to you. God accepts the will without the deed, but never the deed without the will. Infirmities may overtake the action, but when the heart is unfeignedly set to serve God, we shall be accepted. We allow grains to true, but not to counterfeit gold. The church pleadeth, Isa. 26:8, 'The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. When we follow in rugged ways, though we oftentimes stumble, yet if our soul be with him, we may have comfort.

Use 1. This is for the conviction of divers persons, that they do not more serve God in their souls, do not keep his testimonies.

1. There are some that neither serve God with body nor soul, as all loose persons, who do not so much as make a show of his service; they are all for their brutish pleasures, their souls to hunt them out, and their bodies to pursue and follow them. Their soul is a cage of

unclean birds, and a strainer for meats and drinks to pass through, or a channel for lust to run in, so that they have nothing at all to spare for God: the soul is an ill guide, suggesting all manner of evil, and the body a ready instrument to accomplish it. These are those that yield up their members to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity, Rom. 6:19. Oh! time will come when God will tear them in pieces, and rend the guilty soul from the embraces of the unwilling body. A sad time it will be for these; the soul will curse the body as an ill instrument, the body the soul as a corrupt guide; and curse the day of their first union, when they cannot expect but to meet again in flames.

2. Some that give their bodies to God, but withhold their souls from him. How may this be done?

Ans. 1. Generally, when men content themselves with a naked profession of Christianity, and some external conformity thereunto. It is a stupid religion that consists in outward actions. Judas was externally a disciple, but Satan entered into his heart, Luke 22:3. Ananias joined himself to the people of God, but Satan filled his heart, Acts 5:3. Simon Magus was baptized, but his heart was not right with God, Acts 8:22. Many men may not only make profession, but perform many good actions, be as to external conformity blameless; yet till their hearts are subdued to God, they should not be satisfied with their condition. Though you pray with the pharisee, Luke 18, pay thy vows with the harlot, Prov. 7, offer sacrifice with Cain, fast with Jezebel, sell thine inheritance to give to the poor with Ananias and Sapphira, it is all in vain without the heart. Many hypocrites are all ear to hear, all tongue to talk, all face to appear, but not a heart to obey. Something must be done for religion for fashion sake and shame of the world. Yea, though thou dost not dissemble,

do many things, yet if your hearts be not renewed and changed, all is nothing; you do not keep the testimonies of the Lord with your souls.

2. And more particularly when men make conscience of ceremonies and outsides rather than sincere obedience. As the pharisees, Mat. 23:25, 26, 'They make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but within are full of extortion and excess.' Pretend great purity in eating their meat, but care not with how great iniquity they purchase it. Papists think they have done enough if they mutter over a few idle words, without spirit and life; the most part of their service is but that of the body without the soul; they worship in a strange language, not knowing what they do or say. And, nearer home, draw nigh with their lips when their hearts are far from him, Mat. 15:8. These leave their hearts at home; the devil findeth them other work that suffer their hearts to straggle and to be like the fool's eyes in the corners of the earth, when with their bodies they are engaged in the serious and solemn duties of God's worship.

Use 2. To press you to serve God with your hearts and souls as well as your bodies.

1. This is the character of true worshippers: Rom. 1:9, 'My God, whom I serve in the spirit;' and 2 Tim. 1:3, 'God whom I serve with a pure conscience.' This was not peculiar to Paul alone; it is the description of the spiritual circumcision: Phil. 3:3, 'For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.' These are such as are true worshippers.

2. God will accept of no other, for he looketh for the heart, and knoweth whether we give it him, yea or no. Men care not for fawning and the obsequiousness of empty courtships, but look for reality, if they could discern it: 2 Kings 10:15, 'Is thy heart right, as my heart is

with thy heart?' It was Jehu's question to Jonadab, the son of Rechab. Dost thou as really affect me, as I do thee? And men do not look to the matter of the gift, but the mind of the giver; and will God, think you, who can infallibly judge, and will one day bring the hidden thoughts of the heart to light, 1 Cor. 4:5, will he be put off with shows and empty formalities? Well, then, see that your souls be in it, otherwise he will not accept of rivers of oil and thousands of rams. All your pomp and cost upon outside services is lost. But it is not every soul that will keep God's testimonies. When the people said, 'All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do it,' Deut. 5:29, 'Oh, that they had such an heart!' It must be such an heart, for man is naturally averse from God; sin sets up its throne in the heart, and thence diffuseth its venom into his actions, Gen. 6:5. It must be—(1.) A broken heart; (2.) A renewed heart; (3.) A heart purified by faith; (4.) And acted by love.

[1.] A broken heart it must be, Ps. 51:11, for before that, all that we do is forced and superficial. We are never serious till acquainted with brokenness of heart, but serve God in a slight careless fashion. That bruising is to cast into a new mould; it is a preparative to the new heart. Wheat is not bread till it be grinded, and a cracked vessel cannot be renewed till it be melted in the furnace, nor we formed anew till we be first melted, humbled, and broken for sin.

[2.] The heart must be renewed by grace, for it is a renewed soul only that keepeth the commandments: Ezek. 36:26, 'A new heart also will I give unto you, and a new spirit will I put into you; and then I will cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments to do them.' The hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil, till God change them, and renew a right spirit within them: Prov. 10:20, 'The heart of the wicked is nothing worth.' A vain, sottish, sensual, careless heart will never do God any service; there



must be life before there can be action, a supernatural principle before there can be supernatural operation, for all things act according to their form; all that we do else is but like adulterating coin, gilding over copper or brass.

[3.] A heart purified by faith, Acts 15:9. There are fleshly lusts in us which must be mortified more and more, and deadened to the pleasures and profits and honours of this world, by remembering our great obligations and expectations from Christ's death and eternal life; for while any fleshly or worldly lust prevaileth with us, and is the chief principle in our hearts, we cannot heartily serve God.

[4.] A heart acted by love: 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 'For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.' This is the active principle which sets us a-work with cheerfulness. Christ often intimateth that keeping the commandments is the fruit of love, John 14:15. All the expression of our love to him is turned into that channel.

Secondly, I come now to the second evidence and testimony of his sincerity, his love to the word, 'I have loved them exceedingly.' Mark

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1. His affection, I love thy testimonies.
2. The degree, in the word exceedingly.

First, From his affection. Note—

Doct. That it is not enough to keep the commandments, but we must love them, and that obedience they require from us.

This love to the law is often spoken of in this psalm; therefore there needeth the less to be said now. Paul speaketh of this love as well as David: Rom. 7:22, 'I delight in the law of God after the inward man.'

The reasons of the point.

1. We can never thoroughly and constantly keep the law without love to it. It is no easy thing to keep the law of God; there needeth much labour and striving. Now where there is a sincere love of the law of God planted in the heart, there will be this striving and endeavouring to perform it. None so sensible of the weight of sin, none so active for God's glory: there is nothing so difficult, but love maketh easy: nihil amarum. In a word, labour and toil prove a pleasure, and pain a matter of delight, where we love. The careful mother bringeth forth the child with pain, and nurseth it up with toil and trouble, is well enough pleased with her work, and cheerful in it, because of the love she hath to the fruit of her womb, and her child is dear to her. Jacob's seven years' labour seemed to be a few days for the love he had to Rachel, Gen. 29:29. So God will have us serve him out of love, because nothing is grievous to love, 1 John 5:3. It beareth all things, suffereth all things, poverty, nakedness, bonds, injuries, labours, never tireth or groweth weary, 1 Cor. 13:7.

2. Except we obey because we love, our obedience is not sincere and acceptable: 1 Cor. 13:1, 2, 'Though I speak with the tongue of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal: and though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing,' οὐδέν εἰμι. Many are frightened into a course of religion, and go on from duty to duty, out of fear of being damned; this is not true obedience, that is done servilely and by constraint, these unwilling

services which we perform to Christ, out of urging of conscience and fear of wrath: Jer. 2:27, 'Which have turned the back unto me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise and save us.' They come to God, not out of delight and choice, but out of necessity, and only then, Hosea. 5:6. They that did not care for God at other times will then come with their flocks and their herds. The spirit of bondage is clamorous for duty, as the spirit of adoption sweetly inclineth to it. Many obey God no further than they are forced, as slaves, whom nothing but fear induceth to perform their master's commands; and so do not love the work, nor do it for the work's sake.

3. The next object to God, fit for our love, is God's law. It is clear that God is *primum amabile*, the first thing that is to be loved; but what is the second? Surely that which hath most of God in it; next after God, his word. There is *vestigium* in the creature, there is *imago* in his testimonies: 2 Cor. 3:18, 'For we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord.' The fairest draught and print of God that can be taken. His people have his image, but it is overshadowed with weakness; it is but the *ἀποφαινισμα*, the off-set of his word. It is the word that maketh saints, there is the liveliest stamp and print of God. His testimonies lead not only to the knowledge of God, but also the fruition of him. Whatsoever leadeth us to the fruition of God is incomparably better than any other thing; therefore, if we love God, we must love his precepts, love them so as to keep them; it is the greatest testification of that love we can show to God.

Use 1. To show us the reason why so many miscarry in the profession of godliness. Many walk in the ways of God for a while, but have no sound love to them; either by-ends, or slavish fears forced them into some profession; but they did not love godliness as godliness, and therefore cannot hold out with God. When a man is biassed and

poised by his heart to a thing, you cannot easily divert and break his inclination, that is a rooted thing; others were but forced, and forced subjection will not always hold. Men are hoping they shall shake off an unpleasing task, and where they obey from constraint, and the iron yoke of terror, they will not long obey.

Use 2. To press us not only to keep God's testimonies, but to love them.

Let me use some arguments.

1. From its excellency. To love is more than to do, as to love sin is a greater evil than to commit it. *Gravius est peccatum diligere, quam facere.* A man may commit sin out of infirmity, but he that loves it, sin reigneth in him. Practice may be overruled; a man may do evil that hateth it, being overborne by the violence of a temptation; as Paul saith of himself, 'The evil that I hate, that I do.' So a man may do good that hateth it, being influenced by by-ends; but our love is our own, the genuine offspring of the soul.

2. The necessity of it. Unless we love our work, we shall never be the more earnest in the performance of it. Nature of itself is unwilling, the heart hangeth off till it be poised by love: reasons and motives will not do it: Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law.' The commandments of God cross our will, profit, and pleasure; therefore we need not only reasons with us, but a strong inclination of heart to hold us to it, else we shall be off and on with God: Neh. 4:6, 'The building went on, because the people had a mind to the work.' Nothing else will do it but this.

3. The utility. We shall have more comfort in the sincerity of our affections than we can ever have in the perfection of our actions. The people of God, that cannot plead the perfection of what they do,

plead the reality of their love: John 21:17, 'Lord, thou knowest all things, and knowest that I love thee.'

4. *Ex debito*. We owe so much love to God, that everything that he requireth should be welcome to us for God's sake: they are his testimonies, therefore your souls should love them, and bind them upon your hearts, and the rather because we are to do our duty not as servants but as friends: John 15:14, 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' Not, Ye are my servants. Between friends there is a perfect harmony and agreement in mind and will. To do a thing for love's sake to his friend, this is an act of friendship. Not by servile constraint, but to keep them as they are his. We are to do what Christ commandeth because he commandeth it; and that is to do it in love; otherwise we break the commands when we keep them. Besides the outward act, there must be a ready inclination and delight in our work. Carnal men, the good they do they would not do. That obedience is not worthy the name of obedience that is extorted from us. Men had rather live ungodly if they durst for fear of punishment. It is but a slight kind of religion when fear prevaieth more than love; they do somewhat God willeth, but they had rather leave it undone. A man is never firmly gained to God, till he prefer service before liberty, and loveth holiness as holiness.

But how must we show this love? By two things. By being awful and cheerful; grieved when we offend him, glad when we please him; awful in avoiding what he forbiddeth, and cheerful in performing what he requireth.

[1.] Awful; you dare not break with God in any one point, but are very chary and tender of the commandments; keep them as the apple of the eye, Prov. 7:2, that is offended with the least dust; or keeping

of jewels: Prov. 6:21, 'Bind them continually upon thy heart, tie them upon thy neck' as jewels; choice of them.

[2.] By being cheerful, ready, and forward to every good work: Ps. 110:3, 'A willing people.' You need not stand urging and pressing; the inclination of their hearts swayeth them. A man is hardly kept from that he loveth: 1 John 2:5, 'He that keepeth my word, in him is the love of God perfected.'

Secondly, The degree, 'I love them exceedingly.'

Doct. Our love to the law must be an exceeding love.

1. In the general, it noteth the height and intensiveness of our love; not a cold love, as children love things, but are soon put out of the humour; but a high strong love, that will not easily be broken or diverted, such as doth deeply affect the heart: Ps. 119:97, 'Oh, how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day.' We that are so coldly affected to spiritual things do not understand the force of these expressions. A high and strong love will break forth into meditation, operation; make us sedulous and serious in obeying God: Ps. 119:48, 'My hands will I lift up to thy commandments, which I have loved;' 1 John 2:5, 'He that keepeth my word, in him is the love of God perfected.' Lift up our eyes to the receiving, our ears to the hearing, our hands to the doing of thy commandments; this argueth love.

2. The prevalency; not only high and strong, but to a prevailing degree.

[1.] Such as prevaieth over things without us. This is such a love as is greater than our love to all other things, wealth, honour, credit, estate; yea, life itself: for if anything be loved above our duty to God, it will soon prove a snare to us: Mat. 13:44, 'Sold all to buy the field

wherein the treasure was hid.' All for the pearl of price. A believer seeth such a treasure in the word of God; that he maketh no reckoning of any worldly thing in comparison of it, but will part with whatever is pleasant and profitable to him to enjoy it, rather than be deprived of his grace. If any fleshly sensitive good or interest lieth closer to the heart than the word of God, it will in time prevail so as to make God's will and glory stoop to it, rather than this interest shall be renounced or contradicted. There is no talking of serving God till you have this prevailing love, and hate all things in comparison of your duty to God: Luke 14:26, 'If any man hate not father and mother.'

[2.] Such as doth prevail over carnal desires and evil affections within us; if it be not a love that doth eat up and devour our lusts within us, if the bent of your hearts be not more for God than for sin. See Baxter, pp. 273–279, in his directions about conversion. There will be evil in the best, and some good in the worst. The critical difference lieth in the prevalent bent of the heart. When your dislike of sin is greater than your love, then you may say, Rom. 7:20, 'It is not I, but sin that dwelleth in me.' There must be a renewed self that prevaieth above corrupt self.

Well, then, rest not in some general approbation of the ways of God, or inclination to good, but this prevailing affection that jostleth sin out of the soul.

## **SERMON CLXXXIII**

**I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies, for all my ways are before thee.—VER. 168**

DAVID still goeth on in his plea. He had spoken of his faith and love, and now of his fear. We must—

1. Labour for faith to believe the promises. The man of God beginneth there, 'I have hoped for thy salvation.'

2. This faith must work by love; that is his next step, 'My soul loveth thy testimonies exceedingly.' And—

3. Love must breed in us a reverent fear of God's majesty, and a care to please him in all things. This is the third part of the plea mentioned in the text, 'I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies,' &c. In which words—

1. His integrity is again asserted.

2. The reason and encouragement of it.

1. His integrity is asserted, 'I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies.' Where it is notable the object of his duty is expressed by two words, precepts and testimonies. *Mandatis adjungit testimonia*, saith Calvin, *ut ostendat se non tantum agere de regula bene vivendi, sed complecti totum salutis fœdus*. He addeth the word 'testimonies' to that of 'precepts,' to comprise the whole covenant of salvation. Precepts signifieth the moral law, and testimonies doctrines of grace.

2. The moving cause or proper reason of this obedience, 'For all my ways are before thee.' Whereby he understandeth either the providence of God apprehended by faith as always watching over him and all his affairs for good, or a sense of God's omniscieny and omnipresence. The interpretations are subordinate one to the other; and in both respects, all our ways may be said to be before the Lord, namely, as he doth govern and dispose of them according to his will.



So it is said, Prov. 3:6, 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' Or that he doth know and see all: Job 34:21, 'His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings.' And in this double sense may a parallel place be expounded: Ps. 16:8, 'I have set the Lord always before me.' In point of reverence and dependence, as inspector, helper, observer, second. But why is it mentioned here? Three reasons interpreters give for it—either by way of appeal, or as the reason of his obedience, or as evidence of his sincerity.

[1.] By way of appeal, as calling God to witness for the truth of what he had said. Lord, thou art conscious to all my ways, knowest the truth of what I spake. 'Lord, thou knowest all things;' thus Peter useth it, John 21:17.

[2.] As a reason why he was so careful to keep all God's precepts. All my thoughts, words, and deeds are known to thee; and so I desire to approve myself to thee in every part and point of my duty.

[3.] Or it is produced as an evidence of his sincerity, that he did all things as in God's sight, and set him before his eyes as the judge of his doings, and so would not offend God to please men; for in this octonary he speaketh as a man in trouble, and ready to miscarry by carnal fear.

Doct. That walking as in the sight of God is a note of sincerity, and a good means to make us keep his precepts.

1. In those few words which God spake to Abraham all godliness is comprehended: Gen. 17:1, 'Walk before me, and be thou upright;' walk before me as in the sense of my eye and the confidence of my all-sufficiency, behave thyself as in my sight and presence. Let me give you a note or two concerning this walking as in the sight of God.

[1.] All men are in God's sight, but few think of it; they forget God's eye that is upon them; as Jacob saith in another case, Gen. 26:16, 'Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not.' God is in them, though they do not see God, and therefore act as if God did not see them. The apostle telleth us plainly, Acts 17:27, 'He is not far from every one of us.' Though God be not far from us, yet we may be far from him, at a great distance in our minds and affections. God is near us in the effects of his power and providence, but the elongation and distance is on our parts. We do not consider his eye that is upon us; for many dare do that in the sight of God and angels which they dare not do in the sight of a little child.

[2.] This walking as in the sight of God implieth a looking upon God as witness and judge, as one that seeth for the present, and will hereafter call you to an account; and so it works upon those two great articles of present providence and last judgment; the one consideration puts an edge upon the other, and maketh it more operative. God is to be looked on as one sitting upon his throne; and Solomon telleth us, 'A king sitting upon the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes,' Prov. 20:8. Would a subject break the laws in his sovereign's sight? So when God looketh on, shall we affront him to his face, the great judge of all the earth? Job 11:11, 'He seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it?' As Ahasuerus said, Esther 7:8, 'Will he force the queen also before me?' The greatest malefactors will carry it demurely in the presence of their judge: Ps. 10:14, 'Thou hast seen it, thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thine hand.'

[3.] We are not only to remember God's eye in the duties of piety which we perform directly to God, but also in the duties of righteousness which we owe to men: Luke 1:75, 'In holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our lives.' Holiness hath

relation to God, and righteousness to men; in both we must act as before him, as in his eye and presence; not only in praying and hearing; then we are before him, immediately speaking to him; but before him as to men; all our respects there must be done as in and to the Lord, performing duties we owe to men as in the sight and presence of the Lord, as it is often said, so as to approve ourselves to God, who seeth the heart; do it unto the Lord heartily: Ps. 25:15, 'Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord.'

[4.] God doth not only behold our actions, but our principles and aims, and the secret motions of our hearts. He is neither ignorant of man, nor anything in man. Men may judge of actions, but not of principles, no further than they are discovered; but God judges of principles when the action is fair: 1 Chron. 28:9, 'And thou Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart and willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imagination of the thoughts;' words that imply an accurate search. God looketh to the bottom and spring of actions, not only the matter, but the principle. A man that standeth by a river in a low place can only see that part of the stream that passeth by, but he that is aloof in the air in a higher place may see the whole course, where it riseth and how it runneth; so God at one view seeth the beginning, rise, and ending of actions; whatever we think, speak, or do, he seeth it altogether. He knoweth our thoughts before we can think them: Ps. 139:2, 'Thou knowest my downsitting and my uprising, thou understandest my thoughts afar off; before we can conclude anything. A gardener knoweth what roots are in the ground long before they appear, and what fruits they will produce.

2. This is a good means to make us keep his precepts.

[1.] It maketh for the restraint of evil; the sight of God is a bridle to us: Gen. 39:9, 'How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' Shall we break God's laws before his face? We take heed what we say and do before informers, and should we not much more before the judge himself? If we be not thus affected, it is a sign we never had a sight and sense of God's eye: 3 John 11, 'He that doth evil hath not seen God.' God taught his people this by the type of covering their excrements: Deut. 23:13, 14, 'For the Lord walketh in the midst of the camp, therefore let thy camp be holy, that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.' The flesh will soon seduce us were it not for the awe of God's eye. Inferiors, when they are in the sight and presence of their superiors, are very careful of their behaviour. He were an unhappy son or a lewd servant that would misdemean himself in the sight and presence of his father or master. Children at school, all is wisht when the master cometh. She were a lewd and impudent wife that in the sight and presence of her husband would prostitute herself to another man. This is our case; God is father and lord, and we are always in his sight; if we believe it, and can remember it, would we be so shameless as to sin, he looking upon us? The wise heathens were sensible that such a thought would be a curb to us, therefore admonished their disciples that they should always set before them some Cato or Cælius, some grave and reverend person, that they might behave themselves as in their presence; for saith Seneca, *Magna pars peccatorum tollitur, si peccatoris testis adfuit*—a great part of sin would be prevented if, when we are about to sin, some witness were present with us. They thought this fiction would be a restraint, and the fiction of grave men. But we speak now of the eyes of God, and that not as a fiction and supposition, but as a certain and undoubted truth; no less certain than that there is a God, which, of all truths, is most certain. Therefore, should not the eye of God restrain, who is with us always and in all places?

[2.] For the encouragement to every good work, and so it is a spur to us. God looketh on; he that is thy judge and rewarder, he knoweth how faithfully we keep his law. All the labours, miseries, slanders which thou endurest for his sake are known to him: Rev. 2:3, 'I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience.' He taketh notice of thy faithfulness. Do not think only that God doth spy out our failings: Prov. 15:3, 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.' He taketh notice of both, both as rewarder and avenger. Now cowards will adventure much in the presence of their general, and idle servants will work while their master looketh on; and shall not we do the Lord's work, since he taketh notice? He knoweth our work and our discouragements, and will help accordingly: Rev. 2:13, 'I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name.' See Basil, *Regulis Brevioribus*, quæst. 34.

More particularly.

1. It is a great means to make us serious in all our addresses to God, that we may behave ourselves with that reverence and awefulness that will become the divine majesty. What is the reason men are so slight and customary in their prayers and other acts of religion? They do not see the invisible God, and think of him to whom they speak. From practical atheism and unbelief we have little sense of things unseen. In speaking to a man we behave ourselves with that gravity and reverence that his quality deserveth; but in speaking to God, our thoughts wander, our hearts are dead and vain, because we see not him with whom we have to do: 'Make us gods to go before us,' Exod. 32:1. Ay! that we would have a visible God, whom we may see and hear; but the true God being a spirit and an invisible power, all the service we do him is a task performed more out of custom than affection, in a slight perfunctory manner. Now, when we believe

God's eye, and are sensible of his presence, that maketh us more serious. He telleth man his thought. Thoughts speak louder in his ears than our words. Oh! with what reverence should we creep into his presence, before whom all things are naked and open! It was a direction Seneca gave to his friend Lucilius, Epist. x.—*Sic vive cum hominibus, tanquam Deus videat; sic loquere cum Deo, tanquam homines videant*—so live with men as if God saw; so speak with God as if men saw. Shall such a speech come out of the mouth of a heathen, and shall not Christians remember God, and set themselves as in his sight when they come before him? We would be ashamed if our hearts were turned in and out in any duty, and men did know all our light, foolish, sinful thoughts that take up our minds; and doth not God see and hate these things more than men. So that it is a powerful consideration to make us come with humility and reverence into God's presence.

2. It maketh us sincere in our whole course; for this is sincerity, to do all things in order to God: sincerity lieth in the universality of obedience, and purity of intention.

[1.] For universality of obedience, we have an instance here in the text. David, by keeping himself as in God's all-seeing presence, performed a uniform acceptable obedience to him. So will all do that habituate this thought, and make it familiar to them; this is that that maketh them obey in presence and absence, to perform secret duties, Mat. 6:6. Therefore a Christian is as religious, if not more, alone and in secret as before others. The hypocrite walketh before men, who see the outward man only, seeketh chiefly to approve himself to men, and therefore is more religious before others than alone; but it is otherwise with a heart deeply possessed with a sense of God's omniscieny and omnipresence. So to avoid secret sins, which are only liable to God's cognisance; he that knoweth all the workings of

his heart lie open before God, maketh it his business to abstain from fleshly lusts as from sinful practices, which would betray him to shame before the world, and dareth not allow himself to sin anywhere, but there where God cannot see, that is, nowhere. Yea, when God's children forget themselves to be in their Father's presence, and corruption gets the start of grace, they afterwards come to be ashamed, and grieved for those sins for which the world cannot tax them: Ps. 19:12, 'Who can understand his errors? cleanse me, Lord, from secret sins.' All our actions are seen by the Lord; some of them may be known to men, but others may escape their eye; therefore, if we look to men only, we are partial; but if to God, universal in our obedience. If this be all our aim, that men may not impeach us of any crime; but if this be our aim, to approve ourselves to God, it is a sign we are sincere.

[2.] As to purity of intention, the proper reason of that is, because God seeth our aims as well as our actions, and knoweth all the deceits and tricks of a false heart. Our business is not with men, but with God, the searcher of hearts, who can distinguish between the motions of the flesh, and those inspired by his Spirit. Certainly, if we make him paymaster, we must intend his work: Rom. 2:29, 'For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, whose praise is not of men, but of God.' He that maketh God his witness, approver, and judge, must chiefly mind what God looketh after: Prov. 16:2, 'All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weigheth the spirit.' That which he chiefly regardeth are men's principles and ends.

[3.] It maketh us faithful in our relations, by considering he appoints them to us, and seeth how we improve them for his glory. Magistrates, there is a special presence of God, not only to direct and protect, but also to note and observe them: 2 Chron. 19:6, 'The Lord

is with you in the judgment;' Ps. 82:1, 'God standeth in the congregation of the mighty, and judgeth among the gods.' When they are for the execution of his office, God is there, and therefore they above all must be men fearing God, have a reverent regard to his eye and presence. Diodorus Siculus telleth us of some heathens that had several empty chairs advanced aloof near the tribunals, as for their gods, to show they were present, and had an inspection over all acts of judicature. So for ministers, they must not only give an account at last, but are observed for the present. God hath a watchful eye over them, as they have and should have over the flock. He observeth how we discharge our trust, and what are our aims, whether to promote our own interest or his: 2 Cor. 2:17, 'But as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ.' Our doctrines must not only be sound, but our aims and principles. It is not enough to speak of God, in his name, his truth, but sincerely approve our hearts to him in the faithful discharge of our duty. So 1 Thes. 2:4, 'We speak not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts;' in all singleness and sincerity of heart discharging our trust. So masters of families are to walk in their houses with a perfect heart, Ps. 101:2; though they are shut up in their families from the observation of others, yet at home as well as abroad they must be careful to walk with God in their domestical converse, where men are wont most to discover themselves, and should behave themselves prudently, and holily, and faithfully there. The apostle mindeth masters of their Master in heaven, Eph. 6:9; one who noteth and observeth your dealings, and will call you to an account for all your carriage: your sins and graces are not hid from him. So for servants: Col. 3:21–23, 'Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.' Still the consideration of God's eye is suggested to them; they must be careful of their master's concernments, whether their master be



present or absent, or whether the things they do will come to his knowledge, yea or no; for though the eye of man will not find them out, yet the eye of God must be regarded; therefore, with respect to God, they must be careful and faithful. So again, Eph. 6:5, 6, 'Servants, be obedient to them which are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.' They should be cheerful, laborious, painful, showing all faithfulness in things committed to their trust, even to a pin or the smallest matter, not saucy, stubborn, and malapert; because the Lord looketh upon them, and if they so do, will own them and bless them. Thus you see we should have better magistrates, better ministers, better masters, better servants, better fathers, better children, if this principle were once deeply imprinted upon their hearts, that all their ways are before the Lord, and he still observeth what they do in all their actions.

Use. To press us to walk as in the sight of God, and to foresee him before you in all your ways. To press you hereunto, consider these things:—

1. You are in the sight of God, whether you think so or no. We can no more be removed from the presence of God than from our own beings, for he is in everything that subsists, and it subsists by him. The apostle telleth us, Eph. 4:6, 'There is one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.' The sun is some representation of God's eye; nothing is hid from its sight: if the sun were an eye, it would see all things that it shineth upon. So doth God; only with this difference, the sun cannot pierce through dark and thick bodies, but God is over all, and through all, and in all, upholding and overruling all by his powerful providence. Therefore you cannot lie hid from God; only this sight is not comfortable and

profitable to you, unless you see him as he seeth you. They say of the panther, when it hideth the head it thinketh it is not seen because it seeth not, and so is taken by the hunters. This an emblem of wretched sinners; they see not God, and therefore think they are not seen by him, and so go on doing evil till their iniquities find them out.

2. What a noble thing it is always to live in the sight of God; for by this exercise, in some measure, and as this mortal state will permit, you enjoy the happiness of the blessed angels, for this is the privilege of the blessed angels: Mat. 18:10, 'That they always behold the face of our Father which is in heaven.' So when you live in the thought of God in some measure, you are doing their work, and your minds become as it were another heaven; for heaven is where God is, and there God is in that heart that thinketh of him; not only there by the powerful effects of his providence, and the impressions of his grace, but there by the workings of our hearts.

3. The profit is exceeding great. By conversing with God often ye become like him. As musing of vanity maketh us vain, heavenly and holy thoughts produce a heavenly mind, and frequent remembrance is one means to introduce the divine nature. Moses, in that extraordinary converse with God, his face shone, he carried away some strictures and rays of the divine majesty in his countenance. We cannot look for that effect upon our bodies, but serious and ponderous thoughts leave some change upon the soul; there is the lustre of grace, and the beauty of the divine nature, which is a greater thing left upon us. The apostle saith, 2 Cor. 3:18, 'For we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.' By seeing him in the word, considering him as always present with

us; the heart is coloured and dyed by the object it often thinketh upon. Oh! therefore be persuaded to set the Lord before you.

For means.

1. To see God aright we need faith, for God is invisible, and invisible things are only seen by faith, Heb. 11:1; and the instance is in Moses, ver. 27, 'By faith he saw him that was invisible.' Many have an opinion that God knoweth all things, but they have not a sound belief of it; it is what is owned by the tongue rather than the heart. Cold and dead opinions are easily taken up, but a lively faith is God's gift; this is a sight not easily gotten.

2. We must often revive this thought, for the oftener we think of it, the more deeply it is impressed upon the soul: Ps. 9:17, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.' It is not said, that deny him, but forget him. On the other side, there is a book of remembrance for those that thought upon his name, Mal. 3:16. God takes it kindly when our minds are set a-work upon him and upon his attributes. We have every moment life and breath, and all things from him; he thinketh of us, and therefore out of a necessary gratitude we should oftener think of God. Nazianzen saith twice, Naz. Orat. de Cura Pauperum, Orat. 10, and Orat. de Theol., Orat. 11: We should as often think of God as breathe, for we cannot breathe without him, and without his continual providential influence we fall into nothing, as sunbeams vanish when the sun is gone. Therefore the apostle telleth the Ephesians they were in their natural estate, ἄθεοι, Eph. 2:12. There are two sorts of atheists—they that deny God, and they that wholly forget God. The latter are more common, and they are described, Ps. 10:4, 'God is not in all their thoughts.' Oh! what misery is this, that we have thoughts more than we can tell what to do withal, and yet we will not afford God the least share in

them! He were a cruel man that would cast his provisions and superfluities into the street, and deny them to the poor, that should let his drink run into the kennel rather than that they should taste a drop of it. Such are we to God. We know not what to employ our thoughts upon, and yet we will not think of his name. We go musing of vanity all the day long, and be grinding of chaff, rather than take in good corn into the mill.

3. There are certain seasons when we are bound not only habitually but actually to think of God.

[1.] In a time of temptation, when the flesh, being enticed by profit or pleasure, or scared by fears, tempts us to do anything contrary to the will of God. Thus did Joseph, when he might have sinned securely and with advantage, Gen. 39:9; the thoughts of God's eye and presence dashed the temptation. We forget him that seeth in secret, and therefore take the liberty to indulge our lusts. Can I consider that God looketh on, and do thus unworthily? It is a daring him to his face to go on with these thoughts; therefore God seeth what I will now do; it is a seasonable relief to the soul.

[2.] We should actually revive this thought in solemn duties, when we come to act the part of angels, and to look God in the face. Surely God is greatly to be had in fear of all that are round about him. It would prevent a great deal of carelessness in worship to remember who is the party with whom we have to do, who is speaking to us in the word, and to whom we speak in prayer: Heb. 4:13, 'All things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' He knoweth how we hear, what thoughts and affections are stirring in our hearts: 'We are all here present before the Lord, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.' We come not hither to see and be seen of men, but to see God; we are here before God, as if God

himself were speaking to us. God is everywhere with us, but we are not always everywhere with God, but when we lift up our hearts and set him before our eyes. So in prayer, when we speak to God, we should think of him who is an eternal being, to whom belongeth kingdom, power, and glory, Prayer is called a coming to God. We beg his eyes be open, Neh. 1:6, to behold us as well as hear us. Now what an awing thought is this in prayer, that our preparations, motions, affections, dispositions, aims are all naked and open to his eyes!

[3.] When God findeth us out in our secret sins by his word, Spirit, and providence, or the wrings and pinches of our own consciences. By his word: 1 Cor. 14:25, 'And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down upon his face, will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.' And Heb. 4:12, 13, 'For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, for all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' So by his Spirit setting conscience a-work: Job 13:26, 'Thou makest me possess the sins of my youth.' Old forgotten sins come to remembrance. Own God and his onmisciency in the dispensation when God sets our sins in order before us as if anew committed. So providence: Gen. 42:21, 'We are verily guilty concerning our brother,' &c. Affliction openeth the eyes; it is his rack to extort confessions from us.

[4.] Consider upon what good reason God's knowing all things is built; his creation and providence. If he made all things, and sustaineth all things, surely he knoweth all things in particular, for every wise man knoweth what he doth. A father cannot forget how many children he hath. He that leadeth us by the hand wherever we

go, knoweth where and how we go. Christ knew when virtue passed from him in a crowd; he said, 'Somebody toucheth me, for I perceive that virtue is passed out from me,' Luke 8:45, 46. Certainly God knoweth there is such a creature as thou art, such a man or woman of the world, knoweth thy uprising and down-lying: Ps. 139:2, 'Thou understandest my thoughts afar off.' He knoweth whether we are laughing, mourning, or praying. He that will judge thee knoweth thee, or else he were an incompetent judge.

[5.] Humble thyself for walking so unanswerably. It would trouble us to have our thoughts, counsels, actions, all we think and speak, divulged and published. All is naked and open to God. If we did not think God's eye a fancy and fond conceit, we would at least walk more humbly. It would trouble us exceedingly if men had a window into our hearts in a time of prayer. Why not because God seeth? How watchful are we not to incur the penalty of man's law, but offences against God are lightly passed over. With what copiousness and flowings of language will men enlarge themselves in prayer when in company, and how slight and overly in closet duties, if not wholly neglective of them; which is in effect to say, Our heavenly father seeth not in secret.

## SERMON CLXXXIV

**My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.—VER. 171**

IN the two former verses he had prayed—(1.) For an increase of saving knowledge, ver. 169. (2.) For deliverance out of his troubles, ver. 170. He reinforceth his request by a promise of thankfulness, if he could get a gracious answer to that, 'My lips shall utter praise,' &c.

In the words we have—

1. A resolution of praise, my lips shall utter praise.
2. The reason and occasion of it, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.

First, A resolution of praise.

The word for 'uttereth praise,' signifieth that praise should break from him as water boileth and bubbleth up out of a fountain. Indeed words cometh from the abundance of the heart, Mat. 12:34; either from the plenty of spiritual knowledge, John 4:38—as a fountain yieldeth water, so his knowledge breaketh out into praises—or from the plenty of spiritual affection; rather from the great esteem of the benefit, or fulness of joy at the thought of it. It is a great privilege to be delivered from blindness and ignorance: 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God,' Mat. 13:11. Now they that have a spiritual gust and taste are so affected with it that they cannot be enough thankful for it; and it is notable that this thankfulness is promised upon granting the first request.

Doct. Divine illumination is so great a gift, that all who are made partakers of it are especially obliged to praise and thanksgiving.

This will appear by these considerations:—

1. That upon the receipt of every mercy we should praise God. There is an equity in it, for this is God's pact and agreement with us: Ps. 50:15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' We are forward in supplications, but backward in gratulations; all the lepers could beg health, but one returned to give glory to God, Luke 17:18. Self-love puts us upon prayers, but the

love of God upon praises. Now we should be as much affected, or rather more, in the receiving mercies, as we were in asking mercies; because before we knew it only by guess and imagination, but then by actual feeling and experience of the comfort of it. Therefore to seek, and not to praise, is to be loving to ourselves.

2. Those that have received most from God are most bound to honour him and praise him, for the return must carry some proportion with the receipt: 2 Chron. 32:25, 'Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefit done unto him;' not according to the kind, only good, and not evil for good, but according to the degree. Great mercies require great acknowledgments: she loved much to whom much was forgiven, and she loved little to whom little, Luke 7:47. More sins pardoned, more mercies received, God expecteth more love, more praise, more thanksgiving. And Luke 12:48, 'For unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom men commit much, of him will they ask the more.' Christ pleadeth the equity from the practice of men. The more helps, the more work and service we expect. He should come sooner who rideth on horseback than he that cometh on foot; so the more light and knowledge God vouchsafeth, the more honour and glory he expecteth from us.

3. That we should praise God especially for spiritual benefits. Usually those are overlooked, but they deserve the greatest acknowledgment; these are discriminating, and come from special love. Corn, wine, and oil are bestowed upon the world, but knowledge and grace upon his saints; these are the favour of his peculiar people: Ps. 106:4, 'Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest to thy people; O visit me with thy salvation.' To have the favourite's mercy is more than to have a common mercy. Protection is the benefit of every subject, but intimate and near admission is the privilege of



special favourites. Love and hatred cannot be known by the things before us, Eccles. 9:1–3. Christ gave his Spirit to the good disciples, the keeping of the purse to Judas.

[1.] Partly because these concern the better part, the inward man, 2 Cor. 4:16. He doth us more favour that healeth a wound in the body than he that seweth up a rent in the garment. Is not the body more than raiment, the soul more than the body? and the soul as furnished with grace more than the soul only as furnished with natural gifts and endowments?

[2.] Partly because these are brought about with more ado than temporal favours. God, as a creator and merciful upholder of all his creatures, doth bestow temporal blessings upon the ungodly world, even upon heathens, who never heard of Christ; yet saving grace he bestoweth only as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Eph. 1:3, with respect to the merit of Christ, who was to purchase these blessings before he could obtain them.

[3.] Partly because they are pledges of eternal blessings, and the beginning of our eternal well-being, John 6:27. These and eternal blessedness are so linked together that they cannot be separated: Rom. 8:29, 30, 'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformable to the image of his Son: that he might be the first-fruits among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified;' and Phil. 1:6, 'Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.'

[4.] Partly because these incline and fit the heart for praise and thanksgiving; the one giveth occasion to praise God, the other a heart to praise God. Outward mercies give the occasion to praise God,

these the disposition; other mercies the motives, these the preparations; these dispose the heart to it: Ps. 119:7, 'I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I have learned thy righteous judgments.' Here they dispose the lip and open the mouth: Ps. 51:15, 'O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.' The work of grace doth set our lips wide open in the magnifying and praising of God. Grace is the matter of God's praise, and also giveth a ready will to praise God, yea, the very deed of praising him.

[5.] Partly because temporal favours may be given in anger, but the graces of the Spirit are never given in anger. God may give an estate in judgment, and indulge large pastures to beasts fitted for destruction; but he giveth not an enlightened mind and a renewed heart in anger; it is a token of his special love: 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God,' Mat. 13:11. Well, then, for all these things should we praise God. We have a quick sense in bodily mercies, but in soul concernments we are not alike affected.

4. That among spiritual blessings divine illumination is a very great gift, and accordingly should be acknowledged by us. To make this evident, I shall—

[1.] Open the nature of this divine illumination.

[2.] Show you the worth of it, and how much it should be valued by us.

[1.] For the nature of it. There is a twofold wisdom and knowledge of divine mysteries:—

(1.) One which is only a gift: 1 Cor. 8:1, 'We know that we all have knowledge: knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.' This is an

excellent gift, but yet it floweth from the common influence of the Spirit, and puffeth up the party, because it is apprehended only by such an excellency as conduceth to the interests of the flesh, and to attain esteem in the world; and because he hath not thereby a deep and piercing knowledge of his misery, but is cold and weak, and doth not warm the heart with love to the thing known. Therefore we should see to it what kind of knowledge we have, whether it be a gift or a grace, whether we use it to exalt God or ourselves. The bare gift puffeth us up with a lofty conceit of ourselves and a disdain of others, but grace keepeth us humble; for the more we know that way, the more we see our defects, and what little reason we have to glory in our knowledge, or any other grace; and besides, by it we are suitably affected to what we know.

(2.) There is a special knowledge of divine mysteries wrought in us by the special and sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost; this is 'the wisdom which cometh from above,' which 'is first pure, and then peaceable,' James 3:17, which humbleth the man that hath it, for the more he knoweth of God, the more his own opinion and estimation of himself is lessened: Job 42:5, 6, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.' I have spoken unadvisedly of God. This knowledge also maketh him serious, and is operative upon the heart, and worketh love to the thing known: John 4:10, 'If thou knewest the gift,' &c.; and maketh us to know God in Christ, so as to acknowledge him, and give him due honour, respect, and reverence. It is a knowledge joined with oblectation and affection. This knowledge is considerable as to its beginning and increase.

(1st.) Its beginning, the first removing of the natural blindness and darkness of our understandings, so that we have a clear discerning of the things of God when the scales fall from our eyes. Naturally we

were ignorant of God and the way to heaven, but now, brought to the saving knowledge of God in Christ, we are acquainted with both. The first creature which God made was light; so in the new creation, the new creature is illuminated with a heavenly light, and cured of its former blindness, that we see things in another manner than ever we saw them before: 1 Peter 2:9, 'Called out of darkness into his marvellous light;' as a man brought out of a dark dungeon into an open light. And Acts 26:18, 'To open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.' So Eph. 5:8, 'Ye were sometimes darkness, but now light in the Lord.' To be seeing is better than to be blind, to be in light than to be in darkness. This is God's first work, and it is marvellous in our eyes; it is double, when we first begin to have a clear knowledge of our own misery, Rev. 3:18. Whereas before we lived in gross ignorance of our own condition; so when we begin to see the remedy, as well as our misery; 2 Cor. 4:6, 'God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' The first thing that God convinceth us of is our own sin, guilt, and misery. So that those things that either we knew not, or did swim loose in the brain, we begin now to be affected with them. We talked before of sin as a thing of course, and were wont to marvel why men kept such a deal ado about sin; but now the case is altered. God hath opened his eyes, and therefore he complaineth of it as the greatest burden, and fain would be rid of it at any rate. He beginneth to seek after Christ as his only remedy, and nothing will satisfy him but Christ; and all things are but dung and dross in comparison of the excellency of Christ, and that he may be found in him. He lamenteth his case, and can trust himself nowhere but in Christ's hands. A natural man slippeth into a heedless credulity, and either doth not look upon the gospel as a real truth, or else is not affected with it so as to venture his salvation in that bottom.

(2d.) As to the increase and progress, and so those that are taught of God need to be taught of God again, and to seek a further increase of spiritual wisdom, or a further degree of the saving knowledge of divine mysteries; as the apostle prayeth for the Ephesians, towards whom he acknowledgeth God had abounded in all wisdom and prudence, yet prayeth that God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation, that the eyes of their understandings might be opened, Eph. 1:17, 18, with the 8th verse. We are yet ignorant in many things, for we know but in part, not fully rooted in the knowledge of these things which we know. They need to be refreshed with new illumination from God, that our knowledge may be active and lively, and stand out against new and daily temptations, and that oblivion and forgetfulness, which is a kind of ignorance, and is apt ever and anon to creep upon us, may be prevented, and truths may be ready at hand for our use, James 1:5. And this is that which David beggeth an increase of knowledge for; he, being a holy man and a prophet, needed not the first illumination: and every degree is a great favour, to be acknowledged with praise.

[2.] Let me speak of the worth of this divine illumination in itself. The worth of it appeareth in four things:—

(1.) Its author. God, by his efficacious teaching, doth cure the blindness of our minds, and doth open and incline our hearts towards spiritual and heavenly things: John 6:45, 'They shall all be taught of God;' 1 Thes. 4:10, 'Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another;' 1 John 2:27, 'The anointing teacheth you all things.' As the heathen Cato would have none to teach his son but himself, for he said that instruction was such a benefit, that he would not have his son beholden to any for it but himself. Oh! it is a blessed privilege to be taught of God, to be made wise to salvation, and not only to get an ear to hear, but a heart to understand, and learn by hearing, not

only the power to believe, but the very act of faith itself. God's teaching is always effectual, not only directive, but persuasive, enlightening the mind to know, and inclining the will and affections to embrace what we know. He writeth the truth upon the heart, and puts it into the mind, Heb. 8:10. He sufficiently propounded the object, and rectifieth the faculty, imprints the truth upon the very soul. But how doth God teach? In the very place where Christ speaketh of our being taught of God, he presently addeth, John 6:46, 'Not that any man hath seen the Father.' God's teaching doth not import that any man must see God, and immediately converse with him, and talk with God, and so be taught by him. No; God teacheth externally by his word, and internally by the Spirit, but yet so powerfully and effectually that the lesson is learned and deeply imprinted upon our souls. This teaching is often expressed by seeing. Now, to a clear sight three things concur—an object conspicuous, a perspicuous medium, and a well-disposed organ or clear eye. In God's teaching there is all these. The object, to be seen plainly in the scriptures, are the things of God, not fancies, but realities, and by the light of the Spirit represented to us, and the eye of the mind opened. A blind man cannot see at midday, nor the most clear-sighted at midnight, when objects lie hidden under a veil of darkness. The object must be revealed and brought nigh to us in a due light; and God secretly openeth the eye of the soul, that we see heavenly things with life and affection. The author then showeth the mercy, when God will not only teach us by men, but by his Spirit.

(2.) The objects known, the highest and most important matters in the world, the gracious soul is savingly acquainted with. It is more to have the knowledge of the profoundest sciences than of some poor and low employment; as Themistocles said, To know a little of true philosophy is more than to know how to play upon a fiddle. But now, to have the saving knowledge of God and of the life to come is more

than to have the most admired wisdom of the flesh, than all the common learning in the world. And therefore how much are we bound to praise God if he will teach us his statutes! More than if we knew how to govern kingdoms and commonwealths, and do the greatest business upon earth. Two things do commend the object of this knowledge:—

(1st.) It is conversant about the most high and excellent things.

(2d.) The most necessary and useful things.

(1st.) Things of so high a nature as to know God, who is the cause of all things; and Jesus Christ, who is the restorer of all things; and the Spirit, who cherisheth and preserveth all things; especially to know his heavenly operations, and the nature and acting of his several graces: Jer. 9:24, 'Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he knoweth me, saith the Lord.' There is the excellency of a man to know God, to conceive aright of his nature, attributes, and works; so as to love, trust, reverence, and serve him. Alas! all other knowledge is a poor low thing to this. God hath written a book to us of himself, as Cæsar wrote his own Commentaries, and by histories and prophecies hath set forth himself to us to be the creature's creator, preserver, deliverer, and glorifier. This is the knowledge we should seek after; common crafts teach us how to get bread, but this book teacheth us how to get the kingdom of heaven, to get the bread of life, the meat that perisheth not. Law preserveth the estates and testaments of men, but this the testament of God, the charter of our eternal inheritance. Physic cureth the diseases of the body; this, afflicted minds and distempered hearts. Natural philosophy raiseth up men to the contemplation of nature; this, of the maker of all things and author of nature. History, the rise and ruin of kingdoms, states, and cities; this, the creation and consummation of the world.

Rhetoric, to stir the affection; this, to enkindle divine love. Poetry moveth natural delight; here psalms, that we may delight in God. These are the only true and sublime things. As light is pleasant to the eye, so is knowledge to the mind. But where have you the knowledge of such high things? What are the mysteries of nature to the mysteries of godliness! To know the almighty living God, and to behold his wisdom, goodness, and power, in all his works, surely this is a sweet and pleasant thing to a gracious soul; but especially to know him in Christ, to know the mystery of the incarnation, person, natures, and mediation of Christ: 1 Tim. 3:16, 'Great is the mystery of godliness.' This is a mystery without controversy great, to know, the law and covenant of God: Deut. 4:6, 'This is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations who shall hear these statutes.' And the sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost, by which we are wrought and prepared for everlasting life.

(2d.) So necessary and useful to know the way of salvation, the disease and remedy of our souls, our danger and the cure, our work and our wages, the business of life and our end, what is to be believed and practised, what we are to enjoy and do; these are the things which concern us, all other knowledge is but curious and speculative, and hath more of pleasure than of profit. To know our own affairs, our greatest and most necessary affairs, these are the things we should busy ourselves about. 'Ἐνὸς χρεία, 'One thing is necessary,' Luke 10:42. Other things we may well spare. Now what is necessary but to know our misery that we may prevent it; our remedy, that we may look after it in time; our work and business, that we may perform it; our end, that we intend it, and be encouraged by it; what course we must take that we may be everlastingly happy? Well, then, if God will show us what is good, Micah 6:8, and teach us what is good, that we may know whither we are a-going, and which way we must go; if he will give us counsel in



our reins, to choose him for our portion, Ps. 16:5, we ought to bless his name. So the 11th verse, 'Thou wilt show me the path of life.' Though ignorant of other things, we are highly obliged for this discovery. It is the work of God to give us counsel, and should be matter of perpetual thanksgiving to us.

(3.) The use for which this knowledge serveth.

(1st.) To entertain communion with God for the present, for by knowing him, we come to enjoy him: Ps. 17:15, 'As for me I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness;' that is more than to have a portion in this world. And 1 John 1:3, 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ.' By communion or fellowship is not meant a society of equals, but the dutiful yet cheerful attendance of an inferior on his superior, the creature on his creator; but yet so as that there is a holy intimacy and familiarity in it, because we both love and are beloved of God. In every ordinance they draw nearer to God than others do; for 1 John 1:7, 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.' All our duties are the converse of a sanctified creature with a holy God, and a humble creature dealing with the blessed God for a supply of all their wants. They pour out their souls to him, and he openeth his ear and bosom unto them; he teacheth them his way, and they walk in his paths, Isa. 2:3. They walk in the fear of his name and the comforts of his Spirit, Acts 9:31. They seek his glory as their great end, and live in the sense of his dearest love.

(2d.) To enjoy him for ever: 'This is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent,' John 17:3. Alas! what is the knowing how to get riches and pleasures, and

the vain glory of the world to this? Surely you that are taught of God, your business is above other men's. While they drive on no greater trade than providing for the flesh, or feathering a nest that will quickly be pulled down, they are providing for everlasting glory and happiness. They aim at nothing beyond this life; all their cares are confined within the narrow bounds of time and the compass of this world; but these look higher, and begin a life which shall be perfected in heaven; they are laying up treasure in heaven.

(4.) The manner of knowing things, when taught of God. They see things with greater clearness, certainty, efficacy, and power.

(1st.) With greater clearness. Others know words, but they know things, and therefore know as they ought to know them. They know the grace of God in truth, Col. 1:6. They have the spiritual discerning, and that is a quite different thing from a literal discerning, 1 Cor. 2:14. He hath an experimental and sweeter knowledge than learned men that are ungodly. He hath tasted that the Lord is gracious, the sweetness of his love, and the riches of his grace in Christ. The theory of divine knowledge, though never so exact, giveth us not this. They have more of the words and notions, but less of the thing itself, they have the sign, the other the thing signified; they break the shell, and the other eats the kernel; they dress the meat, but the others feed upon and digest it; dig in the mines of knowledge as negroes, but others have the gold. A rotten post may support a living tree.

(2d.) With more certainty. There is a great deal of difference between taking up religion out of inspiration, and out of opinion or tradition. Faith is the gift of God, but credulity is received by the report of men. Men may guess at the truth by their own wit, they may talk of it by rote, and according to what they read and hear from others; but divine knowledge is the fruit of the Spirit: Mat. 16:17, 'Flesh and

blood hath not revealed these things unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven;' John 4:42, 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying, but we have heard him ourselves, and know indeed that this is the Christ, the Saviour of the world;' and 1 Thes. 1:5, 'For our gospel came to you, not in word only, but in power and the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.' We never apprehend the truth with any certainty, nor can we discern God's impress on the word, but in the light of the Spirit. God's illumination maketh our knowledge of things certain and infallible: 'Know ἀσφαλῶς, assuredly,' Acts 2:36; John 17:8, ἀληθῶς. It is not a may be, a bare possibility, or likely to be, a probability; but it is sure to be, and will be so, a certainty that belongeth to faith.

(3d.) For efficacy and power: 1 Thes. 1:5, 'For our gospel came to you not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Ghost;' 'Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,' Acts 6:5. We are affected with the truths we know, yea, transformed and changed by them, 2 Cor. 3:18; changed into a divine nature, 1 Peter 1:4. Our hearts are moulded and fitted for God, and for every good work; so that this is a benefit should be much acknowledged.

Use 1. To inform us how the saints do and should esteem this benefit of divine illumination. In this psalm they esteem it more than if God should bestow a great deal of wealth upon them. See Ps. 119:14, 'I rejoice in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches;' and ver. 72, 'More than thousands of gold and silver.' Once more, they think themselves well paid if they get it by sharp afflictions, though by loss of health or wealth: ver. 71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.' The reason is, because they value it as a mercy, for which they can never enough be thankful: Phil. 3:8, 'Yea, doubtless, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I

have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.' The people of God have no reason to envy others that live in the pomp of the world and the splendour of outward accommodations, if he give them the saving knowledge of himself: Prov. 3:31, 32, 'Envy not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward is an abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous.' If God will teach us his statutes, though he keepeth us low, it is more to be one of God's disciples, to be owned by him in an ordinance, than to live a life of pomp and ease.

Secondly, None are fit to praise God but those whom God hath taught: Ps. 50:16, 'What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth?' The new song and the old heart do ill agree together; but when God hath framed our hearts to obedience, then is praise comely in our mouths.

Use 2. To direct us—

1. How to pray for spiritual grace if we would obtain it. The glory of God is the end of all grace vouchsafed to us; with this end, we must pray to God for it. The end of our petitions and requests to God should be, that we may be enabled to praise God; then we seek God for God, much more when we ask spiritual grace. To ask temporal benefits to consume upon our lusts is very bad, and the ready way to bespeak ourselves a denial: James 4:3, 'Ye ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts.' Much more to ask spiritual gifts for our lusts' sake; to beg God to open our mouths, to show forth our own praises rather than his; or knowledge to advance ourselves: as it is a greater indignity to void our excrements in a cup of gold for a prince's own drinking, than in a common utensil. Besides, it showeth our value of the benefit to think

of praise before we have obtained it: Eph. 1:6, 'To the praise of his glorious grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.'

2. It must be used and improved to that end; when we have obtained, we must not be proud of any spiritual gift, but lay our crown at God's feet: 1 Cor. 4:7, 'Who made thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou hast not received?' We pervert the end of the end when we are puffed up, and give shrewd suspicion that it is a common gift, not saving grace, when we are puffed up with it.

Use 3. Exhortation to press you to glorify God and praise him, if he hath given you any knowledge of himself and of the way of salvation.

1. This is God's end in bestowing his grace, that in word and deed we should be to the praise of his glorious grace: 1 Peter 2:9, 'That ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.'

2. You were as indocile and unteachable as others, only God made the difference: Job 2:12, 'For vain man would be wise, though man be born like the wild ass's colt;' Jer. 31:18, 'Like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke;' and therefore the glory must entirely redound to him. You might have perished as a witless fool, and gone to hell as others do, but that God gave you counsel.

3. It is the way to increase it: Col. 2:7, 'Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.' Thanksgiving for what we have received is an effectual means to make us constant, grow and abound in every grace: 'Let the people praise thee, O God, yea, let all the people praise thee,' Ps. 67:3. Look, as the vapours go up, so the showers come down. Experiences of former mercies thankfully acknowledged draweth down more mercy.

4. Prayer necessarily inferreth praise: Phil. 4:6, 'In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.' Blessing God for favours already received is necessary to be joined with prayer; it is disingenuous to be always craving, and never give thanks. Be thankful and depend for more; not always pore upon wants, but take a survey of your mercies, and that will not only enlarge your hearts in thankfulness, but even invite God to bestow further mercies.

## **SERMON CLXXXV**

# **My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.—**

## **VER. 172**

THE man of God had spoken in the former verse how his lips should praise God; here is his second promise that he maketh, of holy conference with others.

In the words we have:—

1. David's resolution, my tongue shall speak of thy word.
2. The reason; because it contained matter that deserved to be spoken of, for all thy commandments are righteousness.

[1.] He speaketh of the whole word of God, all thy commandments.

[2.] In the abstract, are righteousness; altogether righteous and faithful.

First, From the first branch, David's resolution, 'My tongue shall speak of thy word,' observe—

Doct. The subject of a believer's ordinary discourse should be the word, and those spiritual and heavenly matters contained therein.

1. Not that they are always talking of these things; there is a time for all things; the business of our calling will sometimes take us up, and sometimes our recreations; but yet there should be generally a difference between us and others. The people of God should be observantly different as to their words and discourse from other people: Cant. 4:11, 'Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb.'

The lips of Christ's spouse should flow with matter savoury and useful. So Prov. 10:20, 21, 'The tongue of the just is as choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is little worth; the lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for want of wisdom;' where the speech of the righteous is compared to silver; of the wicked, to dross; for because their heart is little worth, their discourse will be accordingly: and then the good man is compared to one that keepeth open house, that feedeth all those that resort to him; but fools do not only not feed others, but perish themselves by their own folly. So Prov. 15:7, 'The lips of the wise disperse knowledge, but the heart of the foolish doth not so.' Men usually discourse as their hearts are. A man of a frothy spirit will bring forth nothing but vain and frothy discourse, but a gracious man will utter holy and gracious things; for the tap runneth according to the liquor with which the vessel is filled. One place more: Ps. 37:30, 31, 'The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment; the law of God is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide.' All men's discourses are vented according as their hearts are busied and affected. A man that hath the word of God rooted in his heart, and maketh it his work to suit his actions thereunto, will also suit his words thereunto, and will edify those that he speaketh unto. Thoughts, words, and actions are the genuine products and issue of the heart. Grace in the heart discovereth itself uniformly in all holy thoughts, holy words, and holy actions; otherwise their conversation is not all of a piece. All these places show that a Christian's discourse will differ from other men's; but, alas! our conference is little different from ordinary men's.

2. More particularly I shall show you that we are not left to run at random in our ordinary discourse, as if our tongues were our own, to speak what we please. This I shall show—(1.) Negatively; (2.) Positively.



First, Negatively; no profane, no idle discourse.

1. No profane discourse: Eph. 4:29, 'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.' Christians are accountable for their words as well as actions.

Quest. But what is corrupt communication?

Ans. (1.) Obscene scurrilous discourse. When the heart is filled with such corrupt stuff, the mouth will be apt to vent it. So Col. 3:8, 'Put away filthy communication out of your mouth.' Sins of the tongue and outward man must be abstained from, as well as sins out of the heart. That αἰσχρολογία, that filthy speaking, rotten speech, is one of the great sins of the tongue. When we speak of those things which belong to uncleanness, this is quite unbecoming the purity and cleanness of Christians; the heart of man being as powder to the fire, easily taken with such temptations.

(2.) Calumnious and censorious discourses, when we cannot meet together but we must be speaking of others, suggesting evil against them, blemishing their graces, or carping at their weaknesses, or aggravating their sins, or divulging their secret miscarriages beyond what Christianity requireth. This sin the scripture brandeth as mischievous to ourselves and others. Ourselves: James 1:26, 'If any man seemeth to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, this man's religion is in vain.' Censuring is a pleasing sin, very suitable with corrupt nature, but yet it is a bad sign. It is made to be the hypocrites' sin, who, being acquainted with the guile of their own spirits, are apt to suspect others, and deprave their best actions, and upon the ruin of other men's credit build their own reputation for religion. And it is mischievous to others, and against that justice and charity which we owe to them: Prov. 20:22, 'The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts

of the belly.' They wound men's reputation unperceivably, and secretly strike them a blow that smarts not for the present, but destroyeth their service, at least to such as receive these privy defamations and whisperings; and it is more craftily carried when they wound while they pretend to kiss, and make their praise but a preface to their reproach, as an archer draweth back his hand that the arrow may fly with the more force. They say, He is this and that; but, &c.

(3.) Proud and arrogant speaking, when all our discourse is a self-boasting. The pride of the heart sometimes shooteth out by the eyes, and therefore we read of haughty eyes and a proud look; but usually it is displayed in our speech, in a proud ostentation of our own worth and excellency: 1 Sam. 2:3, 'Talk no more so exceeding proudly: let not arrogancy come out of your mouth.' When I cometh in at every sentence, περιαιτολογία, wanteth not its vanity: Prov. 25:27, 'For men to search their own glory is not glory.' All their discourses is to set off themselves, and to usher in something of themselves; and if religion be talked of, it is to commend their own knowledge, and their own notions, or their own endeavours for Christ, or to blemish others, that they may shine alone.

(4.) When anger sets us a-discoursing; therefore the apostle saith, Eph. 4:31, 'Let bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and evil-speaking be put away from you, with all malice.' Where there is bitterness, or a secret smothered displeasure, or alienation of affection, it soon breaketh out into rage; which if an impetuous rage, or passionate commotion, that produceth anger; or a desire of revenge. Anger produceth clamour, or boisterous words, loud menaces, and brawlings, or inordinate speeches, which are the black smoke whereby anger and wrath within doth first manifest itself; then clamour produceth evil-speaking, which are disgraceful and

contumelious speeches; therewith the party incensed doth stain the reputation of him with whom he is angry; and then malice is rooted anger and continued wrath. Now all these should be put away. Christians should have nothing to do with them. But that we have in hand is disgraceful and contumelious speaking, as it is the result of anger, wrath, and malice, either by open railing, or derision, and jeering at their sins and infirmities to shame them, or by imprecation and cursing, and wishing evil to them; all which is contrary to that meekness and love which should prevail in the hearts of Christians. As Saul in his anger called Jonathan, 1 Sam. 20:3, 'Thou son of the perverse and rebellious woman;' in his raging fit he blemisheth his own wife, of whom we hear elsewhere no such imputation. Thou art more likely to be a bastard than my own son. Frantic words, all interpreters think them to be.

This is a taste of that profane discourse which is forbidden to Christians. Now the reasons of it are these:—

(1.) Because this allowed and habituated, argueth a rotten and unrenewed heart: Mat. 12:34, 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' Words much discover the temper of the heart, there being a quick intercourse between the heart and the tongue.

(2.) Because it is noisome and offensive to honest ears; it is not a speech that hath any grace or comeliness in it: Col. 4:6, 'Let your speech be always with grace.'

3. It is contagious and infectious to ordinary hearers; especially to children and weak ones: 1 Cor. 15:33, 'Evil words corrupt good manners.' We convey our taint.

(4.) Sinful, vain, and frothy discourse doth make the heart more vain, perverse, and wicked, while the corruption that is in it doth

strengthen itself by getting vent. When the sparks fly abroad of the fire kindled in our bosoms, a man waxeth worse and worse; his reverence of God is lessened and weakened as he hath dared to give vent to his sin and folly, and is more emboldened to sin again: Mat. 15:19, 20, 'For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile the man.' Evil-speaking is one thing mentioned, and it layeth men open to Satan. Therefore, as the heart should be kept from framing such conceptions, so the tongue from uttering them; for so they prove more dishonourable to God, hurtful to ourselves, and offensive to others.

(5.) I will venture at one reason more against profane discourse; it grieveth the Spirit, Eph. 5:29, 30. Many by their obscene, putrid, and carnal discourse intend no further than to make themselves merry, jovial, and glad: Hosea 7:3, 'They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies,' saith the prophet; yet, alas! it is but a poor sport, and will prove so in the end, for it draweth God to be against them; the Holy Ghost is displeased and grieved with it, these things being against his light, motions, and directions, and so an offence to him, which a tender conscience is soon sensible of.

2. Not idle discourse, which tendeth not to the glory of God and the edification of our neighbour. We should have an eye to the good of those with whom we speak, so as to edify them with our speech; for Christ telleth us that we must give an account to God, not only for words, but even for idle words: Mat. 12:36, 'I say unto you, that for every idle word that men speak, they shall give an account thereof in the judgment.' Men esteem little of their words, yet when they are put into God's balance they may weigh heavy; not only wicked words, but even idle words, such as serve for no good purpose, or for no

lawful end; and in your account they will come in as so many sins, and sit heavy upon you; if you have not received pardon before, it is a strict sentence. But what is this idle discourse? Such as wanteth the solidity and substance of truth; such as tend to no use and benefit. De jure God may condemn you for these, though de facto upon repentance he pardoneth greater sins. Or possibly such are idle words as come from a vain idle frame of heart; for he had spoken before in the 35th verse that a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man evil things. Now such idle words are a note of the wickedness of the man, of the evil treasure that is in his heart; for these he is responsible at the day of judgment, as for a vain conversation and the unfruitful works of darkness. However, we must not open a gap to licentiousness; as when the apostle forbiddeth profane discourse, he enjoineth profitable discourse as the only remedy: Eph. 4:29, 'Let no corrupt communication come out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.' As much as may be, holy conference should be mixed with all our discourses and converses, otherwise they are accountable to God. And it is very notable the apostle forbiddeth μωρολογία ἢ εὐτραπεία, foolish jesting: Eph. 5:4, 'Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which is not convenient, but rather giving of thanks.' As he condemneth filthiness, or words contrary to Christian gravity, decency, or modesty, so he condemneth foolish talking, which is impertinent, superfluous, and vain discourse. And then jesting; not all honest mirth or use of wit, but an intemperate use; when men give up themselves to a frothy vanity, that they cannot be serious; or to tart reflections upon the personal imperfections of others; or to impious jests, by wresting the scripture, to express the conceptions of a vain and wanton wit. In the general, there must be a great guard on all jesting, lest it degenerate; and that we entertain one another with thanksgiving, and discourses of the love of God,

and his manifold mercies to us; for it is not an easy matter to keep within bounds of cheerful and allowed mirth. Hearts that are kept sensible of God's goodness are desirous to express it to others whenever occasion offereth, and vain and idle communication is nothing so pleasing to them.

Secondly, Positively; we are to edify one another, as David professeth here that his tongue should speak of God's word; his conferences and discourses should be filled up of no other matter.

1. Because our tongue is our glory: Ps. 10:9, 'My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth.' Compare Acts 2:26, 'My heart rejoiceth, and my tongue was glad.' Now, why is our tongue our glory? Not only as it was given us for the use of tasting meat and drink (so the tongues of the brute beasts serve them), but because thereby we must express the conceptions of our minds. So speech is the excellency of man above the beasts; but Christianity giveth us a higher reason, because thereby we may express the conceptions of our minds to the glory of God, and the good of others: James 3:9, 'Therewith we bless God, even the Father.' That is our glory, that we cannot only think of God, but speak of God, his word and works.

2. Because conference and edifying discourse is one means of spiritual growth and spiritual improvement to ourselves and others. (1.) To ourselves: Prov. 16:21, 'The wise in heart shall be called prudent, and the sweetness of his lips increaseth learning.' The more he venteth what he knoweth, the wiser himself groweth, and learneth by teaching others; for the more he draweth forth his knowledge, the more it is impressed upon his own heart. It is a truth, he that watereth shall be watered, and our gifts, as the loaves, are increased in the breaking, or as the widow's giving oil to the prophet was enriched by it; not only as we occasion others to draw forth their

knowledge, but as our own is confirmed and strengthened by using it, as to him that hath shall be given, Mat. 25:29. As venting of sin and folly increaseth sin and folly, so doth venting spiritual knowledge still increase it. (2.) Others: it is a great benefit to them when we communicate our experiences to them: Luke 22:32, 'When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.' When he was converted by repentance, he should be more careful to convert and strengthen others, that they fall not in like manner, or help them to recover out of the mire of sin. And the apostle saith, 2 Cor. 1:4, 'That God comforteth us, that we may be able to comfort others in trouble, by the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God.' The Lord comforts one that another may be comforted; as in the celestial bodies, whatever light and influence the moon and stars receive, they bestow it on these inferior bodies: they have their light from the sun, and they reflect it again on the creatures below. Or as the official part in the body; as the heart and liver receive, and convey, and derive the blood and spirits to all the other parts, so a Christian, when he is strengthened in himself, ought to convey his comfort and strength to others. It is mighty edifying, when we have found the usefulness of the word, to speak of it to God's praise; if we have gotten direction in doubtful cases, or benefit by it in the mastery of our lusts, and the promises have afforded any support and deliverance in our distresses, we are debtors of the comfort and experiences we have, and are stewards to dispense it to others. Many take a glory that they have cordials, strong waters, and medicines in their closets and repositories, that may be a relief to the bodies of others; so should we delight to refresh their souls with what has done us good. The humiliation and brokenness of heart which thou hast found may be powerful to persuade others of the bitterness of sin. David, when he had smarted for sin, saith, Ps. 51:13, 'I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.' He had found how bitter a thing it was to provoke God by sin, and he could tell them

such stories of it as would make their hearts to wake, and cause them to hate it. The faith and knowledge which God hath given thee may direct and preserve others; thy temptations may conduce to the succouring of others who are tempted.

3. It is a mighty comfortable duty, that hath much sweetness in it, to confer together of holy things: Rom. 1:12, 'That I may be comforted by the mutual faith of you and me.' Holy discourse doth refresh more than vain and foolish jesting; it is a far sweeter thing to talk of the word of God, and those spiritual and heavenly things which are contained therein, than to spend the time in vain and foolish jesting, or discoursing about mere worldly matters. Should anything be more delightful to a Christian than Christ and heaven, and the promises of the world to come, and the way that leadeth thither? and should it be burdensome to talk of these things, which we profess to be our only hope and joy? Certainly our relish and appetite is mightily depraved if we think so, judge ourselves in a prison when we are in good company who remember God; and when they invite you to remember him with them, will you frown upon the motion, because it is some check and interruption to your carnal vanity?

4. The well ordering of our words is a great point of Christianity, and argueth a good degree of grace: 'He that bridleth his tongue is a perfect man,' James 3:2. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, saith Solomon, Prov. 18:21; upon the good or ill use of it a man's safety doth depend. Not only temporal safety, but eternal: Mat. 12:37, 'By thy words shalt thou be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned.' These evidences are brought into judgment; therefore it concerneth us to see what our discourses are, as well as our actions. Solomon often describeth the righteous by his good tongue: Prov. 10:13, 'The mouth of the righteous bringeth forth wisdom;' and Prov. 12:18, 'The tongue of the wise is health.'



Use 1. Reproof. It reproveth us for being so dumb and tongue-tied in holy things. We can speak liberally of any subject, only we are dumb in spiritual matters which concern our edification. We show so little grace in our conferences, because we have so little grace in our hearts. Alas! many that profess religion, their talk is little different from other men's, as if they were ashamed to speak of God, or had nothing to say of him and for him. I do not always bind you to talk of religious things, but sometimes it bindeth. Now, when is it your tongues speak of the word in a serious and affectionate manner? Can you love God and never put in a word for him? Can you see or hear God dishonoured, and suffer your mouths to be sealed up with a sinful silence, that you should not have a word to speak in the cause of God?

Use 2. To exhort us to be frequent and serious in our discourses of God, and spiritual heavenly things.

For means to help us.

1. Divine illumination; to teach others the way of God requireth that we ourselves should be taught of God; then it cometh the warmer and fresher when we speak not by hearsay only, but experience; as heart answereth to heart, so the renewed heart in him that heareth to the renewed heart in him that speaketh, and we show others what God by his illuminating grace hath first showed us; it savoureth of that Spirit that worketh in both. He will easily kindle others who is once on fire himself. The word passeth through others as water through an empty trunk, without feeling; they may speak very good things, but they do but personate and act a part. But when we have been in the deep waters, and God hath bound up our wounds, we can more feelingly speak to others.

2. A sight of the excellency of the word, and a value and esteem thereof. The reason in the text, 'For all thy commandments are righteousness.' We are apt to speak oftenest of those things which we most affect. Did not your souls grow out of relish with these holy, spiritual, and excellent things, your speeches about them would be more frequent, lively, serious, and savoury; for we cannot conceal our affections. Our coldness in speaking to others of these spiritual and heavenly things cometh from want of this persuasion, that 'all his commandments are righteousness;' for they who are persuaded of the excellency of the word will be talking of the sweetness of its promises continually.

3. A stock of spiritual knowledge: Mat. 12:35, 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things.' Every man entertaineth his guests with such provisions as he hath. It is the word which enableth us to edify ourselves and others with holy conference. The more store, the more we have to bring forth upon all occasions: Col. 3:16, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another.' A plentiful measure of gospel knowledge enableth us to direct and instruct others; there all wisdom is made plain, things revealed which cannot be found elsewhere; that which may by long search be found elsewhere is made ready to our hands, and brought down to the meanest capacity. The heart is the fountain from whence the tongue doth run and flow; and when the heart is well furnished, the tongue will be employed and exercised.

4. Zeal for the glory of God, and love to others' souls. We should communicate to others what we have learned ourselves. David would not reserve his knowledge to himself: 'Teach me, and my tongue shall speak of thy word.' Fire turneth all about it into fire: mules and all creatures of a bastard race do not procreate. David's Maschil, Ps. 32

title, is to instruct others. True good is diffusive in itself; our candle enlightened, should enlighten others. When Philip was called, he inviteth Nathanael to come to Christ, John 1:45; Andrew calleth Simon. True grace showeth itself in zeal to promote the kingdom of Christ and the good of our neighbours' souls; and the new nature seeketh to multiply the kind, and such as are brought to Christ will be careful to invite others.

5. Wisdom is necessary: Col. 4:6, 'Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how to answer every man;' that is, seasoned with the salt of holy and divine wisdom, that it may be savoury and acceptable to the hearers; and both delight and edify. Without this holy skill and wisdom, how often is conference turned into jangling or mere babbling!

6. Watchfulness and heed, otherwise corruption will break out in pride, in a vain ostentation of parts, passion in some heat of words, worldliness and sensuality in diverting from holy conference to that which is carnal and worldly, discontent in some, unseemly expressions of God's dealings with us, indiscretion and folly in a multitude of impertinent talk: Ps. 141:3, 'Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.' The tongue must be watched as well as the heart. All watching will be to little purpose unless God bridle and direct our tongue, that nothing break out to his dishonour. There must be a constant guard that nothing break from us that is unseemly.

Secondly, We come to the reason, 'For all thy commandments are righteousness.'

Doct. There is righteousness, nothing but righteousness, all righteousness to be found in the word of God.

1. There is a perfect uprightness in all God's promises. They are sure principles of trust and dependence upon God: Ps. 18:30, 'The word of the Lord is tried; he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.' He is most just and faithful, and his promises without all deceit or possibility of failing, and will certainly protect all those that rely and depend upon him.

2. As to his precepts, nothing is approved in them, or recommended to us, but what is holy, just, and good. There is no virtue which it commendeth not, no duty which it commandeth not, no vice which is not condemned therein, nor sin which is not forbidden.

I shall prove the doctrine by three things:—

1. By the sufficient provision that is made for man's duty. In a moral consideration there are but three beings—God, neighbours, and self. Paul's three adverbs are suited to these, Titus 2:12, 'soberly, righteously, godly.'

[1.] For self-government, or living soberly in the present world, nothing conduceth to that more than God's precepts. The whole drift of his word is to check self-pleasing and sense-pleasing, and to condemn all excess of meat, drink, or apparel, lest our hearts be besotted and overcharged, and, by indulging sensuality, diverted from spiritual and heavenly things.

[2.] For carriage to our neighbour. What religion provideth so amply as the word of God doth against all fraud and violence, requireth us in all things to do as we would be done by? Yea, it not only enforceth justice, but charity, and to love our neighbour as ourselves, and to account his welfare our own, and rejoice in his good, and mourn for his evil, as for our own.

[3.] For the third, godliness. God is nowhere represented and discovered so much as in his word; nor a way of commerce between him and us anywhere else so clearly established; nor what kind of worship we should give unto him, both for matter and manner. In short, the scripture is written to teach us how to love him, and entertain communion with him, and to serve him in holiness and righteousness all our days; and maketh our daily converse with God in holiness our great work and business.

2. It appeareth by the connaturality and suitableness which they have to the best and holiest: Ps. 119:140, 'Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.' It is written in our hearts as well as in God's book; and there is something in the one akin to the other: Heb. 8:10, 'I will write my law in their hearts and minds.' On the contrary, so far as a man is depraved, so far he hateth it, Rom. 8:7; yea, the more he feareth it: John 3:20, 21, 'He that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.'

3. The event showeth it; for the more the word of God is preached, the more is righteousness spread in the world, and men grow wiser and better. Banish the word of God, or discourage the preachers of it, and there followeth nothing but confusion of manners and corruption in religion. The word, then, is the only means of reforming the world, and curing the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Where either the word hath not been received, as among the pagans, or where it hath been restrained, as in Popery, scriptures locked up in an unknown tongue, or where neglected or sleepily urged, as in churches that have left their first love, there is a greater overflow of wickedness; their ignorance hath caused a great part of them to degenerate into a more sensual, sottish sort of people.

Quest. But are not people very bad that have the scriptures? Do not we ourselves complain of a flood of wickedness?

Ans. 1. Christianity must not be judged by the rabble of nominal, literal Christians, no more than we will judge of the cleanness of a street by the foulness of a sink or kennel, or of the sound grapes in a bunch by the rotten ones, or of the fidelity of subjects by the rebellion of traitors, or the honesty and justice of a nation by a crew of thieves and robbers, nor of the civility of a nation by the rusticity of ploughmen or carters. Those who are serious in their religion are the best men, and of the choicest and most excellent spirits in the world; the scandals and wickedness of others do not impeach their rule.

2. The strictly religious must not be judged by the revellings of the carnal, who are their enemies; ignorant and ungodly men will blast them: 1 Peter 4:4, 5, 'Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you; who shall account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.'

3. Neither is the state of religion to be judged by the complaints of friends, hating the least evil, ashamed of men's unthankfulness. Light maketh it odious; as bad as we are, it is worse where the word is not preached in a lively manner.

Use 1. Let us approve of those things which God hath bound us to believe and practise; they being all suitable to the nature of God and man. The first ground of obedience is consent and approbation: 'I consent to the law that it is good,' Rom. 7:16. So to the gospel: 'It is a faithful saying, worthy of all acceptation,' 1 Tim. 1:15.

2. Let us answer this word, let the fruit of the Spirit be in us all, righteousness, goodness, and truth. The stamp is answerable to the

seal; this is the genuine result of the doctrine we profess.

## SERMON CLXXXVI

### **Let thine hand help me: for I have chosen thy precepts.—VER. 173**

THE two first verses show the drift of this portion. He begs two benefits—instruction and deliverance. His first request, for instruction, is enforced by a promise of praise, ver. 171, 'My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.' In ver. 172, of conference or holy discourse, whereby others may be edified, 'My mouth shall speak of thy word.' Now he comes to enforce the second request for deliverance by an argument of his ready obedience, 'Let thine hand help me: for I have chosen thy precepts.'

Observe here—

1. The petition, let thine hand help me.
2. The argument or reason to enforce it, for I have chosen thy precepts.

First, For the petition, 'Let thine hand help me.' Hand is put for power: Let thy power preserve me and defend me; and help is sometimes put for assistance and sometimes for deliverance. God may be said to help us when he doth assist us and support us in troubles, or when he doth deliver us from troubles. This latter acceptation suits with this place, and it is equivalent with what he said before, ver. 170, 'Let my supplication come before thee; deliver me;' so, 'Let thine hand help me,' 'deliver me according to thy word.' A good man may be brought into great straits when his own hand

cannot help and stead him, but then he may fly to God, and say, 'Lord, let thine hand help me.' His argument and motive which he urgeth is, that 'I have chosen thy precepts;' and from thence he infers his hope of deliverance.

The points will be two:—

Doct. 1. That this is the character and description of a good man, that he is good, and doth good out of choice. So David pleads it here, 'I have chosen thy precepts.'

Doct. 2. That a man which makes conscience of God's commands is encouraged to seek help from him in all his straits; for he prays, 'I have chosen thy precepts,' therefore, 'Lord, let thine hand help me.'

Doct. 1. It is the plain character of a good man to be good and do good out of choice.

It was not out of rashness and ignorance and inconsiderate zeal that David with so much hazard betook himself to God's service, and was so exactly faithful with God; but upon due choice, trial, and examination: 'I have chosen thy precepts.'

The point may easily be proved out of scripture, Isa. 56:4. God's people are described to be those that choose the things that please him, and take hold of his covenant. Taking hold of his covenant relates there to the privilege part of the covenant. As they seek their happiness in the privileges of God's covenant, so as to the duty part, they choose the things which please him. After serious and mature deliberation, and judgment rightly informed, and affection thereon grounded, they embrace the ways of God by a free election and choice. And so you shall see it is the charge against wicked men, this is the disproof of their confidence, Prov. 1:29, that they did not



choose the fear of the Lord. Mark the expression, that is, prefer it before the baits of sin. So Deut. 30:19, 'I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that thou and thy seed may live.' We shall never have life unless we have it by choice. He sets both before them; choose life, not as if it were indifferent in point of duty for to do the one or the other, but to set an edge upon their affections; I have set both before you. God will have his service entered upon by choice: Josh. 24:15, 'Now if it seem evil for you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods whom your fathers served, on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell; but as for me,' &c. He leaves it not arbitrarily to the Israelites whether they should serve God or no, but this he saith that they might freely and without compulsion declare what they were minded to do, and that they might be the more firmly tied to serve the Lord, because they had voluntarily taken upon themselves to do it. 'Now choose you whom you will serve;' that is, compare that which is best with that which is worst, life and death, light and darkness, heaven and hell together; and resolve accordingly; because no man in his right wits would make any doubt after such a representation which to choose. Joshua's speech is just such another speech as that of Elijah, 1 Kings 18:21, 'If God be God, serve him; if Baal be God, follow him.' Not as if he made it any doubt, or would have them make it any doubt, or as if it were uncertain, but that they might choose more freely, and delight and persevere in their choice. These places show we never rightly enter into God's service until we enter upon it by choice.

Here I shall inquire—

1. What it is to choose God's precepts.

2. Give some reasons why they must be chosen, else they can never be rightly kept, or why this is so necessary.

First, What is choosing God's precepts? It implies five things—(1.) Deliberation; (2.) Esteem or preference; (3.) A voluntary inclination; (4.) A firm and steadfast resolution, by which we are bound all our days; (5.) A complacency and contentment in what we have chosen.

1. Deliberation, or a due consideration of what is chosen, its nature, worth, and excellency; for until we compare and weigh things, how can we make a choice, but take them hand-over-head; and therefore there is a weighing the reasons on both sides. God's children are not ignorant what it is to flow in worldly wealth, pleasures, and earthly comforts, and to enjoy the favour of the world, and to sail here with a full stream; and on the other side, they are not ignorant what it will cost them to be through with Christ, to be religious indeed. They do not run hand-over-head to resolve upon such a course. No; they sit down, they count the charges, Luke 14:27. The business sticks with many in this first work; we cannot bring them to any serious consideration; they will not weigh things, but act as their brutish lusts incline them. It is said, Isa. 46:8, 'Remember this, and show yourselves men; bring it to mind, O ye transgressors.' It is a disgrace to our reason, when we will not consider well of things, and bring them not back to our hearts, as the word signifies; but we run on as chance offereth objects or occasions. Consider what this and that will tend to, weigh things in your souls. Even good itself, if we stumble upon it, it is but a lucky hit or a happy mistake; therefore the apostle adviseth us to resolve upon trial: 1 Thes. 5:21, 'Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.' Men will not hold fast that which is good unless they first prove and try. Indeed those things which usually oppose themselves against the spiritual life are such poor paltry inconsiderable vanities, that they are not worthy to be brought

into competition, or into any serious debate with them; for it is no hard question to resolve whether God or the flesh shall be pleased? whether the transitory pleasures of sin should be preferred before eternal glory or the happiness of the saints? But yet serious consideration will discover this to us, and shame us out of our perverse and preposterous choice; whereas otherwise we should go on like men asleep, or like men out of their wits, choose poor base things, delight in inconsiderable trifles, before the things whereof we are so deeply concerned; therefore it requires deliberation in weighing.

2. Choice notes esteem or preference; for election and choice is a preferring of one thing before another. Though God and Christ be good, and grace and heaven be good, yet there are other things that come in competition with them, and when we set ourselves to seek after God and Christ, these competitors are suing for our hearts, and rival. Christ in the soul. And therefore this choice implies a renunciation of all other things, a trampling upon them, and a high esteem and value of Christ and his ways. The scripture speaks of selling all for the pearl of great price, Mat. 13:45, 46, of accounting tilings but dung and dross in comparison of Christ, Phil. 3:8, 9. In choosing the ways of God many things will be offered to us that may hale us this way and that way, many pleasures and contentments of this life. Now we must trample upon them all, and renounce them as they are temptations, that we may actually exalt, prefer, and esteem Christ and his grace. There are two things which assault our resolution for God—the terrors of sense, and the allurements of the flesh or the vanities of the world. Now a soul resolved to serve God, must actually and positively prefer obedience before both of these, before temptations on the right hand and on the left.

[1.] For the terrors of sense, we must be resolved rather to suffer than to sin. In choosing the ways of God, the heart must come to a firm resolution rather to suffer the greatest inconvenience than to commit the least sin. This was Moses' choice, Heb. 11:25. When once it came to a case of sin, then he renounceth pleasures, treasures, honours. Whatever it costs us, we must resolve to be faithful with God, and to run the greatest hazard rather than to do the least thing that is contrary to his will.

[2.] We must prefer obedience before all the allurements of the flesh and vanities of the world. David chose God's precepts, that is, valued them more than all other things. See ver. 14 of this psalm, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches.' He explains the choice here mentioned. If we have grace to serve God, and to keep the way of his testimonies, we count ourselves more happy than if we had all the world. It is not enough to approve God's ways simply, but we must approve them comparatively; not only as good in themselves, but as better than all other things; and it should be more to us to be taught our duty, and to know how to serve God, than if we did enjoy the fulness of all earthly comforts.

3. Choosing the ways of God implies a voluntary inclination, that we should of our own accord follow them; for choice is free, and it is opposed to force and constraint, and a man is said to choose those things which he likes, which he loves, which his soul inclines to, when he is carried to them not by the compulsion of an external principle, but by his own propension and inclination. Look, as the wicked they are described to be those 'who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness,' Prov. 2:13, that is, have an inclination to one rather than another; for what is expressed that the wicked leave the paths of uprightness, it is explained, John 3:9, by 'loving darkness rather than the light. And so it is said of Mary,

she hath chosen that good part; of her own voluntary accord and free inclination she was moved to sit at Christ's feet, to attend upon the improvement of her soul. The business of salvation is offered to our choice, it is left to our own free inclination, though God gives the inclination beforehand (as by and by). If you choose death, you willingly and freely forsake your own mercies.

4. Choice implies a firm and immutable purpose, a resolved adhesion to those things we choose. The mind is not anxious and doubtful, and hanging between two contraries, when we choose, but fixed and determined: 'I have chosen thy precepts;' that is, firmly resolved to observe them. We never choose till we come to a full purpose, Acts 9:33. He exhorteth them with full purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord. A wavering inclination infers no choice. There may be good thoughts and meanings in the soul, but till we are resolved for God we do not choose his precepts. Many are convinced of a better way, but their hearts are not engaged to walk in it. We are fixedly determined by our choice: Jer. 30:21, 'Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord.' He hath sincerely obliged and bound himself to live in a close way of communion with God. The soul begins to pause and consider the vanity of earthly things; there is the first. Yea, and after this, they are brought on that they say, Certainly it is much better to be a servant of the Lord than to be a servant of sin; and they see that the greatest inconvenience is a more tolerable thing than sin, and all the pleasures and profits of the world will not countervail our duty to God. There is an inclination to the way of God. Ay! but this inclination, while it is wavering, it may be taken off, till it come to a resolution. Here I will stick; I will seek my happiness and comfort in seeking God: 'It is good for me to draw nigh unto God,' Ps. 73:28; and therefore I am resolved to seek my happiness and contentment, whatever I do.

5. Choice implies a contentment and complacency in that which we have chosen; and the act of the will is quickened by a suitable affection that accompanieth it. Mark, election is properly an act of the will. Ay! but the affections they are but the vigorous motions of the will. Where there is a remiss will, that is without affection; but where there is a strong bent in the will, that is always accompanied with some suitable affection. As if I have a strong bent and nilling of sin, there is an affection of hatred accompanying it; if I have but a remiss will for holiness, that will never save me; that is made to be one of the seven deadly sins which the schoolmen call listlessness; but where there is a serious will, such a willing as a choosing, certainly there is an affection that accompanieth it. Look, as David, when he had chosen God for his portion, presently he professed his complacency and delight in his choice: Ps. 16:6, 'The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.' Where there is a choosing God for our portion and all-sufficient happiness, there is presently a delight and satisfaction which results from this choice, and the soul is affected with its own felicity in God, and finds a joy and pleasure in choosing him. So it is in choosing the precepts of God: 'I have chosen thy precepts.' See the next verse, 'Thy law is my delight.' Where there is choice there is delight. A man loves what he chooseth, and is ready and forward to do it; and it is a pleasing thing to serve the Lord, for election in such a weighty case is accompanied with love. It is not an act of a remiss, but strong will; and where there is love, nothing will be grievous, 1 John 5:3.

Secondly, To give reasons why we must thus choose the precepts of God. I shall reason—(1.) From the necessity; (2.) From the congruity and convenience; (3.) From the utility and profit of it.

1. The necessity of it. It must needs be so that God's ways must be taken up upon choice, because there are several competitors that bid

for the heart of man; where there is but one thing, there is no choice. There is the devil, by the world, through the flesh, seeks to get in, and reign in your hearts; and there is God, Christ, and the Spirit. Now there must be a casting out of one, and putting in the other. Look, as in Prov. 9, the whole chapter; there wisdom and the foolish woman are brought in pleading to draw in the heart of unwary man to themselves. Wisdom is pleading, and the foolish woman is pleading. In the beginning of the chapter, wisdom tells what comfort, what peace they shall have, if they will take her institutions; wisdom offers solid benefits, but folly offers stolen waters and bread eaten in secret, some carnal mirth when conscience is asleep. Ay! and the dead are there too. The intoxicating pleasures of this world bring death along with them, when they can choke the sentiments of God that are in his heart. 'Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither,' saith wisdom; and 'who is simple, let him turn in hither,' saith folly. As the poets feign of their Hercules, that virtue and vice appeared to him, and the one showed him a rough, the other a pleasant way. Certainly as soon as we come to years of discretion, we come to make our choice, either to go on in the ways of death, or to choose the ways of God; either to give up ourselves to the pleasures of sin, or else to seek after the comforts of the Spirit. Now, since there are two competitors for the heart of man, and his love cannot lie idle, it must be given to one or another; love and oblectation cannot remain idle in the soul, either it must leak out to the world, or run out to God. There is a necessity of a choice, of renouncing the bewitching vanities of the world, that we may seriously betake ourselves to the service of God.

2. Consider the congruity and conveniency of it, both to the honour of God and nature of man, that no man should ever be happy or miserable but by his own choice.

[1.] It is not for the honour of God that a man should be happy or have such great privileges settled upon him without his own choice; such great benefits as justification, sanctification, and eternal glory. On the other side, that a man should be miserable without his knowledge, or against his will, or besides his purpose and consent, that God should give eternal life whether men will or no. It is not agreeable to the honour of God to inflict eternal death upon them without their consent, unless they choose the ways of death; man's heart else would have a plea against God. Certainly the wise God will never make any happy without their own consent, and never make any miserable but their destruction is of themselves, Hosea 13:9.

[2.] Neither will it agree with the nature of man, who is a reasonable rational creature, or any agent capable of election or choice. The brutes are ruled with a rod of iron. God guides all things by his providence; inanimate creatures by mere providence, brutes by their own instinct, and man as a free agent, capable of knowing and prosecuting his chief end. Now every creature of God is governed according to the nature which is put into it; and therefore, since man is a free agent, God expects, in submitting to his service, the creature's consent and choice; and before we can submit to his service, before he will admit us to the benefits, there must be a choice, and an actual will on our parts: Rev. 22:17, 'Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' The business is brought home to us, and left with our will. If we miss of happiness, it is because we would not choose it, and the way that leads to it. The Lord chargeth it still upon man's will, John 5:40; Luke 19:14; Mat. 23:37; Ps. 81:11. Our misery is from our own wilfulness; but in all that are brought into grace, there is a will it is true, but God prevents them and inclines their will: Ps. 110:3, 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of grace and power.' You have a grant, and an offer of mercy from God, and then he inclines and moves you to make a right choice. So that of



the good and bad it may be said they have their choice. If you neglect and refuse holiness, you choose your own destruction, and neglect life. Your hearts must tell you this: Thou wast the fault of it; as Plutarch brings in one Apollodorus, that dreamed one night that he was boiling in a kettle of scalding lead, and that his heart cried out to him, I have been the cause of all this. This heathen improves it to show there is a vengeance that attends sinners. I mention it only allusively. Now it was your own perverse choice and will that made your hell; thou hast but the fruit of thine own choice. Indeed, as to what is good, if you have chosen the precepts of God, there God must have the glory. You must say, Not I, but Christ; as the apostle. Ay! but there you come in; there is an act of your will, but as disposed and rightly inclined by God. You come both to the duties and privileges of religion by a choice also, though not of yourselves, but of God.

3. Let me reason from the utility and benefit. A man that takes up the ways of God upon choice—

[1.] He is able to justify the ways of God, for he seeth a reason for what he chooseth. When temptations come strong, there will be many misgiving thoughts. Ay! but then wisdom should be justified of all her children, Mat. 11:19. A blind accidental love is the fruit of chance, but a love that is grounded upon knowledge and judgment, that is choice. This is so grounded, therefore he seeth reason for what he doth: Phil. 1:9, 10, 'I pray God that your love may abound in all wisdom and understanding, that ye may approve things that are excellent.' They see a reason, for they took it upon choice. The Lord hath showed them the worth and excellency of his ways, therefore they can better justify God against all their prejudices.

[2.] Such will be more firm and steadfast. The cause of all halting in religion is the want of a choice, of a purpose resolutely set. A wavering double-minded man, that is half off and half on, will be unstable in all his ways, James 1:8, διψυχος ἀκατάστατος, a two-soul man, a man that seems to have a soul for God and a soul for earthly things, and the heart hangs sometimes for one, and sometimes for another. A scoff or scorn, or a little inconvenience, a little fear, a little enticement or stirring of the rebelling flesh within, will make him turn out of the way; and how can such a one hold out with God, when his way to heaven is a continual warfare? But on the other side, a man that is a Christian, and a servant of God by choice, his course is likely according to his choice, because he is fixed upon evidence, he knows he is upon sure ground; and depending upon God, he will not miscarry. And therefore Joshua, when he would engage the Israelites to continue faithful with God, he draws them on to a choice, and then saith, Josh. 24:22, 'Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen the Lord to serve him, and they said, We are witnesses.' It much strengthens the bond when a man binds himself freely and willingly, and he makes himself the more culpable and the more inexcusable if he do not observe it.

[3.] They will carry on the work of their heavenly calling with the more ease and delight, because a choice is nothing else but the inclination of the soul guided by reason, strengthened by a purpose, and quickened and actuated by our love. This reason justifies our choice. Purpose binds it, makes it firm; but now here comes love, which makes it easy and sweet to do what we have resolved upon. A resolute traveller will go through his journey, and overcome the tediousness of it; his mind is set to finish it, let him have what way or weather he will. So a Christian will overcome his difficulties when his heart is inclined to this course; it is his own choice, and he will hold to it. It is a hard heart that makes the work hard, but when the will is

engaged, a firm resolution of the will is the life of our affections, and to affection all is easy.

Use 1. To show that they act upon a wrong principle who are not good, and yet do good out of chance. To this end I shall show you— (1.) That a man may do good by chance, and not be good. (2.) A man may do good by force, and yet not be good. (3.) That some do good out of craft and design; but to do good out of choice doth only discover the truth and sincerity of religion.

1. Some do good by chance. As—

[1.] The man that taketh up religion by example barely, and tradition; not out of any sound conviction of the truth and worth of it. Thus many are Christians by the chance of their birth in those countries where the name of Christ is professed and had in honour; and the main reason into which their religion is resolved is not any excellence in itself, but the custom and tradition of their forefathers: John 4:20, 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain;' and 1 Peter 1:18, 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers.' It was hard to reclaim them from their inveterate customs; this is the religion in which they have been born and bred. It is true that tradition from father to son is a duty, and a means to bring us to the knowledge of the truth, and that Christianity is such an institution as doth so clearly evidence itself to be of God, and speaketh to us of such necessary and weighty matters, that it cannot but a little rouse and affect the mind of him that receiveth it, however he receiveth it. But most men do but blindly and pertinaciously adhere to it as that religion wherein they have been born and bred, without any distinct knowledge of the worth of it; so that if there be any goodness in their Christianity (as their

profession is good in itself), they are but good by chance; for upon the same reasons they are Christians, if they had been bom elsewhere, they would have been Mahometans or idolaters.

[2.] Not only these, but also those who stumble upon the profession of religion they know not how, and those who in a pang and sudden motion are all for God and for heavenly things, but this vanisheth into nothing; as fire in straw, which is soon kindled and soon out. This is a free-will pang, not a choice; the heart is not habitually inclined and devoted unto God: John 6:34, 'Oh! that I might die the death of the righteous,' Num. 23:10. Such kind of wishing of holiness, as a necessary means, there may be, as well as happiness. These are accidentally stirred up in us.

2. Some men do good by force. These also are of two sorts—such as are forced by the fear of men, or of God.

[1.] Forced by the fear of men, because they dare not be bad with credit and security; as fear of parents, tutors, and governors: 2 Chron. 24:2, 'Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.' He did that which was right as to external acts, but after Jehoiada's death he revolted from the Lord, 2 Chron. 24:17, 18. So fear of magistrates, as Josiah compelled them to stand to the covenant: therefore, Jer. 3:10, 'Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly.' Fear of the times when set for religion: Esther 8:12, 'Many of the people of the land became Jews, for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.'

[2.] Forced by the fear of God. A little unwilling service may be extorted from them by the force of a convinced conscience. There is a slavish kind of religiousness, arising from a fear of punishment, without any love and delight in God. Men may be against God and

his ways, when fear only driveth them to them. They do something good, but had rather leave it undone; they avoid some sins, but had rather practise them. By the spirit of bondage they are brought to tender some unwilling service to Christ; and their only motives are fear of wrath, and hell, and a sight of the curse due to sin. The falseness of this principle appeareth—

(1.) Because it is most stirring in a time of eminent judgments, when they are sick and like to die: Isa. 26:9, 'When thy judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness;' Jer. 2:26, 'In their affliction they will cry, Arise, and save us.' Metal in the furnace is very soft, but take it out and it returneth to its old hardness. See Ps. 78:34–37. The sense of present devouring wrath, and the terrors of an angry God, may drive men to some temporary acts of devotion. These proceed only from the natural fear of death and love of self-preservation. This may put a stand for a while to their former ways of provocation, and incline them to seek God with some diligence in the outward forms of religion; but it produceth no steadfastness in the covenant. As if there had been some weak effect upon them; as if it brought them for awhile to some temper of piety; but it was not hearty and durable, but only formal and temporary.

(2.) Because they take all occasions to enlarge themselves out of the stocks of conscience, and as soon as their fear is worn off, away go all their religious pangs, and thoughts of the other world, and care about it. How often is this verified by daily experience! Many that were frightened into a course of religion went on from duty to duty out of a fear of being damned, but their hearts were another way; but afterwards they cast off all, when they have sinned away these fears; as Herod feared John, and afterwards put him to death, Mark 6:19,

20. Yea, all the while they did good they had rather do otherwise if they durst, and therefore did but watch the occasion to fly out.

(3.) Because men of this frame dispute away duties rather than practise them, and are quarrelling at those things which the new nature would sufficiently incline them unto, if they had it. In the New Testament, God much trusts love; and the number and length of duties is not stated so exactly, because where the love of God prevaieth in the heart, men will take all occasions of glorifying God and edifying themselves. But when men quarrel, How do you prove it to be my duty to do so much and to give so much? When the duty itself is instituted, love will make God a reasonable allowance, and not stand questioning, How do you prove it to be my duty to pray so often in my family, or in secret, or hear so many sermons, which our constant necessities do loudly call for? Men that have a love to a thing will take all occasions to enjoy it, or be conversant about it; and a willing heart is liberal and open to God, and is rather disputing the restraint than the command: How do you prove it is not my duty? and is loath to be kept back from its delight.

3. Some do good out of craft and design, there is some by-end in the cause; as Jehu was not so much zealous for God as his own interests, 2 Kings 10:16; and our Lord telleth us of some that make long prayers to devour widows' houses, Mat. 23:14; made piety a colour and pretext to oppression, and, that they might be trusted, took a show of great devotion; and of this strain were those that followed Christ for the loaves, John 6:20, to be fed with a miracle and to live a life of sloth and ease. God never set any good thing afoot but some temporal interest grew upon it, with which men were swayed more than with what belongeth to God.

Use 2. To persuade you to choose God's precepts: 'I have chosen thy precepts,' said the man of God. To this end I shall give you both motives and directions; motives why you should choose them, and then directions in what manner things are to be attended upon in your choice.

First, For the motives.

1. Choose them because they are God's, to whom you are indebted for life, being, and all things. Shall we not obey him that made us, and in whom still we live, move, and have our being? We are debtors to him for all that we have, and truly we cannot have a better master. He was angry with his people, that when the beasts would own their benefactors, that his people would not own him from whom they had all things, Isa. 1:3. The brute beasts, the dullest of them, the ox and the ass, are willing to serve those that feed them, and pay a kind of gratitude; and shall not we own God? Every day your health, strength, and comforts come out of his hands, so every night's rest and ease; and after this can you sin against God that keeps you by night and by day?

2. These precepts are all holy, just, and good. What is it the Lord requires of you, but to love him, and serve him, and fear him, and forbear those things which hurt the soul? Thus he speaks to Israel, Deut. 10:12. Surely these commands are not unreasonable nor grievous, You dare not say sin is better, that it is more profitable to please the flesh, and to wallow in and seek after worldly things. Why then do you not choose God's precepts before the work which Satan puts you upon? for these precepts commend themselves by their own evidence.

3. In keeping them there is a great deal of benefit.

[1.] For the present, there is a deal of comfort and peace to be found in the ways of God. If there were no reward of heaven, yet there is such comfort and peace that attends holy living, even as heat from the fire, that certainly this should draw our choice: 'All her ways are ways of pleasantness,' Prov. 3:17. And again, the prophet tells you, 'The fruit of righteousness is peace.' A man that doeth evil hath a sting in his conscience and a wound in his own soul. But every good action is followed with a serenity of mind, and an approbation from the heart of him that doeth it. Nay, you shall not only have peace, but joy in the Holy Ghost; for if you walk in the fear of God, you walk in the comforts of his Spirit, Acts 9:31; and the kingdom of God stands in righteousness and peace. Ay! and a distinct privilege, joy in the Holy Ghost, Rom. 16:17. What is the difference between peace and joy in the Holy Ghost? Peace is a tranquillity of mind resulting from the rectitude of our actions, but this joy is an impression of the comforting Spirit. This joy hath God for its author, he puts it into our hearts; therefore it will more affect us than the bare act of our natural faculties. Peace is an acquittance from conscience, but joy in the Holy Ghost is an acquittance from God, who is our supreme judge, and is the beginning of that endless joy which he hath prepared for them that love him in heaven.

[2.] For the future and final reward, that is great and glorious indeed. Surely the glory of the everlasting kingdom should invite us to choose God's precepts, whatever it may cost us to keep them; for in choosing holiness you choose life, and in choosing the ways of God you choose the heavenly inheritance, which is the certain end and issue of them. So Prov. 8:35, 36, 'Whose findeth me, findeth life, and obtaineth favour of the Lord; but he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul. All they that hate me, love death.' Christians, when you are about choosing, these are the terms propounded to you, and they should be seriously weighed by us—evil and death,



good and life. Will you choose sin and death, or holiness and life? Is the pleasures of the flesh for a few hours better than the endless joy of the saints? If you believe heaven and hell, as you profess to do, why should you stand demurring? Are you content to be thrust out from the presence of the Lord, with the devil and his angels, into unquenchable flames, for a little contentment here in the world, for a little ease and delight here given to your carnal nature? Is an earthly life, that you cannot long hold, more valuable than an eternal heaven you shall enjoy forever? No; let us go to heaven, though we get thither with many pains and sufferings. If you forsake all, not only in vow and purpose, but actually and in deed, yet still you have something better; you shall be no loser in the end; you shall so choose the blessed God, and live with him for evermore, and be filled with his love as full as you can hold, and be employed in his service; and all this in an eternal perfection and glorified estate.

4. Motive. Choose, for you will never have cause to repent of your choice. The Lord stands upon his justification, is very tender of giving his people any cause to repent of his service: Micah 6:3, 'O my people! what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.' Pray what hurt hath holiness done you? Who was ever the better for sinning, or who was the worse for holiness? There was none that ever made a carnal choice but first or last they had cause to repent of it. Either they repent of it in a kindly manner, while they may mend the matter, or else they shall repent for ever in misery. But who ever repented of his repentance, or cursed the day of his new birth? To whom ever was it any grief of heart that they were acquainted with God and Christ, or the way that leadeth unto life? Who dieth the sweeter death? or who repents of their choice then, the serious or the carnal? Oh! they that have chosen the world, they cry out how the world hath deceived them;

but never any repented of choosing God and the ways of God. Let these things persuade you to choose his precepts.

Secondly, For directions.

1. In choosing, the object is to be regarded. God's precepts indefinitely, all of them, not one excepted, the smallest as well as the greatest, the troublesome as well as the easy, the most neglected as well as the most observed. We must choose all God's precepts, not abate anything, but especially the main or the essential precepts of Christianity, or the fundamental points of the covenant. Now the question is, what is the fundamental point of the covenant? Truly that is known by the form of baptism. Baptism is the solemn seal of entering into covenant with God; it is the seal of our initiation or first entrance into covenant with God, Mat. 28:19. Now what is to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? When you first choose the ways of God, here you must begin; you must close with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, heartily take them to be your God; that is, you must close with God the Father, as your all-sufficient portion, or chiefest happiness, to be loved above all; and also as your highest Lord, that he may be served, pleased, and obeyed above all. Well, and in the name of the Son, that is, Jesus Christ, he must be taken as your saviour and redeemer, to bring you to God, and to reconcile you to him. And to be baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost is this, to take him as your sanctifier, guide, and comforter, to make you a holy people to God, to cleanse your hearts from sin, to write all God's laws upon your hearts, and put them into your minds, and to guide you by the word and ordinances to everlasting life. This is the main thing that is first to be minded, because it contains all, and doth necessarily infer the rest; for otherwise, to be resolute in some by-point of religion, though it be right, this is but the obstinacy of a faction, not the constancy of a Christian zeal.

2. As you must look to the object of this choice, so to the causes of it; and what are they? An enlightened mind, a renewed heart, a love to God, and then the Spirit of God enlightening and inclining our hearts.

[1.] An enlightened mind is a cause of choosing the ways of God, when the Lord hath taught us his precepts. An enlightened mind discovers a beauty and amiableness in the ways of God: Ps. 119:128, 'I esteem all thy precepts to be right, and they are the rejoicing of my soul.'

[2.] A renewed heart, wherein all the precepts of God are written over again. They were written upon our hearts in innocency, but that is a blurred manuscript, therefore in regeneration they are written over again. God writes his law in our hearts, and puts them in our inward parts, Heb. 8:10; and then the law within suits with the law without, for the new creature is created after God in righteousness and true holiness. In true holiness, which relates to the first table of the law, and righteousness, which relates to the second table of the law; the renewed heart that hath this inclination and propension is carried out to them.

[3.] Love to God, for that is implied in the choice: John 14:21, 'He that hath my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me;' and he that loves me hath my commandments and keeps them. It follows the other way; where there is love to God, there will be choosing of his ways.

[4.] God's Spirit, the Lord enlightening and inclining our hearts to this choice. God enlightens, for he teacheth us the way that we shall choose; and when we see these things in the light of the Spirit, then we see the beauty of them, Ps. 25:12. It holds good as to the path of life, and in particular cases; but chiefly in the main case God teacheth

him the way that he shall choose. And the Spirit of God inclines the heart too, as well as enlightens the mind: 1 Peter 1:22, 'Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit.'

3. There are the effects of this choice. What are they? Delight, diligence, and patience.

[1.] Delight: Ps. 40:8, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.' When the law is not only written in the book but written in the heart, then there is a delight, a ready and willing obedience. It is spoken first of Christ; of David it was said in type. It is true also of all believers, for they have the Spirit of Christ; and the same also is expressed of the people of God: Ps. 112:1, 'Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.' When a man hath chosen the precepts of God, and bound himself in this way, then his heart is taken with a delight.

[2.] Diligence. God's precepts are the great business and employment of our lives, and then there is a constant study to please him: Col. 1:9, 10, 'Filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.' We must do God's will and precepts, that we may order our practice accordingly. There must be a habitual aim and purpose to please God.

[3.] Patience; a resolute continuance till our service be over. This is the way I have chosen, and here will I stick until the great reward come in hand: Rom. 2:7, 'To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for honour, and glory, and immortality, eternal life.' And Luke 8:15, 'The good ground brought forth fruit with patience.' That distinguished the good ground from all other grounds; they had some little liking of it, but never came to a serious choice. But the good ground, though there be several weathers between sowing and

reaping, it cherisheth the seed that it is ready at harvest time; so we pass through many weathers before we come to our harvest of happiness and rest.

Doct. 2. That man which makes conscience of God's commands is encouraged to seek help from him in straits.

Such a one may be in great straits; as David, his own hand could not help him, therefore he flies to God. The Lord permits it that he may be trusted alone in his own hands; he will break our carnal dependences; and that his ways may be chosen for their own sakes, and not for temporal reward, and that his love to his own people may not be shown too sensibly, that the mysteriousness of providence may leave a room and place for faith; therefore doth God darken the glory of the godly with afflictions, and put them into straits that their own hand cannot help them.

Now in these straits, those that make conscience of God's precepts they are encouraged to seek help from God's hand. Why? Partly because integrity breeds a confidence, so that a man which hath been faithful with God can look him in the face. It breeds a confidence in life, 2 Cor. 1:12, and in death, Isa. 38:3; when they are sick, weak, and know not what to do, they can fly to God. And then integrity also; it entitles to God's protection all that heartily and sincerely depend upon God: Prov. 10:9, 'He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.' An upright, plain-hearted man, that trusts himself under the shadow and protection of God's providence, he hath no shifts and tricks; this man shall walk safely, God is engaged to defend him. But the perverse, that fly to their shifts, God will disappoint them and show them their folly: Gen. 17:1, 'I am God all-sufficient; walk before me, and be thou perfect.' Do you uprightly serve God, and study to please him, and you need not seek elsewhere for a patron, or for one

to defend you and plead your cause. And partly, too, because they are exposed to the greater difficulties, because they are faithful with God, and trust themselves alone with his protection; for so the apostle, 1 Tim. 4:10, 'For therefore we labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God.' Faith begets faithfulness; their dependence is upon God, and their faithfulness costs them dear, and so they suffer reproach because they did trust themselves in God's ways by God's providence. As you stand in need of God's protection, you shall have it. God will not forsake us in our greatest needs, as the world will; but in our greatest extremities, when all carnal dependences fail us, he will not; then is the time for God to show himself. He hath still a providence and a fatherly care over thee, but his power is especially engaged at such a time. If you will take care of your duty, he will take care of your safety, for he will either keep you out of troubles, or sustain you under troubles.

## **SERMON CLXXXVII**

### **I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight.—VER. 174**

IN this verse you have a twofold assertion or protestation—

1. Of a vehement desire of the salvation promised, I have longed for thy salvation.
2. A great love and complacency in the word of God, and thy law is my delight.

This verse may be understood either of temporal salvation or eternal salvation; the words may be accommodated to either sense. The

context would seem to limit it to the former, and so an enforcing of the second request of this portion: ver. 170, 'Deliver me according to thy word.' Many interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, carry it for the other. Jewish; Rabbi David Kimchi expoundeth it thus, 'thy salvation,' *seculo futuro*; and the last clause, 'thy law,' *quia medium est ad salutem*. Christian; Chrysostom, Theodoret, Calvin. And because these senses are not contrary, but subordinate, I shall insist upon both.

1. Let me handle the words as they may be understood of temporal salvation; and so the sense will be, 'I have long expected thy deliverance, and yet do desire and wait for it.' The preterperfect tense, as Vatablus noteth, includeth also the present: 'For a long time I have expected thy deliverance, and do expect help from thee.' And the other clause, 'Thy law is my delight;' though this help seemeth to be delayed, yet thy counsel is my consolation and perpetual delight. The words thus understood yield us two points:—

Doct. 1. That God's people do look to God for deliverance, and longingly expect the accomplishment of it.

Doct. 2. We should delight in the promise before the salvation cometh.

For the first point, that God's people do look to God for deliverance, and longingly expect it, the point shall be discussed in these considerations:—

1. What longing for God's salvation implieth.
2. The encouragements and reasons of it.

3. What singular thing there is in this longing expectation, since it is natural to all to seek deliverance out of trouble.

First, What it implieth?

1. A sense of our impotency, or insufficiency to save ourselves, and help ourselves out of trouble, by any ways and means that we can find out and use: Ps. 3:8, 'Salvation belongeth to the Lord;' Jonah 2:9, 'Salvation is of the Lord.' Salvation and deliverance of all kinds is God's prerogative royal, and God's proper work; none can save and give peace when he commandeth trouble; and when he will save his people, none can let. It is an evidence of men's neglecting a deity when they would help and save themselves in all conditions, without depending or employing a God; Job 40:9, 14, 'Hast thou an arm like God? then I will confess unto thee, that thine own right hand can save thee. Alas! if we look elsewhere, how soon are we disappointed! Man is a mutable creature, his affections change, or his power may be blasted; an arm of flesh is soon dried up. Besides the distraction and uncertainty that we have while we depend upon man and look to man, we involve ourselves in greater miseries, and meet with a shameful disappointment at last. Sometimes man will not if he can, sometimes cannot if he would. If he will and can, yet he shall not help us without God; for what can the instrument do without the principal agent, the sword without the man that wieldeth it? That is one lesson God hath been teaching his people in all ages, that salvation belongeth unto the Lord; they must take their deliverance out of his hands. He sits at the upper end of causes, and saveth his people when he will, and how he will, and by what means he will; and till he take their cause in hand, how sadly do the most hopeful attempts and expectations miscarry; for to give salvation is a divine property, given to no creature, and must not be usurped by them: looking to man is the readiest way to miscarry.



2. It implieth a dependence upon his fatherly care and powerful providence, and a persuasion that he will guide us unto heaven in a way that is most convenient for us. The great cause of God's anger against his people in the wilderness was because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation, Ps. 78:22. He had undertaken to bring them into Canaan, but they mistrusted his conduct, either that he had not power enough, or enough fatherly love and care to do it; and therefore his wrath was kindled against Jacob, and his anger was hot against Israel; and so do they greatly dishonour and provoke God by their distrust who do not believe that God will bring them out of every strait, in a way most conducing to his own glory and their welfare. Now God's children are so satisfied in his conduct, that in their worst condition they can cheerfully depend upon God, and look and long for salvation from him: Hab. 3:18, 'I will joy in the Lord; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation;' Luke 1:47, 'My spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour.' They are satisfied in his love and power: Ps. 13:5, 'But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.'

3. Holy desires vented in prayer; there we express and act our longings. Words are but the body of prayer, but desires are the life and soul of it. The children of God are described once and again to be such as love his salvation, Ps. 40:16. Now there are but two acts of love—desire and delight; the one concerneth the object as future, the other as present, either to faith or to sense. They rejoice in it as present to faith in the promise, as well as when they enjoy it. But the desire we are now upon, this is vented in prayer, there they express their vehement longings for his salvation: Ps. 35:3, 'Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.' God's saying is doing. He speaketh by his providence; and this is that the saints long for, they plead with him, Ps. 119:94, 'I am thine, save me, for I have sought thy precepts.'

4. It expresseth waiting God's leisure and submission for the kind, time, and means of deliverance: Lam. 3:26, 'It is good to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God.' They continue looking and waiting: Isa. 30:18, 'Blessed are all they that wait for him.' We must wait in the midst of manifold disappointments. When means miscarry, it is in his power to rescue his people from the greatest dangers; and hath a prerogative to save and deliver those whom reason and probability have condemned and given over for lost; as the Israelites, Exod. 14:13, 'Stand still, and see the salvation of God.' They were enclosed, the mountains on each side, the Egyptians behind, the sea before; yet what cannot the salvation of God do? There is a holy obstinacy in faith, trusting him in all dangers. Nay, when God himself appeareth as an enemy, cutting off our hope, and hewing and hacking at us, yet we must wait upon him. All strokes come from the hand of God, and no wound given by himself is above his own cure. Jacob when he fainted was forced to interrupt his speech, and utter this ejaculation, Gen. 49:18, 'I have waited for thy salvation, O God.' In short, God hath ways of deliverance more than his people know of, and can save his own when they count their case desperate: Ps. 68:20, 'He that is our God, is the God of salvation, and the issues from death belong unto him;' the escapes from death and imminent destruction.

Secondly, The reasons and encouragements of looking and longing for God's salvation.

1. God hath bound himself by covenant as our God; it is his covenant style to be the God of our salvation, Ps. 68:19, 20. In the one verse he is called 'the God of our salvation;' in the other, it is said, 'He that is our God is the God of salvation.' If he be the God of salvation, he will be the God of our salvation; for whatever God is in himself, that in the covenant he will be to his people; you shall see the blessing of his

people is inferred out of his title: Ps. 3:8, 'Salvation belongeth to the Lord; thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah.' If God can save, and the salvation be a blessing to his people, he will save them, and deliver them. It is true this title doth mainly concern our eternal salvation, but the conduct of his providence by the way is aimed at in the covenant, as well as our entrance into heaven at the end of the journey. Promises relating to temporal things are put into the believer's charter; but the dispensing thereof is left in the hands of their wise and tender Father. Now temporal deliverance being a part of our charter, if it be not always performed, it is not for want of power or truth, but out of wisdom and love. God doth what is most convenient for us; it is in a wise hand: if it be good for me, I shall have it. Now this is a mighty encouragement to look and long for God's salvation. He shall have the stating of it, for time, means, and kind of deliverance, but we must look for it.

2. We must look to God for deliverance, because he is every way able, and fitted and furnished to make good his covenant undertaking. He hath power enough, wisdom enough, and love enough.

[1.] Power enough: 1 Sam. 14:6, 'There is no restraint in the Lord, to save by many, or by few.' The same supported Asa, 2 Chron. 14:11. The same supported the three children, Dan. 3:17, 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us out of the fiery furnace.' Now a desire is mightily quickened by this confidence. God hath promised to do what is good, and it is in the power of his hands to do this for us.

[2.] He hath wisdom enough to bring it about in such a way as may be most for his glory: 2 Peter 2:9, 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation.' It is an art he is versed in, how to distinguish between his people and their enemies; to bring it about so as may be most for his glory. What is the usual work of

providence, but to give salvation according to his covenant, in such a way as the beauty of his providence may be seen, the patience and faith of his people may be tried, and yet his enemies reckoned with.

[3.] He hath love enough. God doth concern himself in all our affairs: 1 Tim. 4:10, 'We trust in the living God, who is the saviour of all men, especially of those that believe.' A protector and deliverer; yea, it is said he saveth man and beast, Ps. 36:6. The object of his providence is very large. All creatures have their being and preservation from him, much more man, much more his children. They are allowed to believe a special providence, and the more they depend upon him, the more is his care assured to them: 1 Peter 5:7, 'Cast all your care upon the Lord, for he careth for you.' The Lord is free from all passions of care and sorrow, but we shall find no less proof of his keeping off danger, or delivering us from danger, than if we were solicitous for ourselves. Surely our Father is not unmindful of us.

3. Because there is no difficulty that can fall out to check this confidence, which is built upon God's undertaking, and sufficiency to make it good.

[1.] Not any danger from men, though of never so dreadful an appearance: 2 Cor. 1:10, 'Who hath delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver, in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' The danger was trouble in Asia, a great danger, pressed above measure and above strength. Great trouble was at Ephesus, where the people in an uproar were ready to tear him in pieces, so that he received the sentence of death in himself; yet God found a way and means to save, and he came off safe and sound.

[2.] Not any appearance of anger from God himself: Job 13:15, 'Though he slay me, yet I will put my trust in him.' Sometimes trouble may represent God as the party dealing with us; yet faith can

take him for a friend when he seemeth to deal like an enemy; and we must resolve to adhere to God and his ways, and trust his power, with submission to his good-will and pleasure, and believe that he hath more respect and care over us than is seen in the present dispensation.

Thirdly, It is natural to all to seek deliverance out of troubles: Isa. 51:14, 'The captive exile hasteth that he may be delivered, and that he should not die in the pit.' How then is it any part of grace to long for God's salvation?

I answer—It is proper to the godly to love no deliverance but what God sendeth by his own means, in his own time, and to wait for it in God's way.

1. There is somewhat of grace in it, that they look for salvation from God alone, as the author, and are resolved to take it out of his hands, whencesoever it cometh. Men naturally would be αὐταρκος, live upon himself, be sufficient to his own happiness; and so they are vexed when they are left upon God, and put upon dependence and submission and waiting upon him; for they think it little worth to wait upon God as long as any other shift will serve the turn. As Ahaz, when troubled with the fear of Rezin and Pekah, and the prophet assureth him of God's salvation, and biddeth him ask a sign: Isa. 7:11–13, 'I will not tempt the Lord.' I will not trust the Lord, he meaneth, though he useth that pretence; his expectation was fixed on the friendship of his confederates. If he had asked a sign of God, he must wait for the issue in God's way. Now Ahaz could not endure to trust God alone; he depended on the Assyrian, and not on God's salvation; he believed nothing the prophet spake, but counted it vain and frivolous, and was resolved to go another way to work.

2. God's salvation as to the means; not by our shifts, that maketh a breach upon our sincerity: Gen. 17:1, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou upright.' A man that doth not trust God cannot be long true to him. You go off from God to the creature by distrust and unbelief, Heb. 3:12. This is making more haste than good speed, Isa. 28:16. It plungeth us in sin; it is the greatest hypocrisy that can be, to pretend respect to God, and shift for ourselves; it is to break prison, to get out of trouble before God letteth us out.

3. In his own time, 'Thy salvation.' They resolve to wait till he sendeth it. Carnal men, when other means and expectations fail, will seek to God; they are beaten to him. But if their expectation in waiting upon God be delayed, they wax weary and faint; as that king put on sackcloth for a while, 2 Kings 6:30, afterwards said, 'This evil is from the Lord; why should I wait on the Lord any longer?' They give it over as a hopeless service.

4. That in the height of trouble they still go to God, and will not cast away their confidence and dependence, come what will come: Isa. 26:8, 'In the way of thy judgments we have waited for thee; our desires are to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name.' They still look to him, and though often disappointed, will seek salvation from no other: they still cleave to God's way: Ps. 44:17, 'All this is come upon us, yet have we not forsaken thee, nor dealt falsely in thy covenant.' They persevere in prayer: Ps. 88:13, 14, 'Unto thee have I cried in the morning; my prayer shall prevent thee, Lord! Why castest thou me off? why hidest thou thy face from me?' They will not give over, but show their vehement longings after God; whereas wicked and carnal men, when great troubles continue, are driven to despair, and give over all hope.

Use. In times of trouble let us look to God, and continue looking all the time that God will exercise our faith and patience, and express our longings and desires of God's salvation in humble and earnest prayer.

1. It is no time to look elsewhere; for God will show us that vain is the help of man by many disappointments: Isa. 48:11, 'I, even I, am the Lord, and besides me there is no saviour.' He will break all confidences till we come to this. He shall be my salvation, as Job resolved when God brake him with his tempests, and pursued him with his waves, and was ready to slay him, as he thought. In all extremities this should be our fixed ground of faith, that salvation and deliverance is to be expected from God only: Jer. 3:23, 'Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and the mountains; truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.' God will teach us this lesson ere he hath done with us. Usually there is no serious dealing with God till we find the vanity and inability of all other dependences: looking to the hills and mountains, strength of situation, forces, all these will fail us.

2. It is no time to dally with God and his service any longer; for when troubles come close and near, the spirit of prayer should be revived, and what was cursorily sought at other times should now be sought with some vehemency and longings in prayer: Jer. 29:13, 14, 'When they shall seek me with their whole heart, they shall find me, and I will give them an expected end.' We do not stir up ourselves to take hold of him: Ps. 14:7, 'Oh! that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!' There should be a longing, we should not content ourselves with a few dead and drowsy prayers.

3. Salvation may be comfortably expected from God; for as necessity enforceth these longings, so hope quickeneth them. Now it may be

expected, for he is mighty to save, Isa. 63:1; he is willing to save a distressed people: ver. 5, 'I looked, and there was none to help, therefore mine own arm brought salvation to me.' God struck in for the deliverance and help of his people when all human help failed; he did the work alone himself. Once more, when he meaneth to save, he covereth himself with frowns and anger, as if he meant to destroy: Isa. 45:15, 'Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God, the saviour.' He seemeth to hide and stand aloof from his people in their afflictions, and carrieth himself so closely and covertly in the passages of his providence, that his people know not what he meaneth to do. What is our work, then, but to keep longing and waiting and looking to God's hands, till he have mercy upon us?

Doct. 2. That we should delight in the promise before the salvation cometh.

So doth David say here, 'Thy law is my delight;' that is, whilst he was longing for God's salvation; and by law is meant God's word in the general; the promise is included in it, as well as the precept.

1. A believer should not be comfortless in his troubles: John 14:1, 'Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.' Immoderate sorrow for temporal evils will not become one that hath an interest in God and Christ. Whatever falls out in the world, God is the same still, and the covenant is the same; and our better part, and our happiness is above the reach of trouble; there is a long-suffering with joyfulness, Col. 1:4.

2. All our delight and solace must not arise from the delights of sense, but out of the word of God. It is good to see what is our solace and support in troubles, for the man is as his solace is: Ps. 94:19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.' How do we ease ourselves in our perplexities and griefs? Is it



with God's comforts? Now God's comforts are gospel comforts; the comforts we have from the word they will make us more love the word, and trust more upon God's word, and the more confidently expect the performance of it.

3. The promises should support us upon a twofold account—partly because they are good, and partly because they are sure.

[1.] They are good; there is a fulness in God's allowance that suiteth with all our cases: Ps. 84:11, 'For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; he will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that live uprightly.' So 1 Tim. 4:8, 'Godliness hath the promises of the life which now is, and of that which is to come.' Heaven and earth are laid at the feet of it. A man cannot desire a greater cordial than necessary provisions for this and the future life: Ps. 119:111, 'Thy testimonies I have taken for an heritage for ever; they are the rejoicing of my heart.' The promises of the world to come should swallow up all our present grief, for there is more in heaven than can be taken from us in the creature: 2 Cor. 4:17, 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,' Heb. 10:34, 'And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods; knowing in yourselves that in heaven ye have a better and more enduring substance.' We have a treasure and a happiness elsewhere, which cannot be infringed by the afflictions we endure in this world. We do not lose much if we get eternal salvation in the issue, and so we get to heaven, no matter how dark soever our passage be. Then for the promises of this life, they suit with all our troubles, wants, dangers, breaches, and distresses. But what confidence can we have of these temporal deliverances or mercies? Ans. Either we shall have the mercies themselves, or God will order providences so as it may be good for us to want them, and have something better given in lieu of them, Rom. 8:28. We know he will

not leave us wholly destitute, Heb. 13:5, nor bring upon us insupportable difficulties, 1 Cor. 10:13; and this should be enough for us to maintain us in life and comfort.

[2.] They are sure as well as good.

(1.) As promises. A promise is more than a purpose, for it is a purpose not as conceived in the mind of a man, but declared to another to invite hope. It is more than a doctrine. A doctrine giveth notice of privileges, but a promise giveth us an interest in them. It is more than a revelation or prophecy. Scripture prophecies will be fulfilled because of God's veracity; but scripture promises not only because of God's veracity, but also his fidelity and justice. There is a kind of righteousness in making good promises, because we give another a right and claim to the things promised by the promises we make to him. A promissory lie is worse than an assertory lie. A promise gives us a holdfast upon God, *promillendo se fecit debitorem*.

(2.) As the promises of God, who cannot lie and deceive the creatures: Heb. 6:18, 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation.' And therefore by acting faith on these declarations of his will, we may have the accomplishment of them. None that ever depended on God's word were disappointed: Ps. 18:30, 'The word of the Lord is a tried word.' God was never yet found worse than his word; he hath been tender of the credit of his word: Ps. 138:2, 'Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.' Heathens have acknowledged that God hath never so much showed himself in the world, as in these two things ἀληθεύειν καὶ εὐεργετεῖν, in doing good and keeping promise. Above all that is named and famed of God, this is most conspicuous.

Use. To exhort us in all our straits, dangers, and troubles, to be contented with his word, and to delight in the promise, as if it were performed. I shall here show you how we are to carry ourselves towards the promises.

1. You must rest confident of the truth of what God hath promised, and be assured that in time the performance will come to pass, as if you saw it with your eyes: Heb. 11:13, 'They were persuaded of these things.' This is the assurance of faith spoken of, Heb. 10:22. I know I shall find this to be a truth. Men are conscionable and faithful in keeping their word; much more God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

2. You are to delight in the promise, though the performance be not yet, nor like to be for a good while; neither performed, nor likely to be performed. Heb. 11:13, they saw them afar off, and yet being persuaded of these things, they embraced them; and John 8:56, 'Abraham saw my day, and was glad.' You hold the blessing by the root, where you have the promise, Heb. 6:18.

3. You are to take the naked promise for a ground of your hope, however it seem to be contradicted in the course of his providence. It is his word you are to go by, and stand by, and according to which you must interpret all his dispensations. It is said, Rom. 4:18, that 'Abraham believed in hope against hope.' When faith dependeth upon God's naked word, then it standeth upon its own basis and proper legs. Everything is strongest in its props and pillars which God and nature hath appointed for it. He hangeth the earth upon nothing, in the midst of the air, but there is its place. So faith standeth fast upon his word, who is able to perform what he saith.

4. This faith must conquer our fears, and cares, and troubles: Ps. 112:7, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting

in the Lord;' and Ps. 56:3, 4, 'In God I will praise his word, in God have I put my trust; I will not fear what man can do unto me.' The force of faith is seen in calming our passions and sinful fears; or else it is but a notion, and our reverence and respect to God will be weakened by it.

5. When faith hath done its work in the quieting of our own hearts, you must glorify God in your carriage before others: John 3:33, 'Put to his seal that God is true;' that is, when we confirm others in the faith and belief of the promises, by our joyfulness in all conditions, patience and contentedness under the cross, diligence in holiness, hope and comfort in great straits. You shall see, Num. 20:12, that God was angry with Moses and Aaron because 'they believed not, to sanctify him in the eyes of the children of Israel.' We are not only to believe in God ourselves, but to sanctify him in the eyes of others; as the Thessalonians by receiving the word in much affliction, much assurance, and joy in the Holy Ghost, were examples to all that believed in Achaia, 1 Thes. 1:5–7. Thus we should do, but how few do thus believe! Some count these vain words, and the comforts thence deduced fanatical illusions or fantastical impressions; nothing so ridiculous in the world's eye as trust and dependence on unseen comforts: Ps. 22:8, 'He trusted on the Lord, that he should deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.' Ungodly wits make the life of faith a sport or matter of laughter. Some have more modesty, but as little faith; they are all for the present world, 2 Tim. 4:9. Present delights please them, but present temptations altogether unsettle them, Heb. 12:11; cannot bear present smart, nor despise the present world, Rom. 8:19. Anything in hand is more than the greatest promise, of better things to come. They do not deal equally with God and man. If man promise, they reckon much of that; but cannot tarry upon God's security, count his promise little worth. They can trade with a factor beyond sea, and trust all their estate in a

man's hand whom they have never seen; and yet the word of the infallible God is of little respect with them. The best build too weakly upon the promise, as appeareth by the prevalency of our cares and fears, Heb. 12:4–6. If you did take God at his word, you would not be so soon mated with every difficulty; there would be more resolution in trials, more hardiness against troubles. A man may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me.' If we had faith to believe it, it would more effectually quiet our hearts and minds in all our straits, necessities, and perplexities, it would calm our desires and fears: we would not desire the best things of the world, nor fear the worst.

## **SERMON CLXXXVIII**

### **I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight.—VER. 174**

WE now come to the second acceptation of the word salvation, as it implieth eternal salvation; and so the points are two:—

Doct. 1. That we should vehemently long and earnestly wait for eternal life.

Doct. 2. That we should not only long for salvation, but delight in the way which leadeth us to it.

For the first point, that longing for salvation is the duty and property of God's children—

The reasons are taken from—(1.) The object of these desires; (2.) The subject of these desires; (3.) The use of these desires; (4.) The state and condition of the present world.

1. The object. The object of desire is good, considered as absent and not yet obtained good. All desire that it should be well with themselves. This desire is confused and general; not the hundredth part longeth after the true good: Ps. 4:6, 'Who will show us any good?' Some are carried by ambition, others by covetousness, others by sensuality: 1 John 2:16, 'All that is in the world is either the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or pride of life;' and Isa. 53:6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have every one turned to his own way.' As the channel is cut, so corrupt nature finds a vent. But now God's salvation is the true good, and ought to be desired, and will be desired by all his children. It importeth a freedom from all misery, and an enjoyment of all good. A freedom from all misery: There sin and sorrow shall be no more, and all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, Rev. 21:4. The blessed spirits above have none of our cares, and fears, and sorrows. Here we are sighing, and they are praising; we sinning, and they pleasing God; we full of infirmities, and they are perfect and without blemish, and in the full enjoyment of all good: Ps. 16:11, 'At thy right hand is fulness of joy, and in thy presence pleasures for evermore;' Ps. 17:15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' Alas! the preparations to this estate in the world are far above the vain delights of the flesh; much more the pleasures there; these the soul longeth for; though they are thankful for a refreshment by the way, yet they long to be at home.

2. The second reason is taken from the subject of these desires; and there we have—(1.) The suitableness; (2.) The experience; (3.) Our pressures.

[1.] The suitableness; they are suited to this happiness, wrought for this very thing, 2 Cor. 5:5. Everything hath a prepension to the place for which God framed it; it is the wisdom of God to put all things in their proper places, as every creature is placed in that element which is suitable and answerable to its composition and frame, as fishes in water, fowls in the air. God's children are framed for this very thing, therefore have an inclination and a tendency thither. As heaven is prepared for them, so in some measure they for it, Rom. 9:24; aforehand prepared unto glory; and Col. 1:12, 'Made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.' They grow more dead every day to the interests and concernments of the animal life, and have a greater agreeableness to this happiness.

[2.] Experience: Rom. 8:23, 'We that have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.' A Christian here is unsatisfied, and longeth for a better and purer state of bliss and immortality, light, life, peace, joy. One drachm of grace is more precious than all the world, but yet it setteth them a-longing for more. The first-fruits showeth us what the harvest will be, and a taste what the feast will prove. Here we get a little knowledge of God, a sight of him in the ordinances, a twilight discovery of Christ, a look through the lattice, Cant. 2:9, a little glance of his face, when neither doth he let the believers in to him, nor doth he come out to them. This glance maketh them long for more, so that in effect they send up the same message to Christ which his mother and brethren did because of the press, 'Thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to see thee.' Tell him thou standest here without, but desirest to see him. So for the communion we have with Christ, it is but a taste: 1 Peter 2:3, 'If so be ye have tasted the Lord is gracious;' but that taste is very ravishing and delightful. Here we get a little from him in an ordinance, but that little is as much as we can hold; but there he is all in all. Here our

holiness is not perfect, the seed of God remaineth in us; but there it groweth up to perfection, as every spark of fire tendeth to the element of fire.

[3.] Our pressures and the miseries of the present life: 2 Cor. 5:4, 'Being burdened, we groan.' We are pressed under a heavy weight, burdened both with sin and misery, and both set us a-groaning and a-longing, as men in a tempest would fain be set ashore as soon as they can.

(1.) Sin, to a waking conscience and a tender gracious heart, is one of the greatest burdens than can be felt: Rom. 7:24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?' If any had cause to complain of afflictions, Paul much more; he was whipped, imprisoned, stoned, in perils by land and sea; but afflictions did not sit so close to him as sins: the body of death was his greatest burden, and therefore did he long for deliverance. If others go away silently under their load, the children of God cannot. As light and love increaseth, so sin groweth a greater burden to us. They cannot get rid of this cursed inmate, and therefore are longing for their final estate, when sin shall gasp its last: they long for the parting day, when by putting off the flesh, they shall put off sin, and dwell with God.

(2.) Miseries: the children of God have not divested themselves of the feelings of nature, are not grown senseless, as stocks and stones. The apostle telleth us, Rom. 8:20–22, that the whole creation groaneth, because it is under misery and vanity. It is a groaning world, and God's children bear a part of the concert: they groan and desire earnestly their full deliverance. 'Few and evil are the days of the years of my pilgrimage,' said holy Jacob, Gen. 47:9. Our days are evil, therefore it is well they are but few; that in this shipwreck of man's felicity, we can see banks and shores and a landing-place where we



may be safe; here is our travail, but there is our repose. We would sleep too much here, and take up our rest, if sometimes we did not meet with thorns in our bed.

### 3. The end and use of this longing and desiring.

[1.] It is an earnest desire, it maketh us industrious, and stirreth up and keepeth up our endeavours after another world: Phil. 3:20, 21, 'But our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.' Where there is a lively expectation, there men drive on a trade for another country. Desire is the vigorous bent of the soul, and so beareth us out under all the difficulties of obedience. If we do not desire, we will not labour, nor seek it in the first place; and if our desires be weak and feeble, they are controlled by every lust, abated upon every difficulty: whatever gets your hearts, that will command your endeavours; for as a man's desire is, so is he.

[2.] To make us constant, notwithstanding troubles, reproaches, persecutions: Mat. 11:12, 'The violent take it by force.' They will have no nay; they must have it, whatever it cost; though sore troubles and persecutions, yet if we may get heaven and glory at last, it is enough. But where a thing is coldly and carelessly desired, everything puts us out of the humour.

### 4. The state and condition of the present world; it is called, Gal. 1:4, 'The present world.' The pleasures of it are mere dreams and shadows, and the evils of it are many and real. God's children are pilgrims here, and hardly get leave to pass through; as Israel could not get leave to pass through Edom. Sometimes they meet with such bitter and grievous persecutions, which make them weary of their

lives; as Elijah requested for himself that he might die, 1 Kings 9:4, or as the spirits of the Israelites were filled with anguish because of their hard taskmasters. God will give his people rest hereafter, but before the rest cometh they are sorely troubled: 1 Thes. 1:6, 7, 'And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost, so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.' Nay, the company that we go with to heaven are apt to fall out by the way, and to deal perversely one with another, unministering, unchurching, unchristianing one another, impaling, enclosing the common salvation, and jostling one another out of the way to heaven; so that the church, which should be terrible like an army with banners, marching to heaven in order in one whole body, is like an army in rout, and most are forced to get home in straggling parties. Now every tender soul should long for God's salvation, to get up to that council of souls who with perfect harmony are lauding and praising God for evermore, Heb. 12:23.

Use 1. To reprove them that are loath to leave this woful life, and do not long and prepare for a better. God driveth us out of the world, as he did Lot out of Sodom, yet we are loath to depart; as if it were better to be miserable, apart from God and Christ, than happy with them. Surely they are far from the spirit of true Christians who would live always here, at home in the world, and cannot endure to think of a remove. There are two causes of this—(1.) An unmortified heart; (2.) An unsettled conscience.

1. An unmortified heart; they are not yet weaned from the world, their hearts are set upon satisfying the vile lusts of the body; carry it as if their portion lay in this world, Ps. 17:14; sucking yet upon the world's dug; they have no longing nor desire for that happiness and

glory which God hath provided for them that love him; they desire no other portion than what they have in hand.

2. And the other cause is an unsettled conscience. Some fear the state of the other world rather than desire it and long for it. There are two degrees—not knowing for certain it shall go well with us, and not knowing for certain but that it shall go ill with us; both suppress this desire, especially the latter.

Use 2. To rouse up our languid and cold affections, that they may more earnestly be carried out after heavenly things; that we may seek after them with more fervency, and constancy, and self-denial.

The motives to press us are these:—

1. God giveth heaven to none but to those that look and long for it. Men may go to hell against their wills, but none go to heaven against their wills. In a punishment there is a force offered to us, but not in a reward. We suffer what we would not, as Christ saith to Peter, 'Another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not,' John 21:18. But happiness must be embraced, pursued, and sought after. Well, then, let the concernments of the other world more take up our hearts and minds, and stand as at heaven's gate, expecting when God will open the door and call you in: Christ will appear to them that look for him, Heb. 9:28.

2. The children of God long to see God in his ordinances: Ps. 27:4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of God all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple;' and Ps. 42:2, 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?' Ps. 63:1, 2, 'O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry

and thirsty land where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.' Now if there be so great and longing a desire to see the glory of the Lord in a glass, wherein so little of his glory is seen, with any comfort and satisfaction, how much more to see him immediately face to face! If a glimpse be so comfortable, what will the immediate vision of God then be? Surely if this be salvation, every one of us should long for this salvation.

3. If it be not worth our desire, it is little worth; the estate being so excellent, such a complete redemption from all our troubles, so perfect, and so full a happiness in body and soul, will not you send a groan, or a hearty act of volition after it? It is great ingratitude, that when Christ hath procured a great state of blessedness for us at a very dear rate, we should value it no more. He procured it by a life of labour and sorrow, and the pangs of a bitter cursed death; and when all is done, we little regard it. Surely if we choose it for our happiness, there will be longing and looking for it. No man will fly from his own happiness: a man's heart will be where his treasure is, Mat. 6:21. If you prize it, you will sigh and groan after it. The apostle saith, Phil. 1:23, 'I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, which is far better,' πολλῶ μαλλόν. If you count it better to be there than elsewhere, you will be desiring to be there, and longing to be there; for we are always longing for that which is better, chiefly for that which is best of all. There is the best estate, the best work, the best company, all is better; if you count it so, it will be no difficult thing to bring you earnestly to desire it.

4. All the ordinances serve to stir up this longing after heaven, and to awaken these desires in us. The word is our charter for heaven, or God's testament wherein this rich legacy is bequeathed to us, that every time we read it, or hear it, or meditate upon it, we may get a step higher, and our hearts more drawn out after heavenly things. In

prayer, whether in company or alone, it is but to raise and act these heavenly desires; there we groan, and long for God's salvation. In the Lord's supper, we come solemnly to put ourselves in mind of the new wine we shall drink in our Father's kingdom, Mat. 26:29, to put a new heavenly relish upon our hearts.

5. The imperfection of our present estate. We are now imperfect, and straitened like a fish in a pail or small vessel of water, which cannot keep it alive; it would fain be in the ocean, or swimming in the broad and large rivers. So we are pent up, cannot do what we would; there is a larger estate, when filled up with all the fulness of God. That holiness we have now maketh us look for it and long for it; and surely holiness was never designed for our torment.

6. We are hastening into the other world apace, and therefore we more desire it. Natural motion is in principio tardior, in fine velocior—the nearer to fruition, the more impatient of the want of it. When a man is drawing home after a long journey, every mile is as tedious as two. We are drawing, nigh to the other world, let us leave this willingly, not by force; let not trouble chase us out of it, but love and desire draw us out of it. God doth loosen our roots by little and little, that we may now be fit for a remove; the pins of our tabernacle are taken down insensibly, and by leisurely degrees. Now as fast as we are going out of this world, we should be going into another; the inner man renewed day by day, that is, as it groweth more holy and heavenly. From our first renovation we should be dying to this world, and setting our affections on a better; much more when God beginneth to call us home, then draw home as fast as you can.

For means to this desire and longing, there is necessary—

1. A sound belief of this blessed estate, or a certain confidence of the truth of it: 2 Cor. 5:1, 2, 'For we know that if our earthly house of this

tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens: for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.' Not a bare conjecture, but a certain knowledge. Surely heaven is amiable, and the object of our desires, if we be persuaded of the truth of it, we will long after it.

2. A serious preparation for it: 2 Cor. 5:3, 'If so be that, being clothed, we shall not be found naked.' They have made up their account between God and their souls, sued out their pardon, stand with their loins girt and lamps burning; then they long and wait when God will draw aside the veil of flesh, and show them his glory. A seafaring man desireth his port, especially if laden with rich commodities. Where there hath been diligent preparing, there will be serious waiting and desirous expectation. While we make provision for our fleshly appetites and wills, we dream of dwelling here; we take it for granted they have no thought of removing to another place who make no provision before their coming thither. When a tenant hath warning to be turned out of his old house, he will be providing of another, and be preparing and making it ready before he enter upon it.

We now come to the second clause, 'Thy law is my delight.'

Doct. 2. That we should not only long for salvation, but delight in the way which leadeth to it.

Here I shall speak to two things:—

1. That we must take the way that leadeth to it.
2. That we must delight in the way.

First, That we must take the way that leadeth to it.

1. Partly because of the nature of God's covenant, which is conditional. There is in it ratio dati et accepti, something required and something promised: Isa. 56:4, 'For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant;' Heb. 10:22, 'Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water;' Exod. 24:4, 'And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel: and he took the book of the covenant and read it in the audience of the people, and they said, All that the Lord hath said we will do, and be obedient.' Surely in the covenant of grace God requireth conditions; it is not made up all of promises. Now a condition is this, when one promiseth any good, or threateneth any ill, not simply, but upon covenant; if the thing required be performed, or the thing forbidden be committed; the performance of the thing required is the condition of the promise, the doing a thing forbidden the condition of the threatening: 1 Sam. 11:1, 2, 'And all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee: and Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition I will make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel;' and Luke 14:32, 'While the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassage, and desireth conditions of peace.' Now these conditions are twofold—making covenant and keeping covenant.

[1.] The conditions as to making the covenant arise from the law of grace, or the *lex remedians*, faith and repentance. Faith performed or omitted: John 3:36, 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting

life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.' So repentance performed: Ezek. 18:30, 'Repent ye, and turn from your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.' Omitted: Luke 13:5, 'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.'

[2.] Then conditions of keeping covenant, which is conformity to the law of God, or new obedience performed: Ps. 84:11, 'No good thing will be withhold from them that walk uprightly.' Omitted: Heb. 12:14, 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' Well, then, upon the whole we thus judge, that it is not enough to desire God's salvation, but we must also delight in his law; that is to say, we must repent and believe, and so begin our acquaintance with God in Christ; and we must also walk in the ways of God's precepts, if we mean at length to be saved, and to enjoy the vision of the blessed God. That which is propounded conditionally we must not presume of absolutely, and so make reckoning to go to heaven as in some whirlwind, or as passengers at sea are brought into the harbour sleeping, or to be crowned without striving.

2. From the nature of this longing and desire, which must be regular and according to the tenor of the covenant of holiness as well as happiness; and it must be strong, so as to overmaster contrary difficulties, lusts, and desires. Let us instance in Balaam. He said, Num. 23:10, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his.' He saw that the state of a righteous man at the end of it is a blessed estate, and this he longed for. But there was a double defect in his desire; it was not regular. Balaam desired to be saved, but he did not delight in God's law. He would be at the journey's end, but was loath to take the way; there was a complacency and well-pleas'dness in the end, but a refusing of the means. Again, this desire was but a flash, a sudden motion, occasioned by



contemplation of the blessedness of God's people, but no operative transforming desire; a desire which the love of the wages of unrighteousness prevailed over. All men will long for salvation, but all men will not take a right course to obtain it; and so it is a wish rather than a desire, if we long for salvation but have not a heart to use the means appointed thereunto. Where there is a true longing there will be a using the means, and a using the means with delight. They that will not submit to these conditions, or snuff at these conditions as troublesome, they do not long for his salvation, nor delight in his law.

Secondly, That we must delight in the way that leadeth to glory; but this argument being handled in other verses of this psalm, it is omitted here.

## **SERMON CLXXXIX**

**Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee;  
and let thy judgments help me.—VER. 175**

THIS verse containeth three things:—

1. David's petition for life, let my soul live.
2. His argument from the end, and it shall praise thee.
3. The ground of his hope and confidence, and let thy judgments help me.

1. David's petition for life, 'Let my soul live.' 'My soul,' that is, myself: the soul is put for the whole man. The contrary, Judges 16:30, 'Let me die with the Philistines,' said Samson: Heb. marg., 'Let my soul

die.' His life was sought after by the cruelty of his enemies, and he desireth God to keep him alive.

2. His argument from the end, 'And it shall praise thee.' The glorifying of God was his aim. The fruit of all God's benefits is to profit us and praise God. Now David professeth that all the days of his life he should live in the sense and acknowledgment of such a benefit.

3. The ground of his hope and confidence, in the last clause, 'And let thy judgments help me.' Our hopes of help are grounded on God's judgment, whereby is meant his word. There are judgments decreed and judgments executed, doctrinal judgments and providential judgments. That place intimateth the distinction: Eccles. 8:11, 'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. There is *sententia lata et dilata*. Here God's judgments are put for the sentence pronounced, and chiefly for one part of them, the promises of grace. As also Ps. 119:43, 'I hope in thy judgments. Promises are the objects of hope.

The points are two:—

Doct. 1. That we may beg the continuation of life for the honouring of God.

Doct. 2. That God's judgments are a great help and relief to his people, who desire to praise him, even when they are in danger of their lives.

For the first, that we may beg the continuation of life, for the honouring of God. This point must be divided into two parts:—

1. That the principal end for which a man should live and desire life is to praise and glorify God.
2. That we may desire life upon these ends.

First, That the principal end for which a man should live and desire life is to praise and glorify God. This appeareth—

1. By direct scriptures: Rom. 14:7, 8, 'For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth unto himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's;' and Phil. 1:20, 21, 'According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or death: for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'

2. By the prayers of the saints; as Ps. 119:17, 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live,' &c.; and Ps. 118:17, 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.' This was David's hope in the prolongation of life, that he should have farther opportunities to honour God. But of this more at large, ver. 17 of this psalm.

3. By the arguments urged in prayer: Ps. 6:5, 'For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in the grave who shall give thee thanks?' and Ps. 30:9, 'What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth?' Ps. 88:11–13, 'Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise, and praise thee, Selah? shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness,' &c.; and Isa. 38:18, 19, 'For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit

cannot hope for thy truth: the living, the living, he shall praise thee,' &c. A man may praise God in heaven, but from their bodies no service is performed for a long while in the other world. There is no such service there as here; as reducing the stray, instructing the ignorant, propagating godliness to others who want it, by our counsels and example.

#### 4. By reasons.

[1.] Life is given us by God at first: Acts 17:25, 'He giveth to all life and breath, and all things;' and ver. 28, 'In him we live and move, and have our being.' Now all things that come from God must be used for him: Rom. 11:36, 'For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things,' &c., angels, men, beasts, inanimate creatures. He expecteth more from men than from beasts, and from saints than from men. Life was given for this end, and therefore not to be desired and loved but for this end, even God's glory. How grievous a thing is it to go out of the world ere we know why we came into the world! We live not barely to eat and drink, as brute beasts live; we live not to live as heathens. The end of our life is service and obedience to God; yea, and it is the life of our lives, the perfection of them. Well, then, since we live by God, we must live to him.

[2.] It is preserved by him. It is God's prerogative to kill and to make alive; to wound and to heal, Deut. 32:39. Our life dependeth wholly on him. It is said, Job 12:10, 'In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.' God hath a dominion over all his creatures, over every living thing, and man in especial, to dispose of them according to his pleasure; not an hair of our heads can fall to the ground without him, Mat. 10:29, 30. Our life is wholly in his hands; we cannot add one cubit to our stature, make one hair white or black at our pleasure. Life cannot be taken away without him, how

casual soever the stroke is: Exod. 21:13, 'If a man lie not in wait for his brother, but God delivereth him into his hand,' &c. Well, then, in all reason we should serve and glorify him who by his providential influence continueth life to us every moment: Deut. 30:20, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and obey his voice, and cleave unto him; for he is thy life, and the length of thy days.' It is a charge against Belshazzar, Dan. 5:23, 'God, in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.' We must not look upon ourselves as made for ourselves, but for God. He gave us life, and keepeth it, that we may wholly be at his disposing. While we have it, we must have it for God, that he may be glorified in the use of it; and when he cometh to take it away, he may be glorified by our submitting to his dominion. It is a presumption and encroachment on God's right to seek satisfaction to ourselves in any state, without a subordination and subserviency to his glory. He that giveth and pveserveth life may dispose of it at his pleasure; and our life so continually preserved by him ought to be devoted to him.

[3.] When he preserveth it in any imminent danger, it is twice given. I say, in such preservations our life is twice received from God—in our birth, and as spared in the danger; and therefore, in all justice it ought to be dedicated to his service; 2 Cor. 1:9, 10, 'But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' Many times there is but a step between us and death, as if God were putting the old bond in suit, and executing the sentence of the law upon us. Deliverance in such a case is called a pardon and remission; and even in the case of the wicked and impenitent: Ps. 78:38, 'He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not.' It was but properly a reprieve for the time, a forbearance of the temporal judgment, not executing the sentence, or not destroying the

sinner presently; much more to a godly man: Isa. 38:17, 'Loved my soul from the grave.' To be loved out of a danger, and loved out of a sickness, that is a blessed thing, a great obligation upon us.

[4.] We must surrender our life to him again; and therefore, while we have it, we must employ it for him, Luke 19:23; into his hands we must resign our spirits. Every one must give an account of himself to God, what honour he hath by our lives.

[5.] We shall never glorify him in heaven unless we glorify God on earth first, or carefully serve him: John 17:4, 5, 'I have glorified thee on earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do: and now, O Father, glorify me, with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.' Here is our trial, our present service. Saints above are ἐξώβελεῖς; that is our reward, to glorify God in heaven.

Secondly, That we may desire life upon these ends; as Ps. 39:12, 'O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence and be no more.' A little time of relaxation, to serve and glorify thee ere I die.

1. Long life is in itself a blessing, taken into the promises, though more frequently in the Old Testament than in the New. Of this, see more at large, ver. 17.

2. It is well sought when this is our scope, for then the request is lawful both for matter and end: James 4:3, 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.' Life should not be loved but for further glorifying of God, for all our natural interests must be subordinate to our great end.

Well, then, we may lawfully pray for long life, with submission to the will of God, and that death may not come upon us suddenly, but

according to the ordinary course of nature.

But how will this stand with the desires of dissolution, and willingness to depart and to be with Christ, which certainly all Christians that believe eternity should cherish in their hearts?

To this I answer—(1.) By concession; (2.) By correction.

1. By concession. It is true we are to train up ourselves in an expectation of our dissolution, &c. See ver. 17 more fully. But—

2. By correction. Though it be expedient to desire death, yet we are not anxiously to long after it, till the time come. For—

[1.] They do not simply desire death for itself, but as a means to enjoy those better things which follow after death: Phil. 1:23, 'For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.' It is not our duty to love death as death. No; so it is an evil which we must patiently bear, and may holily deprecate it; but because of the good beyond it, it is our duty to love God, to long after communion with him, and to be perfected in holiness. Had it not been an evil to be avoided and dreaded, Christ had never prayed against it; and 2 Cor. 5:4, 'For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.' It were an unnatural desire to desire death as death. A creature cannot desire its own destruction. Jesus Christ, before he manifested his submission, did first manifest the innocent desires of nature: 'Father, let the cup pass.' The separation of the soul from the body, and the body remaining under corruption, is in itself evil, and the fruit of sin: Rom. 5:12, 'And so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.' Grace is not given to reconcile us to corruption, or to make

death, as death, desirable, or to cross the inclinations of innocent nature. But—

[2.] Upon these terms, death is sweetened to them, and they readily submit to it. Though it be not to be desired as it is death, yet heaven and eternal happiness beyond it is still matter of desire to us. Death is God's threatening; and we are not threatened with benefits, but evils; and evils of punishment are not to be desired, but cheerfully submitted unto for a higher end. Nature abhorreth and feareth death; but yet grace desireth glory. The soul is loath to part with the body, but yet it is far loather to miss Christ, and be without him. A man is loath to lose a leg or an arm, yet, to preserve the whole body, he is contented to part with it. In short, the soul is bound to the body with a double band—the one natural, the other voluntary, by love and affection, desiring and seeking its welfare. The voluntary bond is governed and ordered by religion till the natural bond be loosed, either in the ordinary course of nature, or at the will of God.

[3.] There are certain circumstances in death which do invite us to ask longer life in order to this end; as—

(1.) God's children would not have the occasion of well-doing or self-denying obedience taken from them too soon; so great is their love and desire of gratitude to God, that they would yet longer praise God in this self-denying way. Death would shut their mouths.

(2.) They would not be taken away in a cloud, or before they see the issue of some present trials on the church or them. They have no will to die till the sense of wrath be removed: Ps. 27:13, 'I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.'



(3.) They may have some design a-foot for God, and therefore are desirous of a little more time to attain this design; therefore pray to God to prolong their lives a while: Rom. 15:31, 32, 'Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea: and that my service which I have done for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints, that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.'

(4.) To breed up their children in the nurture of the Lord, and that they may be useful in their families, as Jacob desired to see Joseph.

(5.) We may beg it that we may not fall into the hands of men, lose our life by murderers: Ps. 31:15, 'My times are in thy hand; deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.' The dispensation of all mercies, comforts, troubles, life, death, are in God's hand, not in man's power; therefore we pray that it may rest there, that we may not be given up to the will of those that hate us.

All these desires have a respect to the glory of God, and if conceived with submission and trust, that God will do what is for the best, they are all lawful.

Use of all. 1. Exhortation. It presseth you—

1. To consecrate yourselves to God: Rom. 12:1, 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.' Under the law the bodies of beasts were to be slain; yours is a living sacrifice. Both were set apart for God, the one to die, the other to live to God.

2. Having given up yourselves to God, use yourselves for God: there will be an inquiry what share God hath in your time: Acts 27:23, 'The God whose I am, and whom I serve.'

3. Praise the Lord with heart, mouth, and life. A Christian's conversation is nothing but a hymn to God: 1 Peter 2:9, 'But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.' The virtues of God, his attributes.

4. Whenever you pray for continuance of life in any danger or distress, either for yourself or others, propound this as the end, not so much your own satisfaction as the honour of God. A Christian is not content to have the use of the benefit to himself alone.

[1.] For self. Every man desireth life. The whole world would all and every of them put this request to God, 'Let my soul live;' but very few consider why they should live. Some desire life only to please the flesh, and that they may enjoy the delights of the present world, a brutish wish. A heathen could say, he doth not deserve the name of a man, *qui unam diem velit esse in voluptate*, &c, certainly not of a Christian, that would desire life merely to enjoy the delights of the flesh. These would not leave their hog's trough to go home to their father. Some there are who desire life to see their children well bestowed, or to free their estate from incumbrance, and are loath to part from their natural relations, wife, children, friends. This is a natural respect, and should be subordinate to a higher end. Though this desire, keeping its place, may be lawful, yet, out of its place, sinful. We use to profess, Ps. 73:25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.'

In short, two motives I will urge why the glory of God should have the chief respect in our affections:—

(1.) The benefit it giveth, hope of prolonging life, if this desire be true and real; and it giveth certain assurance of not perishing for ever. The one it doth, for God doeth all things with respect to his glory, Ps. 119:94. The other also, for he will glorify those that glorify him.

(2.) This is the temper of a sincere Christian. Surely to a believer it is a piece of self-denial to be kept out of heaven longer; therefore it must be sweetened with some valuable compensation; something there must be to calm the mind, and contentedly to spare the enjoyment of it for a while. Now next to the good pleasure of God, which is the reason of reasons, there is some benefit we pitch upon; there is nothing worthy to be compared but our service: if God may have glory, if our lives may do good; a gracious heart must be satisfied with gracious reasons.

[2.] For others. If we make it our request, we must have the same aims in this case, that the faith and grace of others may benefit them: Mark 2:5, 'When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee.' Now in such requests bare natural reasons should not move us, but that God may not lose an instrument of his glory, and that his power and providence may be more seen in the world in the recovery. It is good to beg of God for God: Ps. 115:1, 'Not unto us, but unto thy name give glory.' It should be accounted as a mercy unto us: Phil. 2:27, 'For indeed he was sick nigh unto death, but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.'

5. This end is known by the use in having and submission in asking.

[1.] The use in having, how we use a mercy when we have it, if we do indeed live to the glory of God, and the rather for these experiences.

[2.] Submission in asking, whether we fight or are crowned, work or receive our reward; for God is the best judge of what is most for his own glory.

Use 2. Direction; but of this see ver. 17.

I come now to the second point.

Doct. 2. That God's judgments are a great help and relief to his people, who desire to praise him, even when they are in danger of their lives.

Here I shall show—(1.) What are God's judgments; (2.) How they are a help.

First, What is the meaning of misphalim, judgments here?

1. God governeth the world; that is called judgment: Ps. 9:7, 8, 'He hath prepared his throne for judgment, he shall judge the world in righteousness; he shall minister judgment in uprightness.' So John 5:22. When the government is put into the hands of Christ, it is said, 'For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.'

2. God governeth the world according to this word; there is his judgment concerning things and persons, stating what is good and evil; the reward of the one, and punishment of the other: Ps. 19:9, 'The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.' The precept is the rule of our duty, the sanction of God's process. Therefore in scripture the punishments of the wicked are sometimes called judgments; so also the rewards of the righteous, as ver. 43 of

this psalm. The word pronounceth concerning every man's condition. His delivering of the righteous: Ps. 78:8, 9, 'Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven; the Lord arose to judgment, to save the people of the earth.' The moderation of their affliction: Jer. 10:24, 'Correct me, but with judgment;' that is, his merciful judgment, according to the new covenant dispensations. Punishment of sins, that they are judgments we are sufficiently convinced of and sensible of it. Well, then, he prayeth that that of the word may be executed either—(1.) By breaking his enemies, and giving them the merit of their doings; or, (2.) That his promises may be accomplished by sending him help and relief in his troubles.

3. This government is to be observed, for it confirmeth the word: Heb. 2:2, 'For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect?' &c.; and he punisheth them 'as the congregation have heard.' Carnal men attribute all to chance, but God's people observe his word.

Secondly, Now these judgments must needs be for a help to God's people, because the word of God speaketh more good to them than it doth to others; and if God judgeth according to his word, they may conclude that his children are never finally forsaken, nor will their enemies escape unpunished. There will be an accomplishment of promises, and an execution of threatenings, which is a comfort to them that walk uprightly.

1. In the general case, it is a relief to us; for God hath a provident care over all those that desire to honour and glorify him; their hopes will not altogether be frustrate. Keep his commandments, and it will turn to good. They shall have seasonable preservation according to God's promised and wonted mercies.

2. In the particular case of contests and conflicts with the wicked, he will punish enemies and reward the faithful. This is the tenor of the word. And to this word of God he ascribed his deliverance. Not this power, or this means, but thy judgments held me. God doth not deceive us with vain promises; when matters are strangely carried on in the world, here is our comfort.

## SERMON CXC

### **I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.—VER. 176**

THESE words are the close of the whole psalm. In them observe—

1. A representation of his case, or, if you will, a confession of his sin, I have gone astray like a lost sheep.
2. A petition for mercy, seek thy servant.
3. A protestation of obedience by way of argument, I do not forget thy precepts.

The chiefest matter that needs to be opened is the representation of his case, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep.' Sheep are animalia gregalia, such kind of creatures as naturally gather together and unite themselves into a flock. Many other creatures live single and apart; they may sometimes sort together, yet are oftener severed and kept asunder: but the property of sheep, and their safety, is to come together in a flock. But now, when they are out of the flock, then they are exposed to all manner of misery, and therefore a strayed sheep is

usually put in scripture for misery and sin, Isa. 53:6; Mat. 15:24. Lost sheep are represented as those that are ready to perish. Now the business is whether this similitude here mentioned be to be interpreted of David's misery or his sin. Interpreters are divided, both ancient and modern. The similitude itself is applicable to either, and accordingly used in scripture. Sometimes it is put for sin: Isa. 53:6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray.' Sheep are creatures very subject to stray and wander, especially if driven by wolves or dogs; and sometimes by a disease, a sort of madness incident to them, follow not the rest of the flock: the Arabians call it tsunall—(Bochart). And so they would have it signify here his going astray out of infirmity, from the way of God's commandments. Or else sometimes the condition of strayed sheep is put for misery; as Hosea 4:16, 'The Lord will feed them as a lamb in a large place.' A lamb that is out of the fold goes up and down bleating to seek the fold again, and some company with which it may join itself. It is spoken of them that affected liberty; the Lord by his prophet tells them they should have liberty enough, but little for their profit and comfort; leave to wander in the world, and should bleat alone, bewailing their solitude and danger, and be exposed as a prey to the next wolf. He would not feed them in the flock and body of the Israelites together, but would scatter them by exile and banishment, so that there should be Israelites amidst many Assyrians, like a lamb bleating up and down that is gone out of the fold. Some think David here represents his misery, when he was a banished exile from the assemblies of the faithful; not living like a prince in his palace, but wandering from place to place to shift for his life, as a poor sheep doth that is driven from the flock, exposed to beasts of prey; and thus it befell him in the case of Saul's and Absalom's persecution. If this be the meaning, the following clauses must be suitably expounded: 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant;' that is, consider my affliction, and in thy good time relieve me and restore me; and the last clause, 'For I

do not forget thy precepts:' he did not forget his duty, whatever his condition was.

If we should follow this sense, it yields us these points:—

1. That a believer may be driven from place to place, in perpetual hazards and distresses, wandering up and down like a strayed sheep, driven by the wolf, and scattered from the fold: 1 Cor. 4:11, 'We have,' saith the apostle, 'no certain dwelling-place.'
2. In such a case we may with confidence go to God, the good shepherd, who hears the bleating of the poor wandering sheep, takes care of them, seeks them, and reduceth them into the fold.
3. That whatever befalls us, we should still go on in the way of obedience: 'I have gone astray,' &c.; driven up and down, and yet, 'I do not forget thy precepts.' When God seems to forget us, we should not forget his precepts. These points might profitably be insisted upon.

But because many ancient and modern, both Jewish and Christian interpreters, understand it of sinful errors, and the words will commodiously enough bear this sense, and it being a similitude very frequently used in scripture, to compare the faithful to sheep, and God to a shepherd, I shall handle the words with respect to this interpretation: 'I have gone astray,' &c. We may all of us make this confession to God, we are too apt to straggle from our duty, and we all of us need to make this petition to God, to beg his watchful providence and shepherd-like care over us; and we may do it with encouragement to be heard of God, if our hearts are unfeignedly set to keep his law, that God will hear us, and keep us from our wandering.



Doct. That a Christian that is obedient for the main, yet may run into many failings and errors of life.

David was right for the main course of his life. He profeseth here he did not forget God's precepts, he did not cast off the yoke of his law; but yet in particular acts he acknowledged he did err and fail, and went astray like a lost sheep. And so many who are God's own servants, that do not forget his precepts, may thus err and go astray.

First, In our natural estate, man is of a straying nature, apt to turn out of the way that leadeth to God and true happiness. The Holy Ghost sets forth the degeneration of mankind by the similitude and emblem of a strayed lost sheep: Luke 15 and Isa. 53:6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way.' Mark, he speaks of our estate by nature collectively and distributively. Collectively and in common, 'All we like sheep have gone astray.' And distributively, 'Every man to his own way.' We all agree in forsaking the right way of pleasing and enjoying God, but we disagree, as each one hath a bypath of his own. Some are running after this lust, some after that, and so are not only divided from God, but divided from one another, whilst every one makes his own will his law, quicquid velit, licet. As the channel is cut, so corrupt nature in every one finds an issue and passage: Ps. 14:3, 'They are all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no not one.' Some run this way, some that way; some are enslaved by pleasures, others are captivated by the honours of the present world, and some are oppressed by the cares of this life. Every man hath his way of sinning and running away from God. But, however, the emblem and similitude of the Holy Ghost is to be considered, that our departing from God and his ways is like the straying of a sheep. What doth that note?

1. In general it implies this, that we are brutish in our sin and defection from God, led by sense, fancy, and appetite; and therefore our condition could not be expressed but by a comparison fetched from the beasts. Silly sheep are carried away by their fancy and appetite from the flock: Ps. 49:12, 'Man being in honour, abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish;' that is, he abode not in the honour of his creation. Some would render it 'for a night.' Adam 'abode not for a night.' What we translate man, is Adam: the excellency and dignity wherein God had set us; he became like a beast. How is man like a beast? We are governed by our senses and lower appetites. The senses are grown masterly and inordinate, so eagerly set upon their objects, that they will not be reclaimed, and man's life just like that of the brutes; it is things of the same nature we value and adhere unto, terrene and earthly things, the comforts of the animal life; and as we have the same objects, so the same ends, to enjoy our sensual pleasures, and satisfy our fleshly minds as long as we may; now what is this but to suffer the beast to ride the man; to put reason and conscience in vassallage, and subjection to sense and appetite?

2. This similitude is used to show our proneness to err. There is no creature more prone to wander and lose its way without a shepherd than the sheep. Sheep are creatures subject to straying if they be not kept in the pasture; so all men are obnoxious to erring and straying: Jer. 14:10, 'They love to wander.' It is a delight to us to be pleasing our flesh and gratifying our carnal senses. So Ps. 95:10, 'It is a people that do err in their hearts.' We do not only err in our minds, but err in our hearts. To err in our mind is to err out of ignorance, but to err in our heart is to err out of sensual obstinacy; so are we carried away with the desires of the flesh, think ourselves never better than when we run away from God. Ah! the best of us is soon out of the way. If God takes off his guidance, and leaves us to ourselves, we are apt to transgress the bounds wherewith God hath hedged up our way, and

make it our business still to be running away from the chief good, into the bushes and thickets of carnal error, wherein we are entangled.

3. Our inability to return, and set ourselves into the right way again; for we stray like sheep, not like swine and dogs. Swine and dogs, though they wander, they will find the way home again; but a sheep is irrecoverably lost without the shepherd's diligence and care: Jer. 50:6, 'My people have been lost; they have gone from mountain to mountain, they have forgotten their resting-place.' So should we run, and keep running away from, and forget our resting-place. I remember Austin in his meditations hath this passage, *Domine errare potui, redire non potui*—Lord, I could go astray by myself, but I cannot return of myself. The sheep easily straggle, but it is the shepherd must bring home the lost sheep upon his own shoulders, Luke 15:5. And to this we may apply that of the prophet, Hosea 13:9, 'O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help.' We could destroy and ruin ourselves, but we cannot recover and save ourselves. The shiftless infant can defile himself, but it is the nurse must cleanse it, and we ourselves can fall from God, but to recover us to God, that is the shepherd's care.

4. It shows our readiness to follow evil example. A sheep is animal sequax, a creature that runs after the drove, they run out of the gap one after another, and one straggler draws away the whole flock. When the apostle speaks of the sinful state of mankind, Eph. 2:2, 3, he reckons up example as one: 'Walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.' In that place there is the devil, the world, and the flesh. There is the prince of the power of the air, and there is the course of this world (that I quote it for now), there is Satan, corrupt example, and evil inclination, all which

are depravers of mankind, and all concur to our ruin and destruction. We easily swim with the stream and the torrent of common example, do as others do, and so mutually propagate and receive taint from one another. Imitation is not the whole cause of sin, but propagation and inclination of nature, yet imitation and example doth much to the perverting of the world, and increasing wickedness and fleshly-mindedness makes us addicted to worldly vanities, and so we run with the fowl into the snare, walking according to the course of this world, Eph. 2:2; Isa. 6:6, 'I am a man of polluted lips, and I dwell among a people of polluted lips.' We have sin within, but it is mightily increased by example without; by dwelling among those that are polluted, we are more defiled; we catch sickness one of another, we do not get health one from another; as in the law, by touching an unclean thing a man was made unclean, but not on the contrary. We, being polluted ourselves, are more defiled by others, by conversing with them. We live among them that are neglectful of God, and unmindful of heavenly things, and we come also to grow more so ourselves.

5. To represent the danger of straying. Sheep when they are out of the pasture, are in harm's way, exposed to a thousand dangers: Jer. 1:7, 'All that find them have devoured them.' So are we in danger to become a prey to the roaring lion, who goes about seeking whom he may devour, and to the dogs and wolves that are abroad. In his sinful state man is a sheep, whom no man taketh up, out of God's protection, and a ready prey for Satan, taken captive by him at his pleasure, 2 Tim. 2:26, till the Lord recover him by repentance. Thus God forms, represents, and points out our condition before conversion. Certainly before we were converted to God we were as sheep wandering in our ignorance and sinful ways to our own destruction, and in hazard to be preyed upon continually by the roaring lion.

Secondly, See if it be better with us after conversion. For here is a man of God; he saith, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep.' Now, after grace received, though our heart was set to walk with God for the main, yet we often swerve from our rule through ignorance or through inadvertency, and sometimes are blinded by worldly desires and fleshly lusts, and so transgress our bounds and neglect our duty: Ps. 19:12, 'Who can understand his errors?' Our errors are so many, who can bear them all in mind? who can know and remember them all? I say, even the best, who are tender of displeasing and dishonouring God by sin, they have their errors, yea, and sometimes too their foul faults.

Let me a little show this.

1. There are some unavoidable infirmities and frailties which we cannot get rid of though we fain would; as Rom. 7:15, 'What I hate, that do I;' and ver. 19, 'The good that I would, that I do not; and the evil that I would not, that do I;' and Gal. 5:17, 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.' A true Christian would love God more perfectly, delight in him more abundantly, and bring every thought into subjection to his will. He would get rid of the fountain of sin, of natural concupiscence, and of the stirrings of envy, lust, pride, anger; but alas! the spirit that worketh in us lusteth to envy, and bewrayeth itself in these carnal affections. These are aberrations from the strict law, which God hath given to us, but such as men are subject unto in this state of frailty. Though they be hated, resisted, though they be restrained in a great measure, that they do not break out into gross acts, yet a child of God cannot get rid of them; though this fire is not blown up but smothered, yet in some degree it burns in our bosoms; there is life in it still.

2. There are other things which they might get rid of if they would, and yet they are not always so happy as to withstand it; certain sins that are avoidable by the ordinary assistances of grace which God vouchsafes to his people, yet a believer may relapse into them many times. Men are not always so watchful, nor is the bent of their hearts so strongly fixed in them; and there is very much security in the saints, and they run into the snare till they be awakened either by some powerful convictions or some smart affliction; as David saith, Ps. 119:67, 'Before I was afflicted, I went astray.' The best of God's children many times in their peace and prosperity they fall asleep and forget themselves, and so let some infirmity still be upon them, before God doth awaken them, and bring them to themselves again. Hezekiah was no sooner settled in a peaceful estate, but presently he forgets himself, and suffers pride to steal upon his heart, till the Lord humbled him for the pride of his heart, 2 Chron. 32:25, 26. When all things went happily with him, he was recovered out of his sickness, and had congratulatory messages from the princes of the nations round about him, and lived in great prosperity, then his heart was lifted up. Some carnal distemper may grow upon us, or evil practice we may fall into. David, when he had gotten a carnal pillow under his head, he lay down and slept, and dreamt of nothing but prosperity, a perpetual uninterrupted temporal happiness, Ps. 30:6. He was full of carnal complacency, until God made him look about him. Thus by our carelessness do we often provoke God to use sharp remedies. There are some are not avoidable, but left for humiliation; but those that are avoidable by such ordinary assistances of God's grace to his people, yet many times, through our folly and inadvertency and sleepiness of conscience, we run into them.

Having showed the kinds of these sins, let me now show the causes, why many times those whose hearts are right with God, that do not forget his precepts, yet they go astray like lost sheep.

1. The first cause is their present imperfection. Though grace doth heal all the faculties, yet it doth not totally heal them, or wholly overcome the weakness which is in them. God promiseth to put his law into their hearts and minds, yet both the understanding and will, and all the inferior faculties, they are but in part sanctified. You know our soul is divided into two parts, into the ἡγημόνικον, and the faculties which should command and direct, and into the faculties which should be commanded and directed. The commanding faculties are called spirit, and the faculties which should be commanded are called soul. The reason, or the incitation, the affections, the dispositions, which incline us to things good for us, there is a weakness in all these. Whence comes all the weaknesses and errors of the saints? There is a defect in the leading or commanding part of the soul, which is the understanding and the will. In the understanding is the directive counsel, and in the will is the imperial power. Now the understanding, which should direct and guide us, is blind and sleepy, and not so vigilant and watchful as it should be; and so in many cases it proves but a dark and imperfect guide and director to us, and so we err like lost sheep. We have not always so clear and so deep a sense of our duty as we ought, and find not such lively, powerful, and effectual thoughts of God and heavenly things, and so clear a sense, so that the directive part fails us. Then for our wills, which should command us where the imperial power resides, they are imperfect. There is, I confess, in the regenerate a sincere will to please God in all things, but it is not a perfect will; so that our willing and nilling, our consent and dissent, is not so powerful as it ought to be; but the will being tainted by the neighbourhood of a distempered sense, it yields a little, and bends to the flesh, and gives way to evil, and many times it opposeth that which is good; at least we are often overtaken in a fault, being inconsiderately and suddenly surprised, as the apostle useth that expression, Gal. 6:1, 'If a man be overtaken in a fault.' Though a

regenerate man hath a new light put into his mind, he is renewed in the spirit of his mind, though he hath a new bent and bias put upon his heart, yet the imperial and directive power have flesh in them still, and the wisdom of the flesh is so ingrained and kneaded into our natures, that it cannot be totally dispossessed, no more than we can sever the leaven and the dough when once they are mingled together. If there be a defect in the governing and leading part of the soul, there will be disorders in the life and conversation.

Come we now from the ἡγημόνικον, the leading faculties, to the faculties which should be commanded and directed. Alas! they are by sin grown obstinate and masterly, and are so eagerly set upon their objects (carnal vanities) that they will not be reclaimed, but rebel against the direction of conscience and inclinations of the renewed will. The apostle speaks of a law of his members warring against the law of his mind, Rom. 7:23. In the lower, in the most sensitive faculties, there is much headstrong opposition against the directions of the will. We have but a slender feeble guide. The leading part of the will is defective, and there is much of the wisdom of the flesh there. It is a trouble to the flesh to be restrained from what it desires and inclines us to, as a headstrong horse is loath to be governed; therefore we yield and suffer ourselves to be transported and led away by our passions and carnal affections. Now, though the rebellious and disobedient disposition of the appetite and senses is in a great measure broken and subdued in us by the power of grace, yet the best have somewhat of inordinate sensuality and weakness, and being imperfect, are tempted by the world and sense, as well as others. Well, then, ever weigh in your mind for your direction these two grand reasons of all the weakness that is in the saints,—there is the debility and the weakness of the leading and commanding part, and the rebelling of the inferior faculties, which should be ruled and commanded. (1.) The debility and weakness of the leading and



commanding part of the soul. And thence is it that we are so inconsiderate, so dull of apprehension, have such dark and ineffectual thoughts of God and heavenly things; and thence is it that the will doth not so potently and rulingly command the directive faculties, but is apt to yield to, that it doth not stand upon its authority as it was wont to do. (2.) The other part is the rebellion of the inferior faculties, and stubbornness of our sensual and carnal inclinations. Look, as in a kingdom and commonwealth, where are rebellious subjects and a feeble empire, things must needs run into disorder, so here the reins are managed very weak; there is a feeble empire in the soul, and here are strong rebellious desires not easily controlled, and so draw the soul away. To make this more evident a little, I shall show the order of all human operations, if rightly constituted. Their actions are governed in this manner:—The understanding and the conscience, they are to guide and direct the will; the will, according to right reason and conscience, moves the affections; the affections, according to the counsel and command of the understanding and will, move the bodily spirits; the bodily spirits, they move the senses and members of the body. But now by corruption there is a manifest inversion and change, for bodily pleasure doth affect the senses, the senses corrupt the phantasy, the phantasy moves the bodily spirits, and by them the lighter part of the affections. The affections by their violence and inclination captivate the will, and blind the mind, and so the man is carried headlong to his own destruction. Now, though this servitude be in a great measure broken in them that are called unto the liberty of God's children, they are not slaves to their lusts, and the vain pleasures of this life; yet too too often the senses are too masterly, and too too often transmit objects into the soul in a rebellious way, against the command of sanctified reason and conscience. Affections are stirred by thoughts, and thoughts by objects thus represented. I am the

larger in this, that you may more perfectly understand the reason of the weakness of the saints.

2. The violence of temptations. As sheep may be driven out of the pasture by the wolf, so is a poor soul hurried into evil to commit known sin, or omit known duty, by the incursion and shock of temptations, though for the main he doth adhere to Christ by faith, love, and new obedience. Thus Peter was drawn to deny Christ, and many are drawn in the violence of a passion to do things which their hearts do utterly condemn and disallow. In a storm it is hard for a skilful pilot to steer aright; and though it be dangerous to dash against the rocks, yet Christians come off without a total shipwreck, though they may be sore bruised and battered. In such hurries God's children may go astray, but God will not suffer them to be totally lost. David wandered far as well as Saul, but God sought David again; he would not lose him so. A strong temptation may drive us out of the way, as sheep when thieves come are driven out of the fold, whither else they would not have gone.

3. The Lord may withdraw himself for just and wise reasons, and then, when the shepherd is gone aside, we have neither wisdom to direct ourselves nor strength to defend ourselves; as when Moses went away for a while, how soon did Israel corrupt their way! So if God be gone, we see how little we can keep ourselves. God left Hezekiah to try him, 2 Chron. 32:31. God will show us what is in our hearts, and that our standing is not of ourselves. We represent ourselves to ourselves in a feigned likeness, and therefore God will truly show ourselves to ourselves. We do not know what pride and passion and carnality lies hid in our hearts when he is present, warming, comforting, quickening, guiding, directing the soul in the way to life. Now, God, by withdrawing, will show us the folly of our wisdom, and the weakness of our strength, and the pride of our

humility, and the passionateness of our meekness. Divines distinguish of desertion; they say that there is desertio correctiva, and desertio erudativa—a desertion by way of correction, and a desertion by way of instruction. Sometimes, by way of correction, because of former sins, or some unkindness, or ungracious dealing with God—God withdraws; and there is a desertion by way of instruction, to teach us to know the sovereignty of grace, and to know our own weakness. Usually both go together in the same dispensation. It is very hard almost to imagine that the same dispensation should not be both instructive and corrective. But the reason why they distinguish thus is this, because some dispensations are more clearly for correction, and others more clearly for instruction, but usually they go together. We provoke the Lord by some slight or unworthy dealing with him, and then the Lord corrects us, and corrects us that he may instruct us, to see our all depends upon him, and how he should be prized in these things.

4. The fourth reason is some special disease, it may be not yet cured, in our going astray like a lost sheep, even though our hearts be right in the main with God. It may be some corruption too that they cherished, some carnal interest which is too near and dear to us; either worldly, ambitious, or sensual lusts. Though these reign in the unconverted, yet they dwell too much in a heart that is gracious, and so may prevail sometimes to turn us away from God; something there is which we may call our iniquity, Ps. 18:23. Though in the general we keep ourselves from it, as an upright heart will, yet it may sometimes foil us.

Use 1. Let us stand upon our guard. Oh! let us not leave the boat to the stream, for there is an erring straying disposition in a great measure left in the people of God. Consider, Satan is subtle and assiduous in tempting: 1 Peter 5:8, 'He goes about like a roaring lion;'

he is searching up and down after the prey, and an unwary and unmortified soul soon falls into his snare. The flesh is ready to close with the temptation as soon as it is presented; and therefore the best of God's children had need be circumspect and diligent: 'Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation,' Mat. 26:41, lest you be surprised unawares by some sin or other. There is enough corruption in every one of you to betray you to it, if you be not aware; and your resisting graces are very weak and imperfect in degree, and (which is one consideration more) the danger of a fall is very great, for thereby God is dishonoured, 2 Sam. 12:14, and your own peace is mightily ruffled: Ps. 32:3, 4, 'My moisture was turned into the drought of summer, and I was filled with roaring all the day long.' Yea, and a stumbling-block is laid before others, and you may destroy those for whom Christ died; and woe be to men by whom offences come, Mat. 18:7. Under the law, the Lord ordered that if two men strove and hurt a woman with child, that her fruit departed from her, he should surely be punished. To hinder birth was counted murder, so to hinder those that are coming on by any sins of yours in a way to life. If the offence be foul, you may feel it long afterward, as an old bruise is felt upon every change of weather; and this sin may cost you dear, though your salvation be secured. This should make us stand upon our guard; it shows that a Christian should live in constant vigilancy and daily conflict with sin, and deny the desires of the flesh, that he may love God, and live to him.

Use 2. It shows us the need of the new covenant, wherein the pardon of sins is established. All the saints that ever lived have had their failings, and what would become of them, even of God's own children, if there were not a forgiving God, and a gracious covenant, a way found out to remit their offences? Ps. 130:3, If the righteous God should call us to a strict account, how could the best of his children stand before him? So Ps. 143:2. It would go ill with all the

world if strict justice of law were still in force. All are guilty, and all must perish, the holy, humblest soul cannot abide the trial of that court; not only God's enemies, but his servants cannot. The good they do, it cannot be laid in balance against the evil; it would yield no relief as to remission and pardon. Plainly, if the guilt of sins remain upon us, our duties will not compensate with our sins. But such was the Lord's mercy, that when we all like sheep had gone astray, the Lord found a ransom for us, and laid upon Christ the iniquity of us all, Isa. 53:6, that there might be pardon for poor creatures.

Use 3. It teacheth us, again, the necessity of dependence upon God's care and power for our spiritual preservation. Of all creatures sheep need a shepherd, so do we a spiritual shepherd to keep us from straying, to reduce us from our wanderings, to weaken our distemper, to drive away the wolf. In short, these two considerations will enforce the necessity of dependence, the indefatigable malice of Satan, and the unknown weakness and imperfection of the saints.

1. The indefatigable malice of Satan, and his unwearied diligence in tempting us to sin; his hatred and envy against God and mankind is such that he leaves no man untempted. He would not leave the Lord Christ untempted. Especially in some regards above others he labours to draw the children of God into sin, because he knows their sins, by reason of their profession, will give great occasion of scandal to the weak, and blasphemy to the profane and wicked. Now, as his power is very great, so is his subtlety and diligence. That which Hannibal said of Marcellus perfectly agrees with him; whether he gives or takes the foil, he ever renews and reinforceth the fight. When Job had carried it very innocently in his prosperity in a dangerous time, yet try him in adversity, Job 1:12. Nay, when he had carried it off in a very grievous trial, as the loss of his goods and children, Job 2, &c.

2. The weakness and imperfection of the saints. How easily, if we take not more diligent heed and care, may we fall into sins, both with respect to the weakness of our understandings and perverseness of our affections!

[1.] Our understanding is so weak that we are ignorant of many things necessary to be known; for we know but in part, 1 Cor. 13:12; and if we know something in general, we do not know it as we ought to know it, 1 Cor. 8:2. How is that? Either we fail in particular application, as the heathens that knew there was a divine, an eternal, and almighty power in general, yet were vain in their imaginations, in their discourses, and practical inferences. Or if we should know how to use these truths, if we know them habitually, yet we do not actually consider. Here is a great part of man's misery, being hurried by a multitude of business or violence of temptation, that being laid asleep by the pleasures of the flesh many times fall off. Though men have a perfect knowledge of their duty, and how to apply it habitually, yet actually do not consider; their sin carries them away: 'They consider not that they do evil,' Eccles. 5:1. Thus for the understanding.

[2.] Our affections are so apt to be led by sense and not by right reason, that there is many times great danger that in seeing we should not see, lest seeing, knowing, and approving that which is better, we should embrace and follow that which is worse, act contrary to our knowledge and conscience, Rom. 2:18. Thou approvest the things that differ, yet doest thus and thus. Many have an approbation, yet cannot bring forth grace to victory, cannot govern their hearts according to their speculative approbation. Now if a man be such a blind indigent creature, it is his wisdom still to look out off himself, to lift up his eyes to God; that is, the God of our

salvation and our guide, and defence; all our confidence must be in him.

Use 4. We learn hence the encouragement which one hath who is right for the main, but hath run into some errors of life, to apply himself to God to remedy that evil, as the good shepherd who must seek the lost sheep, and reduce him into the right way.

Here let me show two things:—

1. Who are those that are right for the main, and may look upon their sins as particular errors and frailties.
2. What encouragement they have to apply themselves unto the Lord.

First, Who are those that are right for the main, and whose sins are infirmities, such as David's are represented to be here in this text? (for I will go no further than the text). To represent that in five things:—

1. Such as have a conscience, an awful sense of their duty: 'I do not forget thy precepts.' He had transgressed some of God's commandments, but still he had a sense of his duty; that was kept alive in his heart, that awakened him to return again to the Lord.
2. Such as have a habitual will to keep the commandment of God, though there be failings; as David, when he asks for his servant, 'Seek thy servant,' he acknowledged his duty still. God's children may sometimes go astray, but not totally and finally; they never fall so but there remains something that maintains God's interest in the soul: 1 John 3:9, 'He that is born of God doth not commit sin,' he cannot sin, &c. He doth not sin so as to lie in sin; the seed of God still remains,

and so is more easily reclaimed than others. Look, as in Nebuchadnezzar's vision there was represented a tree that was to be cut down by the watchman, but yet the stump of the roots remained in the earth, Dan. 4:23, that is in his melancholy, when he crept on all four, like beasts (I suppose there was not a transformation into a beast), he did lodge in the forest among beasts, and ate their kind of food; yet there was a stump of this great tree that should bud and scent again, there was a stock of human nature that should recover and show itself again; so here, though a child of God behave himself like a brute beast, and be mastered by his sense, yet the root of the matter is still in him; there is something that will put forth itself again. Or as a spinster leaves a lock of wool to draw on the next thread, so there is something left; they do not wholly cast off the fear of God, nor the yoke. No; their souls are habitually bent to please God more than they are to sin: 'I am thy servant.'

3. As here is a conscience of his duty, and a habitual will to serve God, so here is a broken-hearted confession of his error: 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep;' and so a repentance of the sin committed. It is grievous to a child of God in the remembrance of it; the sin is thereby more mortified and subdued.

4. Here is an unfeigned desire to return to his duty, and grace humbly sought that he may be set in joint again: 'Lord, seek thy servant.' He would not remain in this condition still; his desire was to do the will of God, and to live in no neglect; and therefore he complains of his straying disposition, and would fain have it cured: 'Lord, seek thy servant.'

5. The conscience of his sincerity was not wholly lost. Mark, not only the conscience of his duty, but of his sincerity; for he prays still to be sought as a sheep belonging to the fold. I am thine, though I am gone



astray: John 10:3, 'The sheep hear his voice.' Now this evidence was yet left, I am, Lord, thy servant, and I do not forget thy precepts. He was willing to hear the voice of God. In grievous falls it is otherwise. If a man fall grievously (this doth not relate to any grievous fall), then all were to begin anew. That robs all our peace; as David, 'Lord, create in me a clean heart,' Ps. 51:10. After his grievous fall he speaks as if all was lost. David here professeth still his devotedness to God as his servant, his love and respect to his law as his rule; he could own such a thing in it; it was an evil that annoyed him, but it had not rifled his peace.

Secondly, To speak of the encouragement that we have to go to God if this be our case, as the man of God here desires the Lord to seek him out, and to bring him again into the right way. Those that have gone astray, yet should not keep off, but run to their shepherd: 'Seek thy servant.' Why?

1. We have a shepherd that loves us, whereof he hath given full proof and demonstration in that he died for us: John 10:11, 'I am the good shepherd, that lay down my life for the sheep.' He is not only the great shepherd, as called sometimes, but the good shepherd gave his life in a way of ransom to expiate our sins. When he came to seek and save that which was lost, his first work was to redeem them by his blood. If he could find in his heart to redeem us by his blood, and expiate all our faults, he will recover us.

2. It is one great part of his office to reduce his people from their straggling: Ps. 23:1, 'The Lord is my shepherd.' What then? Ver. 3, 'He restoreth my soul.' If the Lord be our shepherd, it is a great part of his work to restore our souls. We fall into the disease of sin, sometimes wander out of the path, in which we should perish, if God did not reclaim us from our wandering. Now, it is his work to restore

our souls, that is, to keep us from going on still in our bypaths; therefore we may come and press it. He is inclined to show favour to those who confess their errors, and for the glory of his grace, and constant love, and sworn covenant, he will not be unmindful of us.

3. He delights to guide us in our wanderings, Luke 15:4, 5. The good shepherd leaves the ninety-nine, and seeks out the strayed sheep upon the hills and mountains, and brings it home upon his own shoulders rejoicing. It is a pleasing thing to Christ to be reducing strayed souls, Ezek. 34:4. He was angry with the under-shepherds, and rebukes them because they discharged not their duty: 'The diseased have you not strengthened,' &c.; and he promiseth his own care: ver. 6, 'I will seek that which was lost.'

4. He will bear with our infirmities, and if humbly sought to, will take care of us. We straggle sometimes out of weakness, and out of vanity of spirit, and lose ourselves through our own folly; therefore Christ saith, 'I will seek that which was lost.' Sometimes we are driven away by wolves. Christ will fetch us back again, that we may not be meat for their mouth. If sin be as a breach upon conscience, he will heal that wound and bind up the broken. If we be weak, ready to straggle, he will confirm us, and strengthen us more and more. Having such a shepherd, this should encourage us more to go to him.

Use 5. Here is caution; take heed not to run into infirmities, as if it were matter of nothing. Why? They must be repented; and it is part of wilfulness voluntarily and allowedly to do that which he must undo again, and necessarily be repented of; as David confesseth his error. Little sins allowed and customarily committed, on the presumption of a pardon, they are not infirmities, but are of a dangerous nature. If you indulge iniquity, you lose your claim as those that are devoted to God; you will hazard this if you indulge

your straying humour. And consider, even infirmities may cost us dear, for though they do not make void the eternal reward, yet usually God reduceth us not by internal grace, but by some smart providence; as David, Ps. 119:67, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray.' God will teach you your duty by briars and thorns, by sharp affliction. And where the distemper is more rooted in us, if it be not an act only, but a kind of rooted distemper, then the dispensation of God's providence may be very sharp. As Paul's thorn in the flesh, when he was apt to be lifted up in pride, he prays thrice: the Lord was terrible to him; possibly it was the stone, or gout, some racking pain, 2 Cor. 12. Though he prays, God would not release him, but still keeps the pain and trouble upon him. So our strayings will cost us dear. To be sure they must cost us repentance, but they may cost us a great deal of sorrow in the world. We should not incur the hazard of God's temporal displeasure. Again, you have no assurance and command of the time and measure of the Spirit's assistance; and therefore, if you give way to little failings, they may become grievous enormities in the end, and when you grieve the Spirit, you do what lies in you to drive him from you, and provoke him to suspend his assistance the longer; and therefore, 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption,' Eph. 4:30.

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ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions July 2019. Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, OR 97068

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