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**MERCY**

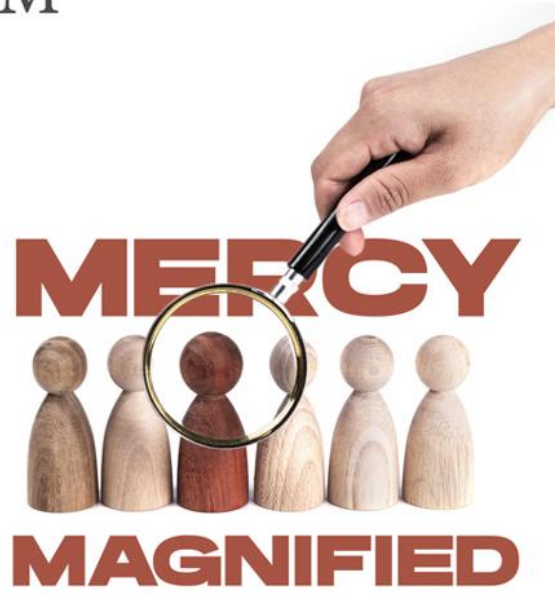


**MAGNIFIED**

*Sermons on the Penitent Prodigal*

**SAMUEL WILLARD**

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# Mercy Magnified

*Sermons on the Penitent Prodigal*

By Samuel Willard

Teacher of a Church in Boston in New-England.

Luke 19. 10. *For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.*

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## **CHRISTIAN READER,**

If the skill in handling of it had any way answered the excellency and utility of the subject handled in the following Sermons, there would have needed no Apology for the publication of them. The Parable under consideration compriseth (in most lively and heart-affecting allusions) many precious truths. Here are divers Mysteries of Providence cleared, pointing to those secret ways wherein God carries his Decree of Election under-ground a great while, before it rise and break out in effectual Calling: here we learn how far a chosen one may run from God before he turns: here we are instructed in the methods God useth to bring wanderers home, and recover the most profligate Sinners by Repentance: the nature of true

Repentance is here curiously limned, and the transactions between God and a Sinner in his Conversion pathetically described: yea, how miserable a thing it is to be a Sinner, how happy to be a Saint is wonderfully illustrated. The fountain of Grace is here opened, and the deep streams in which it runs revealed: and all this accommodated to the most feeling apprehensions of the soul. I confess I have but drawn a veil upon the picture, and am deeply sensible of my own insufficiency to Display these Mysteries: all the account which I can give of the publishing this imperfect thing, is, knowing it the desire and duty of those that fear God, as they have opportunity, to do all the good they may in their places; & God having so far afforded his Presence and Blessing with these Sermons in the Preaching, that many Souls have born witness to the benefit received by them, some of whom have desired they might have the further advantage of their being made public; I was therefore induced for this reason to consent to it; hoping withal (if God sees meet) that it may be further beneficial to some or other, to show them to themselves, and instruct them in the way of life: to give light also to, and help some to prove themselves and their own state: only let it be (for caution) adverted, that I have not here undertaken to confine the Spirit of God in his ways and methods with his Elect, in bringing them home; but only have signified that something of all that is herein expressed is one way or other done in the Soul that is savingly brought over to Christ. The work of Conversion begins to be thought a small thing; and a matter of little observation or wonderment for a Sinner to become a Saint: Many Commence Believers before they were either convinced or humbled; and that is the reason why so many prove Apostates: The great design of the Parable, and aim of this Discourse upon it, is that proud and secure Sinners may be awakened and humbled, and brought off from their empty and undoing courses; and that abased and self-loathing Sinners may be encouraged, notwithstanding all their profuse and

prodigal ways, to return to God in Christ for his mercy, and so may taste of the Royal Feast, and be entertained at that noble Table, which God hath prepared for them who come home from their far Country, by true Repentance. My encouragement is, that out of the mouth of Babes and Suckling's God hath ordained praise; to his blessing I commend this work; and may his Name have the Glory, and your Souls be made so to partake in benefit by it as to give him his due acknowledgment I shall have reached the utmost of my aim.

Who am the Unworthiest Laborer in Christ's Harvest,

S.W.

# MERCY MAGNIFIED

## SERMON I.

And he said, a certain man had two Sons, &c. - Luke 15. 11. &c

The Riches and Freeness of the Grace of God, manifesting itself in the Conversion and Salvation of undone self-ruined Sinners (having by the same Grace first provided for this in the glorious Redemption wrought out by Christ) is one of the great designs of Gospel discoveries. Proud nature slights it itself, and envies it to others. The self-conceited Pharisee deems none to deserve favor but himself, and thinks he hath reason to find fault with a merciful God, if he reveal and apply his mercy to any other. A notable Instance of this, the Chapter afore us doth afford: our Savior Christ is recorded, ver. 1. (and it was not the first time that he had so done) to condescend to teach Publicans and Sinners in the great concerns of their Souls, and instruct them in the way to eternal life: [Ver. 2.] The Pharisees and Scribes (those self-admiring Justiciaries) take great offense, and when the almost did they otherwise than find fault with the spotless actions of Christ? but when offense is taken and not given, the woe denounced falls upon those that take it: Christ therefore doth not for this abstain, lest they should be prejudiced, but strenuously maintains and justifies that which he hath done against all their cavils. The main things which we aim at in this vindication are the discovering:



1. That the Subjects of God's Grace are not Pharisees but Publicans, not men righteous in their own vain Opinion, but such as are sinners both in their own and others account.
2. That God is the first in this great work, he seeks up lost sinners before they seek after him:
3. That the greatest distance which sinners have set themselves at from God, can neither hinder their return, when he comes to convert them, nor give obstruction to his merciful and kind acceptance of them returning. This our Savior Christ illustrates in three Parables; the two former more brief and succinct, and (being taken, the one from a sensitive, the other from an inanimate thing) not so full; the third more ample and large, as carrying in it a very great Analogy to the thing; which last is the subject of the ensuing Discourse.

In order to the entrance upon this Subject, give me leave to premise a few words touching the nature and use of Parables in general.

Parables are properly Aenigmatical or Allegorical comparisons, wherein, under the representation of other persons, actions or things, some other like thing is intended, and commended to our consideration. The word Parable is variously used in Scripture, in Heb. 11. 19. it is used for an exchange, in Heb. 9. 9. for a pattern: but in the Gospel usually for a representation of heavenly truths under earthly similitudes: The Scripture maketh mention of two ends of the using of Parables, which indeed seem to be contrary, which contrariety chiefly ariseth from the different way of expressing them.

1. They are to wrap up mysterious Truths in obscurity: they are a kind of Riddles which require great Study to enode them. Christ to this end spake them to the multitude, of the Jews, Mat. 13. 10, 11. it was not given to them to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom;

they were to break their teeth upon the shell, and not come at the kernel: Hence they are called dark sayings, Prov. 1. 6. and this is their nature, when there is only the proposition, or parable itself proposed, without its illustration.

2. They are to explicate and clear up a Truth to the understanding by the help of the senses. They speak of sensible things, such as are obvious to our eyes, ears, &c. and so lead us to a conception of spiritual things; and this is done when the Reddition or Interpretation of them is given: see Mat. 13, 18. When a Parable is opened, it bringeth more light to men's understandings, than plain enunciations of Truth, and adds to be very useful for the moving of the affections.

Now if we would make a genuine improvement of Parables, we must carefully attend unto these two Rules.

1. That Parables are not so much for Argumentation as for Illustration, or the opening of our understandings to the conception of things: we do not so much argue by a similitude (though there be something of Argument in it too if it be pertinently framed) as clear up the matter we are upon to the apprehension of those to whom we are speaking.

2. That we must not strain the circumstances of Parables beyond the purpose or intent of the similitude, but rest in the main scope of them: for, because they are Similitudes, that which we have to mind is the thing which they are improved to shadow out unto us. The neglect of this Rule runs men into many errors: we must carry this as a certain truth, That such things as are condemned by plain Scripture prohibitions, are in vain sought to be justified by Parables.

But to come to the Parable itself: Let it not be thought vain or needless that Christ useth so many Words, and divers Parables to insinuate the truth of God's free Grace; but let it inform us of our stupidity, & Christ's rich condescendency to us, so as to take so great pains to instruct us in the matters of our Souls welfare.

The main scope of this Parable is to set forth the rich Grace of God to miserable self undone sinners, and the great pleasure which he takes in their Conversion: it therefore presents us with the pattern of a grievous sinner, and discovers to us, both what he is before Conversion, and how he is converted, and what welcome he finds with God upon his return unto him: this is that which is principally intended, unto which there is added a discovery of the malice of carnal Professors against sincere Converts: all of which is shadowed out to us, under the comparison of a Father and his two Sons, and the carriage of each of them. This Parable, amongst Ecclesiastical Writers, bears the title of the Prodigal, because such an one is the primary, and principally intended Subject of the Discourse. The Parable may be divided into four principal parts, besides the introduction to them, in ver. 11. viz. 1. The Prodigals going away from his Father, with the consequences of it, ver. 12, to 17. 2. His return to his Father, with the motive and manner of it, ver. 17, to 20: 3. The entertainment which he finds with his Father at his returning, ver: 20, to 25: 4. The carriage and deportment of his Elder Brother, with the circumstances depending, ver: 25 to the end: I shall endeavor (as God shall assist) to speak to each of these severally and in order.

The Introduction you have in ver: 11: in which we have the persons and relations used in the Parable intimated, viz: A Father and his two Sons: Interpreters variously assign the intent or meaning of these persons: That God himself is here represented under the title of a

Father, is without any just reason of being doubted; for although spiritual Adoption is not here aimed at, (nor, possibly, is there any respect had to the visible and external relation of men to the visible Church, which is a sort of outward Adoption, Rom. 9. 4.) yet herein our Savior intends to express the carriage of God towards men, by that of a Father to his Children: and it is certain that God is in the Scripture, with respect to his Creation and Providence, called the Father of all Flesh. Some by the two Sons understand the Jews the Elder, and the Gentiles the Younger: but I rather close with their judgment, who refer the Parable to the present case and question: Doubtless Christ's design here is to lay matter of conviction before these Jews, and to vindicate himself from their injurious aspersions, of having undue commerce with Publicans and Sinners. By the Elder Son then is intended these Scribes and Pharisees, those strict Orders of the Jews, that made a show of zeal and rigid austerity in legal performances, and so counted themselves the deserving Heirs and Inheritors of the promises: and by the younger is intended Publicans and Sinners, who seemed to be excluded from a right to this Inheritance, men that were self-condemned, and could pretend to no such hopes. It is not my purpose or business to insist on these things only let us by the way observe, That there is many a Man calls God Father, who is yet either a profane sinner, or at least an hypocritical Professor. The challenging of such a Relation, so built, will stand men in little stead. If we will call God Father Profitably, let us carry ourselves as becomes his Children: let not men boast of their Privileges, and for that count themselves Elder Brethren, knowing that there may come those from the East and West, the North and South, that shall sit down with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob in the Kingdom of God, when the Children of the Kingdom are shut out: and on the other hand, it may encourage convicted sensible sinners, to come humbly to God, and to wait upon him in hope; for

those that so do are in the most likely way to find him a Father to them.

But I proceed to the parts of the Parable.

Verse 12. And the younger of them said to his Father, Father give me the portion of Goods that falleth to me, and he divided unto them his Inheritance.

The first part describeth to us the Prodigal's going away from his Father, with the circumstances and events. We must not seek for mysteries in every word: the general scope of it is to show us how far sin leadeth us from God, how many provocations it hath in it, and to what miseries and straits it reduceth us: and this is set forth by the pattern of a foolish ingrateful Son, dealing most unworthily by a kind and indulgent Father; meriting by his carriage to be rejected, and bringing of himself to all miserable exigencies by his so doing. Of this part of the Parable we may briefly take this partition; it consists of two parts, or holds out to us:

1. The folly of the younger Son.

2. The misery which ensued upon it.

1. His folly displayeth itself in two Particulars.

1. His unreasonable demand of Ins portion, to have it in his own hand and dispose, ver. 12.

2. His improvident and wastful misimprovement of it, ver. 13.

1. His unreasonable demand; this is the first thing we have to take notice of in the twelfth verse: in which description we may observe.

1. The person making this demand: the Younger Son.
2. The person of whom he makes this demand, his Father: He said to his Father, Father:
3. The demand itself, Give me the Portion of Goods that falleth to me.
4. The Fathers conceding act; And he divided unto them his Living.

1. Touching the person that makes this demand, he is called the younger Son; whether the Opinion of some will hold, that would have him called the younger, to note his folly and childishness, I cannot well see; though it be a proverbial speech in some Nations, to call a giddy shallow witted person a younger Brother, yet that it was so used among the Jews, I find not: the scope of it may rather seem to be, that our Savior would here (to make way for the illustration of Grace) represent this Son at all disadvantages, whereof this is one. If a Father had no Son but one, he might have greater seeming reason to bear more with him, and pass by many and great offenses, as having no other to confer his love upon; and if he have more than one, the elder Son might promise himself most of his Fathers patience and connivance, as looked upon under greater advantages, and often carrying away the best portion, not of Goods only, but of Affections also: but for a younger Son thus to abuse his Father, this aggravates his fault; and for him after this to find favor, and obtain acceptance when there was an elder Brother, this enhanceth the kindness: and may teach us thus much;

DOCT. That God's Grace oftentimes chooseth the vilest and worst of men to make itself known upon.

Such as men would least regard, God hath many times the largest favor for: Hence that of our Savior, Mat. 21. 31. The Publicans and Harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you: and here the Fathers special love is expressed to the younger Son: all Jesse's elder Sons are refused by God, and David, the youngest is appointed and anointed King: and many that are last are first.

REAS. For the exaltation of free Grace, and manifestation of the Sovereignty of God's good pleasure. Should God make application of his saving mercy, only to men of a sober profession, and civil conversation, and such as are more outwardly advantaged, men might begin to think, that there was some worth in their persons, some merit in their civil carriage, some obligation on God by their visible relation, to give them the Kingdom of Glory: but how when he chooseth such an one, here appears to be nothing of the creature to obscure his Grace: this Peter acknowledged when he saw the Holy Ghost was given to the Gentile Believers, Act. 10. 34, 35. Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, &c. and on this account is our Savior's doxology, or thankful celebration of God's Grace, Mat. 11. 25, 26.

USE. 1. To refute the Arminian Doctrine of something in us foreseen, as that which directs the Counsels and purposes of God about our future good. How contrary this is to the freeness of God's Grace, and the ordinary way of his dealing with the Children of men, very obvious: let the pattern of this poor Prodigal stand forever to confront that Opinion look upon him in all his disadvantages; he had no law to pretend to the righteous observation of, and make a plea from thence; he had no good works to enumerate, and challenge acceptance for; he had no Covenant whence to pretend an interest in, and heirship to the Kingdom: he was a younger Brother, a Prodigal, a riotous Liver, and all that was evil.

USE 2. To encourage such poor Souls, who being under deep conviction, do find nothing of advantage in themselves to rely upon, and are hereupon ready to say, I have nothing to do with the Covenant, I am a poor abject, Publican, &c. why be assured, that you are for this never the further off from saving Grace, nor ought you to be anything the more discouraged from going to God: though you are a younger Son and a Prodigal too, yet if you go to him in Faith and Repentance, he will own thee for a Son, as the Father did such an one: be not then daunted, or beat off with frights and fears, but venture into his presence, he knows how, Where sin hath abounded, make Grace more than abound. But I pass.

## **SERMON II.**

Touching the Party of whom he makes the demand, and title which he puts upon him, Father, whiles he studies ingratitude and proud self-dependence, he puts on a cloak of submission, he acknowledgeth his Father by his title, although he is not willing to be at his dispose; Hence we may observe.

DOCT. I. That the most wicked intentions are sometimes clothed with the fairest pretenses.

Men are not content to dissemble one with another, but with God too. The name Father, is a name of honor, and when the Son calls him Father, he makes a show of acknowledging him in all that dignity, power, privilege which a Father hath of his Children: he comes mannerly, as if he would not grieve him, while yet he is



plotting his greatest disgrace, and how to carry himself most unworthily.

REAS. From the naturally remaining activity of Conscience which is in men, and hath in all some power, excepting such consciences as are cauterized.

Men have something in them accusing or excusing, Rom. 2. 15. Whence it comes to pass that though the hearts and wills of fallen men readily close with and approve of Wickedness yet their natural shame, fear, self-condemnation makes them to palliate and shadow it under self-cheating and deceiving pretenses: thus they hide their sin from themselves, and think they do so from God too.

USE. To Admonish us to look to our own hearts, and in special to beware to ourselves in our Prayers: we often seem to go fairly to God and call him Father, to ask things of him which to us may seem rational: thus the younger Son thought it but fair, that being (as he supposed) at age and discretion to dispose of his own, he might without fault demand his Portion: we many times ask these and those things in prayer mannerly in expression, but let us beware lest for all that the wickedness of our hearts be in it: we ask gifts, but possible to be proud of, and get applause by, and not to serve God with them; we ask comforts of this life, but not to encourage our cheerful serving of God with them, but to spend them upon our Lusts: and when it is so, it is God's greater love to deny us: Jam. 4. 3.

DOCT. II. Wicked men are apt to challenge special propriety in God.

The Prodigal accosts his Father with a title of nearest relation: the degenerate and profane Jews, that had cast off the fear of God, yet must needs challenge him to be their Father: Joh. 8. 41. We have one

Father, even God. Oftentimes there are none more confident then such; God is their God, they profess him, own and acknowledge him.

REAS. 1. From the conviction which every natural man carries upon his mind of his Absolute dependence upon God, and that he alone can make him happy or miserable: for, although this be a truth which man by his sinful courses practically contradicts, and a light which he is not unwilling to extinguish, it is yet so riveted in the mind of man, that he cannot wholly evade it; it sticks as close to him as his being; and hence it follows that though he neither loveth, nor careth for serving of God, yet he would maintain an hope, which may uphold his spirits from sinking, though it be but a rotten hope.

REAS. 2. From the carnal confidence that is in the hearts of many ungodly men: they are not willing to believe themselves such and so bad as they are, but presume that they are as much as any in the favor of God: the Jews thought themselves the Temple, though fallen into the depth of Apostasy, Jer. 7. 4. Men build upon false Grounds, and place their trust in lying words; and suppose that if they can but fairly dissemble with God, he must needs believe them.

USE. This may put us upon it to try our hopes, and prove what it is that our confidence is grounded upon: we say we call God Father, and if we would do so rightly, Consider 1 Pet. 1. 17. If ye call on the Father, —pass the time of your sojourning here in fear. It will little avail us to challenge him to be our Father, if he refuseth to own us as his Children: and let us be assured, that if we do not bear his image, we shall notwithstanding all our pretenses be looked upon as Bastards and not Sons: it is not verbal calling of God our Father, but a careful doing the will of our Heavenly Father, that will render us blessed.

3. We come to consider the demand itself: Give me the portion of Goods that falleth to me. This I call his unreasonable demand: for though at first blush it may look as if it were rational, he asks but his Portion, his Share, that which falls to him by the right of Sonship, and he saith give, seeming to acknowledge his Fathers power, and that it is his bounty which he depends upon: although the word [Give] doth not always intimate a free favor, but sometimes a delivering of a thing out of our hands to another, which is his by right: but the unreasonableness of the demand appears in these things.

1. The positiveness of it: Though he calls him Father, yet he asks in a way of challenge, as though his father had stood obliged to do it upon his asking; as though the Estate were his during his fathers life: he doth not beg, but as it were command.

2. His asking is under the notion or consideration of an interest in it, he calls it therefore the Portion falling to him: the word <H&G> signifies, quod contingit, that which befell him of itself, q. d. that which providence hath made mine, as if he were not beholen to his fathers courtesy; yea, as if it would have been an injury in his father to have denied him.

3. His discontent in being at his fathers disposal and providing, and desire to be at his own pleasure: he seeks to shake off the yoke of his fathers Government, will be ordered by him no longer, and proudly thinks himself wiser than he; he can order things better for his own benefit than his father hath done: The substance is, he would be from under command, and have all in his own hands.

4. Instead of relieving his father in his old age, he would not only leave him, but leave him as poor and bare as he can, would rake and scrape all from him that he can come at, but do him no service at all.

What our Savior alludes to by this portion is the main enquiry. Some there be who refer it to all that furniture of Grace which God bestowed upon man when he created him: but this interpretation cannot suit to the state of Publicans and sinners which is here alluded to, though we had all in Adam, and bear the woeful punishment of his loss. I rather judge it to aim at all that which God bestows upon natural men, to some of whom he gives more, and to some less: It may include all God's common favors, all but saving Grace; whatsoever it is that doth providentially fall to their share, in God's sovereign distribution, as Wit, understanding, good natural dispositions, and all the comforts of this life, as health, strength, wealth, honor, &c. For such things as these is God pleased to make the portion of unregenerate men in this life, Psal. 17. 14: The men of the World which have their portion in this life. See how large it sometimes is Job 21. begin. Psal. 73. begin.

Hence then we may observe.

DOCT. I. That all the common gifts and graces, and worldly favors which men enjoy in this life, are the gifts of God.

The son, however otherwise wicked, yet in this did express that which was true, by acknowledging that his father had his portion in his hand, and at his dispose, & that by a power of sovereignty, although he did not acknowledge the justice of it, as will be seen in the next Doctrine. And truly nature itself teacheth this lesson, and the providence of God in the arbitrary and unaccountable disposal of these things, evidently affirms it; so that a man must first blot out the remains of the Law of nature, and put out the eyes of his experience before he can deny it. It is God who gives to men all their natural faculties, and the power of them, he makes not only the eye, but the seeing eye: Men's understandings and affections, wits and wills,

parts and dispositions, and all the benefits and blessings that in this world they are accommodated withal, are the proper fruits of God's bounty to the Children of men. They are God's gifts in several respects.

1. They have their Original from his power and goodness: God formed the eye, he planted the ear, &c. Psal. 94. 9: God was under no natural obligation to the creature, he owed him not so much as his being, nor any either internal or external ornament of it; he stood no more engaged to give Wisdom to the wiseman, than he did to the fool: Nabal had as much right, and as good a claim to counsel and understanding as Achitophel, &c. Whatever men have they had it of him, and it was his bounty that bestowed it; it is he that gives life, breath, and being to all; and he gives it as he will: He gives men their Songs in the night, i.e. their conveniences and comforts, and he teacheth them more than the beasts of the field, though they practically forget, or do not regard whence all this comes, as Elihu complains, Job 35. 10, 11.

2. They are preserved and upheld in being by him: It is he alone who maintains that which he had before conferred upon us: He keeps our soul in life, eye from tears, foot from sliding, Psal. 116. 8. He is called the preserver of men, Job 7. 20. Men's wits, abilities, powers, comforts and delights last no longer than he sees meet to maintain them, it is his hand underneath that keeps them up from sinking, and when he plucks it away, they die and perish, nor can they draw breath one moment longer than his sustaining providence supports them, Psal. 104. 29. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled, thou takest away their breath, they dy.

3. The power of improving or making use of any of them is from him: Observable is that passage of the wiseman's, Pro. 20. 12. The hearing

ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them. Both the faculty and operation wholly depends upon him; we not only live but move also in him: If he at any time suspend his concourse, that very suspense gives sufficient check to our operations, Pro. 16. 1. The preparations of the heart, and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. A man may have a great estate, but without him a man hath no power to make use of, or take any comfort in it, Eccl. 6. 2:

4. God is by no natural necessity bound to give or continue these favors to the Children of men: Whatsoever he doth upon this score is mere bounty; though men may call it the portion of goods that belongeth to them, and seem to challenge it as due debt, yet God might, had he so seen meet, have given it all away from them, and done them no wrong: He cannot owe the creature anything, except he voluntarily become a debtor by free promise, which puts upon the thing promised the proper quality of a gift.

5. And he either withholds or taketh them away according to his Sovereign pleasure; yea, and bestows them too in what degree he sees meet, without being accountable unto us: Hence proceeds the various distribution of these gifts and favors of God: One is born a natural, another with excellent endowments; one is rich, powerful, highly honored, another poor, ignoble and despised; yea, and the same men are now up and then down; Job in the morning the most opulent and flourishing of the East, at night, poor to a Proverb: Yea, and we can give no reason of the distribution, wicked Dives is rich, and abounds in all worldly delights; honest Lazarus, is a beggar and full of sores; and if a reason of all this be demanded, Solomon will give us the answer, Eccles. 9. 11. yea, and our Savior Christ in Joh. 9. 3.

USE. 1. This affords us a wholesome caveat, that none of us pride ourselves in our inward or outward, natural or moral endowments; these are not things to be gloried in, Jer. 9. 23. Remember you purchased them not to yourselves, you have nothing but what you received: Are you tempted to despise others? Reflect and think who it is that hath made you to differ: Have you excellent wits and parts? Remember that it was of God that you and the veriest fools did not exchange places: Have you wealth? Had God seen meet, this might have been the beggar's portion, and his yours; God made both; it's Solomon's note: Pro. 22. 2. And if once you come to pride yourselves in these things, God can blast them in a moment, and put a disgrace upon your glory: Be not high minded, but fear.

USE. 2. Here see what great reason there is why we should improve all that we have and are to the glory of God: as also the greatness of their sin that misuse them to his dishonor. Be we then exhorted to beware to ourselves what improvement we make of them. It was a convincing reproof which God gave unto them, Hos. 2. 8, 9. She did not know that I gave her Corn, &c. I will therefore return and take away my Corn, &c. God claims all the common gifts which you have received, as his; he saith it is my corn, my flax, he counts your knowledge, your good natural dispositions, your wealth, your power, to be his, and expects that you use them for him; and if you shall do otherwise, he will let you know of it, and it will be a sad reckoning that he will call you unto. God's goodness leads men to Repentance, Rom. 2. 4. And withal know that God designs his own Glory by whatever he doth and if you do not so do too in your improvement of all, he will in a judicial way recover it at your hands, and get himself a great name upon you: God will not be a loser by any of his Creatures: Let this humble and awaken such as have a more liberal portion than others, considering that where much is given, much is expected.

DOCT. II. Sinful man counts all those natural and acquired favors which God bestows upon him, to be his own, and would have them at his own dispose.

There are two assertions contained in this Doctrine.

1. He reckons upon them to be his own: the Son claims a Portion as due to him, he pretends such a right thereto as by the rule of equity he may challenge, and though upon Sovereignty he may withhold it, yet he deems it injustice if he deny him: Thus, whatsoever God is pleased to do for sinful men, they are so far from acknowledging his immerited beneficence therein, that they account it a debt. I know there is something Connexively or Hypothetically belongs to the Creature, but still the whole depends upon God's good pleasure. If God will have such a Creature, serve to such an end, there must be a capacity and suitableness put in to it unto this service and end, else it can never reach it, but all this is only Hypothetical, for God properly owes to the creature neither its being nor its end: & yet vain man thinks he holds all in capite, that he is a natural and rightful heir to all the Wit, Wisdom, Wealth, &c. that he hath. Thus Nebuchadnazzar, boasts of his Babylon, he made it, and for his glory, Dan. 4. 30. and thus they, Psal. 12. 4. Our Lips are our own, who is Lord over us? Reason for this there is none, for if men knew themselves, or would eye the work of Creation and Providence, they would find full conviction of their low & depending estate, and deep obligations unto God for distinguishing undeserved favors: But the Reason of it is from the pride which is in the heart of man, and hath been there ever since he aspired to be as God, whence he doth not willingly acknowledge any subordination or dependence; and is so far from owning of that condition which Creation placed him in, viz. of a subordinate depending Creature, that he counts himself a Lord, and beholden to none, much less then will he yield the merit of that



miserable state which sin hath reduced him unto, in which all the subordinate Covenant-right, whatever it was which before the fatal Apostasy he had, is forfeited. And that men do thus account of these things appears in this one invincible Demonstration: viz. That as they do not thank God for these things, so neither do they aim higher than at themselves in the improvement of them. Have natural men Wit, Wealth, &c. they seek their own glory and not God's: Thus did Herod, Act. 12. 21. Hence they ascribe all to themselves, Hab. 1. 16. They sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their drag.

USE. To convince and reprove this folly in the Children of men: Are these things your own? how came you by them? what did they cost you? whence had you to pay for them? did you put them into, or procure them for yourselves? who was it that taught you more than the beasts of the field, you yourselves, or God? what did that little piece of common Mass or matter merit of God to be made into a man, and not a brute? have you anything which God did not bestow upon you? and what obligation had you laid upon him to do it? wherein stood he more engaged to you than to others? can you keep them as long as you please? or can you entail them upon your posterity? nay, can you say they shall be yours the next hour? if you can do none of all this, why then do you boast and pride yourselves in these things? be assured if you are grown too proud to confess them to be God's it's the ready way not to have them long yours: If Nebuchadnazzar will not give God the honor of making him a man, he can soon let him know how easily he can change him into a beast.

2. He would fain have all these favors at his own dispose: He is not content unless he may have them in his own hands; like a child, who, when he begins to grow up to years, presently grows weary of Family Government, and cannot bear to be limited or controlled in anything

by his Parents, but must have his Estate given him, and set up for himself: This truth is evident by the lives of men; For,

1. They are not content to be restrained and directed by the Laws of God, in the improvement of these gifts; the bounds of the precepts are too narrow for them, they must walk at large; tell them of the Command, they regard it not, and their lives say as they did with their tongues, Jer. 44. 16. As for the word which thou hast spoken to us in the Name of the Lord we will not hearken unto thee.

2. Men do not manage themselves in the use of these things to the advancement of the honor and glory of God in the world: They do not serve God with their gifts, and estates, but serve divers lusts; they make panders of them for their corruptions: Great Wits are usually loose and licentious, great Estates are men's security to sin against God with the more boldness: It is a rare thing to see men that have the greatest visible advantages for it, to be very zealous for God.

REAS. 1. From the rebellion of the nature of fallen man: Man in his Apostasy shook off the yoke of obedience, and cannot endure to take it on him again: Ephraim professeth himself as an untamed heifer, that, not being accostumed to, knew not how to stoop under the yoke, Jer. 31. 18. Man is therefore said to be born as the wild Ass-colt, Job 11. 12. which never keeps in the enclosures, but hath the Wilderness for his range: Mans heart is become rebellious, and filled with a principle of enmity against, which makes him hate subjection to the law of God, Rom. 8. 7:

REAS. 2. From the mistaken opinion which he hath taken up of liberty. Liberty is, if truly known, a most desirable good, and a great part of a Believers happiness, but the heart of sinful man hath foolishly put that glorious title upon the worst of licentiousness, and hereupon he accounts himself to be under intolerable restraint, so

long as he may not take his swinge in the world: and hence he esteems the law to be no better than a prison, which is indeed a perfect law of liberty.

REAS. 3. For Mans fond apprehension of his own wisdom, Job 11. 12. Vain man would be wise. Every natural man is fondly opinionated of his own discretion, though he is indeed a mere fool and Child, yet he thinks he knows better than his Lord and Master: God's Laws are not suited with men's carnal principles; they apprehend they see a great deal of weakness in them, and needless hazards in obeying of them; they are impolitic, and they can prescribe to themselves a better way to attain their ends than that which God hath laid out.

USE. 1. We see here the reason why men of large parts and abilities use them so little to the glory of God, the most part of such men improve their wit to invent sin, and find out vain, carnal, and fleshly devices, and worldly stratagems to advance their own by-ends: others use their estates to feed and humor their lusts, to pamper their pride, voluptuousness, or covetous humors: the reason of all this is, because man being turned away from God, and fallen upon other objects, is not willing to be ruled by God: Had men been free to have lived like Children, and kept their own place, God would have taught them to have better improved his gift. By this therefore you may discover a natural man, he is like a young novice, that is broken away from Family Government, with his reins on his neck, and lives like one that hath none to rule him.

USE. 2. To admonish us that we beware of giving way to this inclination: Our nature is prone to it, and we have therefore reason to be the more watchful against it: and there are two things which if well weighed, will be helpful here:

1. That we cannot of ourselves order anything well, Jer. 10. 13. I know that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh, to direct his steps. Man ever, when left to himself, proves himself but a fool; he is like a poor young Child, who, if he be not carefully watched by his vigilant Parents, will run himself into every mischief that is before him.

2. That except God guide and rule us, we shall but provoke him, and, the more he lends us of his favors, the more exorbitances we shall run into, and thereby make our account the greater and more dreadful; let everyone then receive this conviction, and be there upon awakened to go to God and submit to him, entreating him to take us under his watch, care and rule; then only are we safe when he undertakes to manage us by his fatherly counsel.

### **SERMON III.**

4. We are in the next place to consider of the Fathers conceding act, or yielding unto the unreasonable demand of his Son; in these words, And he divided unto them his living. To argue from hence that there is a Portion due from God to any men, is a straining the Parable beyond our Savior's meaning: This action of the Father is brought in here, only to express and signify to us, God's bounty, that by comparing of it, we may thereby be better advantaged to discover the greatness of man's impiety, and withal to give us to see and consider, how far the Providence of God can, without deserving any just imputation, indulge wicked men, and forward them in their sinful ways. Hence,

DOCT. God sometime grants wicked men large Portions of common favors, and leaves them to use them at their own pleasure, without control.

He gives them their Portion, and lets them go and do what they will with it: gratifies their sinful desires by giving them what they would have, and leaving them to take such courses in the improving thereof, as their own cursed inclination leads them to. In the Explication of this truth, we may consider. 1. The evidence that it is so. 2. Answer some doubts about it. 3. Give the reasons of the Doctrine.

1. For the evidencing of the truth we may Consider.

1. That all the affairs of the world are ordered & disposed of by Divine Providence. Whatsoever any of the Children of men have or enjoy, it is of God. The universal extent of the Providence of God to all affairs, and things in the world, is a principle whereof there is no liberty for any man to make a question, the denial whereof, even in the sound judgment of Meer Ethnics was branded with the deserved note of Atheism: and the confirmation of this truth is fully established in Scripture, assigning to all Creatures an absolute dependence upon the disposal hereof: See Psal. 145. 15, 16. The eyes all wait upon thee &c. and in many other places.

2. That in the course of this Providence many wicked men enjoy all favors in abundance. This is so notorious a truth, that the so frequent, and almost constant observation of it, hath sometimes dazzled the weak eyes of the People of God, and put them to a demure in their thoughts. In Job's time it was not a thing so obscure as his friends would have made of it; hence Job. in his own vindication amply describes it, Job 21. begin. David or Asaph, gives no less a pathological description of it, and his own imbecility in those

offenses which he had taken at the observation of it, Psal. 73. begin, Jeremiah also seems to be in some suspense about it, Chap. 12. 1. What power, honor, and dominion had Nebuchadnezzar conferred upon him? What an oracle of Wit and Policy for his time was Achitophel? What eloquent curious language had Herod and Tertullus; yea, and we may still observe men to be fullest fraught with these common favors, who neither glorify God, nor have any desire to glorify him therewithal.

3. That these men are left of God to use these, or rather abuse them, at their sinful pleasure, is evident in those divers ways wherein he so leaves them. For though it is true that God doth restrain wicked men unto such limits as he sees meet even such as shall make all serviceable to his Glory at last, yet they are in very high measures given up by God; For,

1. That they do abuse them is manifest, by the evil improvement which they make of them: Observe but what course men of greatest advantages do usually steer in this world; doth not all drive at the advancing of the interest of Satan's Kingdom, and not of Christ's? And how few great men improve their power for his Glory? the most do it for his dishonor; hear the Apostle, 1 Cor. 1. 16. Not many wisemen after the flesh, not many mighty, &c. These carnal things for the most part serve but to strengthen the enmity of the heart against God; poor, weak, and base things are they which for the most part follow Christ:

2. God's leaving them thus to do discovers itself in three things.

1. His withholding his spirit, and not affording to them his renewing or assisting Grace, without which no man can improve anything to the Glory of God. When God doth not give a man an heart to be for him, he thereby leaves him to himself, and it is a Judgment; Moses

bewails it, Deut. 29. 4. The Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, &c. And there needs no more but this suspension, the consequent upon which is for men to go in the ways of their own heart, and sight of their eyes: When God intends that a People shall go in his ways, he promiseth them his Spirit, Ezek. 36. 27- I will put my spirit into you, and cause you to walk in my statutes. The spirit of God is the inward guide of the Children of God, they that are deserted by him, are consequently given up to their own guidance.

2. His laying no outward check or restrain upon them to hinder them, or stop their course. When God would no longer leave Israel to himself, he hedgeth up his way with thorns, that he shall not find the way to come at his lusts and lovers, Hos. 2: 6, 7: But where he lets men have a large range, liberty and opportunity, when he afflicts them not, but they prosper and have all at will, and there is no outward control, this is a leaving men: thus God did to Ephraim, Hos. 4. 7. Ephraim is joined to Idols, let him alone:

3. His turning of these favors into snare and provocations of their lusts, to allure and draw them after them: There are many lusts in the heart of man and these outward mercies are suitable matter for them to work upon: and when God lets it be so; yea, judicially orders it to be so; when he gives them their table to be a snare, their wealth a snare their health and strength a snare, their wit and knowledge a snare; when pride, profaneness, and sensuality are [promoted] and nourished by these things, then God gives men up to their own hearts lust, and lets them walk on in their own ways, Psal. 81. 12. He puts their Portion into their own hand, and lets them go whither they will, and do what they please with it.

2. To answer some doubts which may here arise;

1. Whether this doth not cast imputation upon God's Holiness, in giving men his favors, and leaving them to themselves, when he knows they will both abuse them, and dishonor him by their so doing; whereas his Holiness engageth him to seek his own Glory in all his works of Providence?

ANS. That God will be no loser of his Glory by any of his Creatures, in any of his works which he doth to or for them, is a truth not to be questioned; but the ways in which he will be a saver, and no loser, are to be commended to the management of his own infinite wisdom, which doubtless will not fail in the execution, and though he may for a while seem to be on the losing hand, whiles men are running on the score with him, and meditating nothing of payment; yet if we can let God alone till his day and time of reckoning with men, he will then make it to appear that he will be glorified in all the Pharaoh's and wicked men of this world, whom he hath raised up, and suffered at present to abuse his manifold mercies to their own ruin; and were it not that God knows how to get his penny worths out of them, he would never credit them so far as he doth: God will be glorified in Zidon, as well as in Zion.

2. But God seems by this to be an encourager of wickedness, and promoter of man's vile designs: Is not this to put a Sword in a madman's hand, that he may destroy himself therewithal? And if God hateth sin, why would he thus give men advantage to sin against him?

ANS. The wisdom of God in ordering of all things according to his own counsels, is not for us mortals to call in question: God hath other Attributes besides his Justice to make known, and they are his bounty, patience, goodness, long sufferance; and this he can do upon the vessels of wrath, and thereby makes way for the glorious



manifestation of his Justice upon them that are not led to repentance by it, but abuse his goodness, Rom. 2. 4, 5. Neither doth God by this encourage sin, since by his holy Law (which is man's rule, and a discovery of his righteous Judgment) he strictly forbids, and severely denounceth threatening's against all sin: Neither is God's bounty the moral cause of promoting of sin, but hath argument in it to prompt men to holiness and obedience; but it is man's corrupt heart abusing it to such ends; whereas an holy heart is encouraged by all God's benefits to study his Glory and praise, Psal. 116. 12. And yet God may righteously leave man to follow his own wicked heart, and so to misimprove all his beneficence to his own just condemnation; yea, he may raise up Pharaoh to that very end, Exod. 9. 16. But I come to the Reasons of the Doctrine, which will serve further to clear the truth from imputation; and they are taken from the ends which God design in thus doing; which though they are at present secret in regard of the individual persons who are thus left, till God of his Providence shall be pleased to make more full and clear discovery of them, yet in themselves they are always one of these two, for all God's dealings with mankind do ultimately center in the one or the other viz. either.

1. That thus way may be made for the more illustrious manifestation of revenging Justice, in the destruction of sinners: They are thus made vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, Rom. 9. 22. Where much is given, there is much expected: The more that men have abused, the more wrath awaits them: Doubtless a man of great parts and understanding, hath more to account with God for than a fool, the rich and wealthy man, then the poor, a Magistrate, or a Minister, then a private Man: The more advantage Men have put into their hands to serve God withal, the more they have to answer for, you may see what indictments God draws up against Babylon, Isa. 14. Tyrus, Ezek: 27. which had the advantage of other Nations, of worldly pomp and wisdom: For such God hath wonderful plagues:

This patience, and goodness, as they are largely displayed before such at the present, so they, by men's abusing of them, open a way for the more notable executions of Justice.

2. That he may prepare a way to make his Grace notably appear to be Grace, the truth is, God's ways are very mysterious, and past man's finding out; and oftentimes, when we may have reason justly to fear, that such a sinner is mounted on Horse-back, to run the swifter to his own utter ruin, yet even then God hath gracious designs in all this: God sometimes allows a sinner a long Tedder, and lets him run to the end of it, and then pulls him back: God suffers him to lay a scene for his own ruin, and then displays his riches of his grace in saving him from it, when he hath used all possible means utterly to have undone himself: Manasseh in the old, and Paul in the New-Testament stand for eminent examples of this, and the latter of these speaks thus of it, 1 Tim. 1. 13, 14. Who was before a blasphemer. &c. But I obtained mercy, &c. and the grace of our Lord Jesus was exceeding abundant, &c.

USE. 1. To teach us not too much to bless ourselves in our enjoyment of outward favors. God's love is not from hence to be positively concluded: It is the wise man's observation, Eccl. 9. begin. No man knows love or hatred by all that is before him. And yet there is nothing more common than for men to be proud and self-conceited in these things whereas they are indeed nothing else but some of the offal's of God's favors, which he can spare to the swine of the world, and often throws out to them in a plentiful measure: Things common to the Elect and Reprobate are not just matter of boasting; if you have all these blessings, and are wicked in the enjoyment of them, you are not happy but miserable in that enjoyment.

USE. 2. It may also teach us not to grudge at, or envy wicked men, for their great parts, and large estates, or whatever other worldly blessings they enjoy in a more liberal measure than other men: and the more we ought to beware of this, inasmuch as good men have sometimes been prone to be envious at these things, Psal. 73. begin. Yea, the Prophet had a mind to have impleaded God about it, Jer. 12. 1. If God leave them to themselves, they will but abuse and foolishly squander them away, and then you know, the more Talents any have received, the more are to be reckoned for, and if he fared so ill that did but hide his one in a napkin, what account shall he be called to, that squanders many away upon his lust, and dishonors God with them? It would have been better for such men if they had been the veriest fools, and the most obscure persons in the world: And as you have less of these things, so you have the less to reckon for; besides, this will not hinder your happiness in the end, but if you have the grace to be faithful in a little, you shall surely enter into your Lord's joy.

USE. 3. It may afford encouragement not to despair of unregenerate men, although they may at present be left to themselves, and wickedly to abuse all God's favors which they enjoy: God knows how to take them in their months: The poor Prodigal, left to himself, went far, but yet he returns at last, and is graciously welcomed by his Father: If men are bad at present, it doth not hence necessarily follow that they shall never be good: Hence be not put out of heart, do not think your prayers and tears are thrown away, which are laid out for their conversion; yea, but be the more earnest, by how much you see that they may be more serviceable to the glory of God than many others; how much their rich parts, abilities, advantages would bring into the Treasury of the Temple, if God should be pleased to convert them.

USE. 4. It may counsel us all to beware how we desire to be at our own will and dispose; to be left to ourselves, to have our own portion in our own hand: God may grant such unreasonable desires, but if he do, we shall smart for it: Know therefore that every Child of Adam left to himself, will prove a Prodigal: If we are not willing to be under the direction of God's Law, and conduct of his spirit, he may righteously leave us, and then we shall certainly do as this younger Son did, which is the next thing we are to inquire into.

Vers. 13. And not many days after, the younger Son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far Country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

In which words is described to us the second point of his folly, appearing in his improvident and wasteful missimprovement of his Portion; and this discovers itself in two things. 1. His getting as far as he could, with his Portion, from his fathers care and inspection. 2. His improvident and foolish expense of his Estate there, where he was out of sight as he hoped.

1. We are to observe his getting as far away with his portion, as he could, from his father care and oversight, in which there are three things observable. 1. The hast that he make expressed in these words, not many days after 2. that he takes all with him: He gathered all together. 3. The place whither he carried it, into a far Country. I begin with the first.

1. The hast that he makes, as soon as he hath gotten his Portion, now he will be gone; he gets as much as he can out of his father, and when he can expect no more, now he leaves him, makes all speed to be gone, not many days after.

DOCT. Natural men will serve God no longer than may answer their own carnal ends.

Religion is to an unregenerate man nothing but a pander to his lusts: As long as men hope they can get anything to further their worldly interest, they can be (with Jehu) zealous for God: Jehu could destroy Ahab's wicked house, and plead prescription from God for so doing, as though he was afraid to come a whit short of the command and threatening: but now when he hath what he would, all the competitors for the Crown are by this means removed out of the way, now he grows cold in Religion at once, and God's precepts neglected, a further reformation refused, Jeroboam's politick sin adhered to: and if we observe, we shall find that many there are who for by-ends make fair pretenses, and are huge sticklers for God and his ways for a while, who, when once they have gotten some worldly advantage or advancements by it, of a sudden they become other men.

REAS. Because the most Religious natural men have chosen the service of God, not as their end, but only as a medium to attain some other end by: Now a mean is useful but in order to the end for which it is used, but the end is good for itself: Religion was appointed to be man's end, who was designed by the will of God, for his Glory: But carnal men have gotten some other end, which they think better than that which God hath appointed them, and finding (many times) that Religion is a needful step thereunto, they use it as a man doth a Ladder to climb upon, but when they are gotten up it is now of no more service to them, and now Religion is as easily thrown off again as ever it was taken up: It was an imputation which Satan would have cast upon Job, but the event proved it evidently a slander, after he had been upon the greatest trial, that he did not serve God for naught but it will be found a truth concerning multitudes of our

outside Professors: There were many of Christ's followed that were so for nothing but the loaves, Job 6. 26.

USE. 1. This may discover to us a Reason of the Apostasy of many in these times and places. It is not to be doubted, but that here where Religion hath had the precedency, and men have been esteemed of according to the Profession which they have made, that may have taken it up clearly upon this account, viz. to get into credit, favor, privilege, preferment, and hence no wonder, if either when men have been frustrated of what they expected, or have gotten as much as they can probably hope to get by it, it grows an outdated and useless thing with them: This is an hour of trial and he that can maintain his Profession, when to all appearance of sense, it is a losing bargain gives us reason to hope that that man is built upon a more stable foundation.

USE. 2. It may put us upon it to take a strict account and trial of our profession, to see what foundation it is built upon: If it be Sandy, a shock of temptation will overthrow it: If it be for by and carnal ends, those ends, either hopelessly disappointed, or obtained as far as we can hope, will turn us off it: Such a Profession is dead indeed, and moves only by external weights; and if they be either taken off, or run down to the ground, it will cease. The Vitals of Religion consist only in an heart thoroughly persuaded of the glorious excellency of the ways and fear of God, and this is that which will hold out to the end; whereas the other will last but till men have tried to the outside how much they can get to satisfy their lusts with, by professing God and his Service, and when their expectations on that score cease, it will not be many days ere we hear of them, that they have trussed up all, and are gone: see then to the foundation upon which you are built, if ever you hope to stand.

## SERMON IV.

2. He takes all with him; He gathered all together; He leaves nothing behind him: What this all is, we have already heard, viz. All the outward blessing, favors, privileges which God bestows upon the Children of men, be it more or less. Hence,

DOCT. Sinful Man left to himself, denies God the glory of all his goodness.

Let God bestow upon him whatever he pleaseth, for him never so much, yet he takes it not as any engagement upon him to serve God, or glorify him, but dishonoreth him with all. This was the sin which the Prophet laid to the charge of that wicked King, Dan. 5. 23. The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified. And this Paul declares to be the guise of men who are strangers from the grace of God, Rom. 2. 4, 5. The evidence and ground of this truth will appear if we lay together these particulars.

1. The heart of every natural man is estranged from God: they are born so, Psal. 53. 3. They go astray as soon as they be born: there is an estrangement in the understanding, they know him not, though God be near them, they see him not; though he doth all for them, they do not observe it, Hos. 2. 8. She did not know I gave her Corn, &c. There is an estrangement in the Will, they care not for God, they are his enemies; yea, enmity itself against him Rom. 8. 7. They are estranged in their affections, hence they are called haters of God,

Rom. 1. 30. Now by virtue of this estrangedness, they are wholly indisposed, and utterly averse to the fear and service of God.

2. There are many lusts in the heart of every unregenerate man to which he is enslaved man, by seeking an unbounded liberty, had changed one good Lord, for many tyrannical ones, that have usurped the Dominion over his soul, Tit. 3. 3. Serving divers lust and pleasures: The word intimates one that is addicted unto, or wholly at the devotion of another, and is used to express our serving of God: Men's lusts rule them, their work and business is to gratify them, and it is not one single lust, but there are many of them, and he is at the command of them all; each claims an empire over the soul, and sets him on work to make provision for it, there is the lust of the flesh, or carnal concupiscence, the lust of the eye, or covetousness, the pride of the life, or ambition, these must all be obeyed.

3. The lusts of an unregenerate man are insatiable: Like the horse-leeches two daughters, or like the barren womb, they never say they have enough, or like the grave, which is still gaping after more, hence so compared, Rom. 3. 13. Their throat is an open Sepulcher. all concupiscence labors of a dropsy, the more it hath, the more it craves. When a man hath done his utmost to make provision for, he can never give content to his carnal desire, Pro. 27. 20. And there is great reason for it, because concupiscence hath diverted the heart of man from the only soul satisfying object, to empty things.

4. The outward favors which God bestoweth upon men are the proper objects upon which their lusts are placed, & from which they seek their satisfaction. Every carnal heart hath (with Demas) embraced the present world: When man left God he went to the Creature, and what God had provided to express his bounty to him in, that hath he abused to serve his lust withal: It is the world and the



things of the world that his heart is in love with, which is opposite to the love of the father, 1. Joh. 2. 15. God hath in just judgment set the world in men's hearts, for that they know no other good, nor seek any other content; not God himself, but his common favors are their portion, whether natural endowments, or occasional blessings.

5. The natural man can spare nothing of these from his lusts: The truth is, all is too little; everything is lost that doth not feed some lust or other: every lust is like Nabal, only generous and noble to itself, but churlish to David: It may be said of every lust, as was said of great Alexander. *Unus Pellaeo juveni non sufficit orbis*. Hence then it is no wonder if so many lusts think themselves straitened; the natural man is bound to please all his lusts, and there is not enough in a whole world to give them content, and then it is not to be thought strange, if he cannot spare anything in the world from them.

6. The serving of God and serving a man's lusts are things directly contrary the one to the other; and hence a man cannot do them both. That man who seeks his own glory, cannot seek the Glory of God; they that mind their own things, cannot mind the things which are of God: And this is the very reason why men can allow God nothing of glory at all, because they think they shall then wrong themselves, dissatisfy their own lusts: If men should sincerely improve their wit and parts for God, they should then lose their own commendations from men; if they should lay out their health, and strength, and power, and wealth for God, their lusts would want it: and, it being so that they are full resolved in it to deny their concupiscence nothing, hence they gather all together, and leave nothing behind, and resolve that they will not part with so much as an hoof for God and his service.

USE. 1. Hence we see one great reason of the vanity of the creature: The Apostle tells us, It is subjected not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected it in hope, Rom. 8. 20. The reason of it lieth here, sinful man hath gotten it into his hands, God hath providentially given him a Portion of these things, and he through the vanity of his mind, having it at his own dispose, hath carried it away from God, and diverted it from its native and proper use, which was for the service of God, to his own wicked and sinister ends, by virtue whereof it comes to be in vain. The creature hath in its self its usefulness, every creature of God hath a natural capacity of being improved to his glory, man might as well honor God with his wit and parts, and substance as dishonor him; they are Talents which might be traded withal for him, but a wicked heart having seduced him, he turns them into another stream, and so in application they lose their end and become vain.

USE. 2. Here also see the reason why persons of greatest abilities and advantages, are many times the most averse from doing anything to the glory of God: We often see it is so, and wonder whence it comes so to be; we think, oh, what, and how much might such and such a man do for God, if he would but propound it to himself as his business to live to him? but alas, as they have a great portion of God's blessings, so they have great lusts to gratify, and they live at their devotions hereupon, let God call for their service, let their consciences tell them they wrong their own souls. Let the name and interest of Christ call never so much for their assistance, lust countermands, sin that reigns there will not have it to be so, and men have taken it up as a practical resolution, that they will sooner displease God than their lusts.

USE. 3. Let this serve to convince unregenerate men of their great wickedness, and show them what a dreadful account they will have to

give in to God at the great day: Consider of it solemnly, is it not enough for you to go away from God yourselves, but must you needs carry away the whole creation of God's goodness with you? Shall God gratify your desires in giving you a large portion of his bounty, and can you not give him one hearty acknowledgment for it all, but because he gives you in abundance, do you therefore say to the Almighty depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways? Job 21. 14. Be convinced of folly and madness, and hence consider.

1. This is a most ungrateful requital of God; it is a most shameful abuse of his goodness: he may well expostulate with you, as he did with them in, Deut. 32. 5. Do ye thus requite the Lord, Oh foolish people and unwise? Do ye not know that goodness leads unto Repentance? Rom. 2. 4. And will you resist that leading, and instead of it lead goodness into rebellion? cannot Jesurun wax fat, but he must presently kick? out of doubt a merciful God is grievously provoked by such things as these.

2. Do you not know that by thus doing you are laying up treasures of wrath for yourselves? And will not your account be fearful and tremendous, when the fuel of that fire in which you shall burn eternally, shall be made of abused goodness, and your torments shall bear proportion to the favors which you have now enjoyed; when the creatures, which are now groaning under the pressure of violently imposed vanity, shall come in as witnesses against you, and be earnest pleaders that the wrong which you have done them may be righted upon you? Be therefore awakened to see the vileness of your own hearts, bewail your grievous folly, seek repentance and pardon, that you may be cleared of this dreadful charge in the great day of account.

3. We come to consider of the place whither he carried his substance, into a far country: i.e. to get as far out of his fathers sight, and care, and counsel as he could: Hence observe this.

DOCT. The more God doth for sinners, the further they seek to get away from him.

The Prodigal could not be content to live by himself, near his father, where he might have been advised and directed how to improve or husband his estate to profit, but he goes in another Country; yea, a far Country: Thus wicked men (like Cain) go out of the presence of God; hence they are said to be far from God, Psal. 73. 27. The wicked's Apostasy is here compared to a journey, men go step by step, they grow worse and worse, by abusing of all the goodness of God afforded to them. In the explication we may consider, 1. What it is to go away from God? 2. The evidence that sinners, especially prospering sinners so do, and the reason of it.

1. What it is to go away from God?

ANS. There is an essential, and a providential Omnipresence of God, from which no creature can withdraw itself, for in it we live, move, and have our being; this presence fills heaven, earth and hell; it is the preservative of all beings, it is the godly man's joy, and the wicked man's prison. Neither is this going away from God a local motion, but a spiritual withdrawing. We may therefore observe, that besides the general presence of God's common and universal Government of the world, by which he is intimately present with all creatures, and besides that presence of special and powerful Government, by which God leads all reasonable Creatures to an everlasting estate, and in which he drives wicked men to their end, and gets Glory by them, there is also a presence of special Grace, often pointed at in Scripture, by which God guides and leads his own people by his

Word and Spirit, in all their way affording them counsel and support, and guiding them to Glory, inwardly by his spirit, outwardly by his Ordinances, and Providences: Now when men refuse to be under this conduct, and withdraw themselves from it, now it is that they do both say unto God depart from us, and do also themselves depart away from God; and this is done.

1. When men do all they can to put God out of their thoughts, Psal. 10. 4. absence is a great help to forgetfulness; But wicked men desire not to think of God, or his Word, of his promises or threatening's: Men live without God in the world, Eph. 2. 12. They live at such a rate as if there were no God to Judge or call them to an account for their ways: There is a practical Atheism in the heart of all natural men, Psal. 14. 1. And they are gone far from God, having, as much as they are able, shaken off the thoughts of his being, power, holiness, Justice, &c.

2. When men indulge themselves in wickedness on presumption that God is a great way off from them, they take it for granted that he intermeddleth not with their affairs, sees not, nor takes any notice of their ways and doings; they may sin, and live according to their own pleasure, and God is not at all concerned in it; such were they, Ezek. 8. 12. They say, the Lord seeth us not, the Lord hath forsaken the earth. Men would fain have it to be so, and as they would have it, so they presume, and please themselves that it is so.

3. When men, by falsely interpreting of God's patience and benignity, do presume him to favor and approve of their wicked ways; so they argued, Psal. 50. 21. These things thou hast done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself. Prospering iniquity is in their account, Piety; sin unpunished, settles their resolutions, and fortifies them in their courses, Eccl. 8. 11. And what

is this but to go far from God, when men make such a God of him, that if he were so, he should cease to be God? Make him to be one that loves your sin, and approves of your iniquity, and you do manifestly deny the God-head.

4. When men go on in evil ways adding sin to sin: all sin sets the creature at a distance from the holy God; sin is of a separating nature, Isa. 59. 2. Your sins have separated between you and your God. Every transgression is a step from God, when men throw themselves into vain courses they are upon their journey; and as they grow more bold in wicked ways, they get further off from him: Sin is called a going a whoring from God, & what is that but a going from the lawful husband, to the bed of a stranger? Apostate Judah is therefore said to be gone far from God, Jer. 2. 5:

5. When men put away from them the fear of God: this is the character of a wicked man, Psal. 36. 1. There is no fear of God before his eyes. This is interpreted a forsaking of God, Jer. 2. 19. God dwells in men's hearts by putting his fear into them, when he causeth them to delight in his ways, to love his commands, and to be afraid of his Judgments: but when instead of this, they thrust away his law, refuse to hearken to his counsel, and are not awed by his Judgments, their will cannot submit to his, when conscience is stifled, or lulled asleep, and men sin securely and without any dread, now they are gone far from God.

2. For the evidence of the Doctrine that it is so, the Scripture is plain; it is the very character of wicked men, as we heard, Psal. 73. 27 They that are far from thee, shall perish. And that their prosperity emboldens them to it, the Psalmist also ascertains us, Psal. 55. 19. Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God. And he that observes the boldness, security, confidence, fearlessness,

irreclaimableness of wicked men, especially if the providence of God smiles upon them, will easily conclude these men are far from God.

REAS. 1. From the natural rebellion and enmity of the heart of man against God: Men hate God, they abhor his holiness, his Laws disrelish their carnal aims and ends, cross and contradict their natural desires and concupiscence's; his promises savor not with them, his threatening's irritate and provoke them: the sum is, proud and sinful man would be at the greatest possible freedom to take his own course without any control; and knowing how contrary God's Government is to his wicked will, how opposite God's grace is to his impiety, hence he desires to be from under it: Men cannot so quietly and securely sin whiles God is near them: The Prodigal knew that if he dwelt near his Father, he must expect to be disturbed by wholesome counsels and admonitions, and that would mar a great deal of his mirth, he should not with so much liberty and content follow his mad courses.

REAS. 2. From the natural tendency there is for the sinful heart of man to be strengthened in this rebellion by outward prosperity: When men have their Portion large and great, they hope they can now vie it with God: the Prodigal had no more use or need of his father, now he had his Portion, and therefore as long as that lasted he regarded not to come at him: If God speak to back-slidden Judah in her prosperity, She will not hear: prosperity makes men proud, Psal. 73. 5, 6. They are not in trouble as other men, therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain. Men can now do well enough without God, yea best when he is furthest off from them; and they must be reduced to an afflicted and distressed condition before they will think of a return, Hos. 5. 15. We hear nothing of the Prodigals returning to his Father till his folly had laded him with insupportable misery.

USE. 1. This serves to discover the great wickedness, and horrid ingratitude of the Children of men, that strengthen themselves in rebellion by that which should soften and break their hearts: That those cords of kindness by which God would bind & engage their souls to love him, must be turned into cords of vanity to bind their hearts more strong in rebellion against him. It is a very sore charge which God draws up against Judah, to the observation of which, as a thing most unreasonable, and horrible, he calls heaven and earth as witness, Isa. 1. 2. I have nourished and brought up Children and they have rebelled against me. How righteous is the condemnation of sinners, that God kindness should set their hearts more against him, that goodness should engender hatred? This is a strange Antiperistasis. Let it then convince us what wicked hearts we have naturally, and humble us before God, that it should be so.

USE. 2. It plainly discovers to us that the conversion of a sinner is not of himself, nor from any leading motion or inclination of his own heart: for the very Bias of a man's heart doth naturally draw him to turn away from God, yea to run as far from him as possibly he can, and he would never return anymore, if God did not draw him by his Almighty power: There must be the irresistible attraction of the Spirit of God to incline the soul to seek him, before it will look after him: If all God's outward favors make him worse, there is no hope till there be something inward to change his heart, that he will ever be better: Wonder not then if we see men growing worse under the best of means and outward mercies, for the sinful nature of man takes advantage by these things to be so; but let us pray earnestly to God for the pouring out of his spirit and work by his power.

USE. 3. To teach us that it is sometimes a great favor of God to withhold from men the enjoyment of a great Portion of outward blessings, or take them away from them: Augustine 's Periissem, nisi



Periissem is observable; whither would some men have gone, how far had they run away from God, had he not laid chains of affliction upon them, and bound them in fetters? David was going astray before he was afflicted, and how far might he have gone if God had let him alone? think not yourselves then to be hardly dealt withal, because you are held under the restraints of Providence, the day may come when you may bless God for it.

USE. 4. For trial; It may put us upon it to examine ourselves, and see what improvement we make of those blessings and favor which God indulgeth us with. Much of our true spiritual condition is to be known by this Have you God's blessing? have you parts, or worldly comforts? and do they make you weary of God's ways, more careless of his fear, and more secure in sinning? these are the notes and characters of a Prodigal, only a rebellious Child will do so: But if God's favors are thankfully received, and his cords of love engage your hearts to love him and to study his fear; if they make you more to delight in his ways, and diligent in his service; if they oblige you to improve them to his glory, this is indeed a fruit of his spirit & grace in the soul, and to be acknowledged as an evidence that his spirit dwells in you. They only are godly men who do carefully honor God with all his gifts; and if you so do, you shall be acknowledged by God, and he will never repent of what he hath done for and bestowed upon you.

## **SERMON V.**

We have thus heard of the place whither the young son carried his estate, telling us that wicked men love to have the greatest advantage to sin without any restraint: We might also have taken notice of the comparison which is used in the text to illustrate his Apostasy, viz. a journey, he took his journey: or went a Pilgrimage: whence we may take notice of this.

DOCT. That wicked men grow to the height of profaneness by degrees.

Men conversing in the region of sin are upon a Journey, every step they take sets them at a farther distance from God: Wickedness grows upon men by degrees, there are few men that commence high profane per saltum: from but a visible and sober profession to the top of wickedness there are divers steps a man hath to take, he must first leave a great deal behind him before he arrives at it: he must root out the efficacy of good education, he must suppress the activity of a stirring conscience, he must put off and get rid of his accustomed modesty, he must lay by the awe and dread: God's Judgments; and all this requires time and travail, and pains: it will cost a man something to be flagitiously wicked, that hath been formerly professedly religious: you may see the exemplified in Saul and others.

USE. 1. This may tell us one Reason why men, though grossly degenerated, are yet so hard to be convinced of their wickedness they fell into it gradually, and by consequence insensibly: Apostasy comes fair and softly, and men take no notice of it, but think themselves as good as ever.

USE. 2. It may be a warning to men, especially young men, to beware of the first step of sin: carefully avoid the first temptation of giving way to loose and vain courses▪ You may think to stop at pleasure, but

it a cheat, and if you are drawn in, you there by step into a way which leads far from God and will, in a while, arrive to such an high degree of profaneness, as you would at present abominate the very thought of, if wonderful mercy do not hedge up your way, and give check to your progress.

2. But I pass to the next particular, or the consideration of the improvident and unfrugal expense which the young man employed his Estate in; And there he wasted his substance with riotous living. In which take notice: 1. What he did with his Estate, He wasted it: 2. What it was he wasted, his substance: 3. Where he wasted it, there, viz. in that far Country: 4. how he consumed it, in riotous living.

[He wasted] The word [[H&G](#)] signifies the most prodigal and unprofitable throwing away of a thing that can be: Beza thinks it to be a Metaphor from a whirlwind, that scatters and throws the chaff hither and thither: it intimates such an expense as knows no measure, nor regards any end or use, minds neither how much is, nor for what it is laid out.

[His substance] The word signifies either ones being, or that which should uphold ones being, in which latter sense it is here intended: It was that which he should have improved for his livelihood, for his comfort, which was given him to improve, and trade with for the upholding his life.

[In riotous living] The word signifies all manner of intemperance, lasciviousness, prodigality, all the ways which profuse men can take to bring to naught that which they do enjoy: It signifies both excess in experiences, and excess in delights; and therefore it is variously translated [[Profusely](#), [Prodigally](#), [Luxuriously](#), [Lewdly](#), [Ungraciously](#)] The word [[H&G](#)] according to its derivation, intimates, a reserving of nothing, but making all fly, as our vulgar expression is; under

which is shadowed to us the course which every ungodly man take with, and the use unto which he puts all God's favors. Hence,

DOCT. Unregenerate men are the greatest spend-thrifts; for they unprofitably wast all their substance upon their lusts.

It is not only a waste, but a riotous waste, which is the worst sort of unthriftiness in the world: We may take up the Explication of the Doctrine in a few Propositions.

1. The common favors of God are unregenerate men's substance: their wit, their health, their wealth, their privileges, &c. are their portion, which they have in hand: I mean,

1. They are that which they place their dependence upon, the things in the improvement of which they hope to get their living; they place their confidence and trust in them, Pro. 10. 15. The rich man's wealth is his strong City. They have nothing else that their heart relies upon, they call them their goods, because they expect to have their whole good from them, they take up their rest and content under the shadow of these things.

2. They are the Talents which God hath sent them to improve for his Glory, and for their souls good: God hath put them in their hands with a command that they should trade them for him, and in his service: The Lord expected that Belshazzar should have glorified him with his Power, and Kingdom, and great glory which he had advanced him to, Dan. 5. 23. He counts that men have by these things an advantage in their hands to do him service, that they have a price, and if they are not wise in the improvement thereof, for the exaltation of his name, he reckons it for an inexcusable transgression, Rom. 2. begin.

2. Ungodly or unregenerate men do spend all these upon their lusts. This is the nature and guise of every man in whom the fear of God is not, not to honor him, but to sacrifice them to his fleshly desires: What else did degenerate Israel do with God's favors? Hos. 2. 8. For she did not know that I gave her the Corn, &c. which they prepared for Baal. And the Reason of this is, because, as men place their happiness in satisfaction, so the natural man's satisfaction consists in giving content to the carnal demands of his own mind; if these be not satisfied he is discontent: sin hath so blinded the eyes, & deluded the judgment of fallen man, that, till Grace comes in to inform him better, he knows no blessedness but in pampering and cherishing the craving concupiscence of his soul: The rich man, Luk. 12. placeth his whole happiness in his souls ease, and that by giving himself full scope to eat, drink, and be merry; and that is a real description of the frame and opinion of every son and daughter of Adam, before the work of conversion passeth upon them.

3. For a man thus to do with the favors of God, is to waste and spend his substance most unprofitably. When a man useth his wit, wealth &c. to maintain his pride, his sensuality, to encourage him in profaneness, &c. this is to play the greatest spend-thrift, for.

1. Man's great business which he hath in this life to trade for, is happiness: It is that which every man ought to aim at, and is indeed the thing which all the Children of men do propound to themselves, Psal. 4. 6. Many there be that do say, who will show us good? They differ indeed in the way and means (and there are almost as many courses taken to obtain it as there are men that seek it) yet all naturally agree in this one end, viz. that they may do and be well: and the right improving of suitable means to this end, is the great thing where in man's wisdom doth most properly consist: If a man misseth of happiness in the end, all the labor that he hath been at here in this

world is lost, this is the very thing which the wise man so often, in the book of Ecclesiastes calleth Vanity, which is nothing else but a man's losing his propounded end, viz. his ultimate end, i.e. Blessedness: tis only the loss of this which can prove a man to have lived in vain, and spent his time, and cost, and care unprofitably.

2. The only way for us to improve the favors of God's unto the enjoyment of happiness, is in the service of God. As happiness is our subjective, so is the Glory of God our objective end; and God hath tied these together so inseparably, that man cannot possibly make a separation of them, without his unspeakable loss: The way to Glory is to glorify God, our glorifying of him is to be expressed in our improving of his bounty, to us aright, in honoring of him; those that honor him, he will honor. There is nothing we can do sincerely for God, but it redounds to our well-being; parts, power, privileges, and all other creature enjoyments used for God, do help forward our everlasting salvation. Hence

3. All is utterly lost which is laid out upon our lusts: whatsoever men use to the service of their own desires ultimately, it's abused, it is wasted in riot, it is grossly thrown away. For,

1. God is hereby dishonored, and so greatly provoked against us. It is the highest affront which we can offer to God to serve his enemies with his favors, and hither do all the corrupt inclinations of our hearts lead, so much as we allow to them, so much we rob God of, we take it from him when we give it to them, and this he will not bear at our hands: it is the great quarrel which God hath with the world of sinful men, that he is forgotten and disregarded while they seek and serve themselves, Hos. 1. 16, 17.

2. Man's happiness and everlasting wellbeing is no way promoted or furthered by it. A man is never the nearer happiness by all that he

bestows upon himself, he may bless himself, and others may bless him, Psal. 49. 18. But he is not in the way to true blessedness: He may swim in pleasure boast himself in his delicacy, and count himself a happy man, but he is not nearer Heaven and Glory. Nay,

3. Hereby he obstructs and woefully hinders his own salvation; instead of helping it forward, it is the great obstacle to it; it sets him further off from true good: When once the Prodigal is gotten into his far Country, and is now fallen to wasting his Estate in riot, he is in the most hopeless condition of all. A sinner settled in any course of sin, is most unlikely to return to God, whiles he is gratifying his lust, and tasteth a great deal of sweetness in his beloved sin, now he cannot endure so much as to think of the state of his soul, & thus his heart is hardened; he is in his heaven already, & regards not any other, his stakes are pitched down, and his pleasant ditty is, Soul take thine ease: Every sacrifice offered to his lusts sets God further from him, and him at a greater distance from God; nay, his account is increased, and his reckoning will be so much the more dreadful; what he thought should have done him good, doth him the greatest hurt; treasures of wrath are heaped up, out of the treasures of abused goodness, and all that which is so abused for the gratifying of his lusts, is turned into so much fuel for hell: And therefore may all that which is used in a way of sin be well called wasting and spending, Jam. 4. 3. Ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

USE. 1. For Information, learn we hence,

1. What man is like to come to if once he be separated from God's gracious presence. If God leave men, they waste all: That every unregenerate man is not as vile and profligate as ever any was, is of God's restraining grace; if he but withdraw, and that man be left to himself, all goes to rack; let God do never so much for him, put never

so fair a price into his hands, he but abuseth and squandereth it all away: It is therefore a dreadful judgment of God for any man to be left to himself: See, Psal. 81. 12. Rom. 1. 16. Every distance that man stands at from God, is one step to his ruin and undoing.

2. That every natural man is a very fool: For what is folly if this be not, for a man to waste away his substance unprofitably, to spend away profusely what he should have improved for his eternal benefit and good? How well might this young man have lived if he had traded with his Stock, & improved it in a way of commerce? whereas by living on it, & laying it out lavish he wasteth all: And what might many men do for their souls, had they the prudence to trade with their Stock in heavens market, and exchange their outward blessings for spiritual benefits? but herein lies their folly, the young man thought his Estate would bear him out, thus men outwardly favored of God, think they may live as they list, and this their way is their folly.

3. That every unregenerate man is in the high road way to misery. The young man while he lives high upon his Stock, is bringing it apace to that bottom, it is wasting. The common favors of God are of a spending nature, and, if laid out upon men's lusts, will quickly be gone, and come to nothing: There is nothing but saving grace that will increase by the expense, everything else wears out and decays: If you see a man giving up the rains to his corruptions, and pleasing himself in his vain and profligate courses, you may easily read that man's misery in his life.

4. That man himself is the blamable cause of his own undoing. The young man may thank himself if he hath nothing left him to live upon, his own prodigal wasting brought his Estate to ruin. I am far from their opinion, who think that a natural man, by his



improvement of his best gifts, abilities, opportunities, can lay any engagement upon God to give him saving grace; but this is certain, that God will charge upon sinful man every abuse of any part of his goodness, and this shall leave him without excuse: that men spend their time, and strength, and estates in the service of sin, shall bring them under great condemnation in the last day, Hos. 13. 9. Oh Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself. Though fallen man cannot of himself save himself, yet it is his own folly that undoeth him: If men had used what they had to God's glory, they might have done well, that they have done otherwise is of their own sinful inclination: If men would yield themselves up to the guidance of God's holy spirit, they might obtain eternal life; if they will (with the younger Son) get away from God, and follow their own corrupt genius, and by so doing they undo and ruin themselves forever, let them thank their own foolishness.

USE. 2. For expostulation with unregenerate men, and those especially upon whom God hath bestowed much of his common bounty; I would plead with such as these in the words of the Prophet, Isa. 55. 2. Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread? See and be convinced of your desperate folly and madness: God hath given you understanding, health, strength, comforts of this life, the Gospel of grace, and the means of spiritual good; why do you spend all this in riot, lay out all in that which will do you no good at all? wherefore is all this waste? but more particularly.

1. See and be convinced that whatsoever you gratify any sinful lust withal, is mere riot; all is lost that lust gains: The covetous man boasts that he is no Prodigal, he saves, whiles the other spends, he lays up whiles the other lays out, and doth not lay out unnecessarily; but know it, whiles you are feeding your covetous humors, and satisfying that eager desire, and greediness of gain, you do but

consume it. The voluptuous man thinks nothing is ill spent that may afford his sensual part any satisfaction, and whereof he may taste the sweet: but know it, a life of pleasure is but death, 1 Tim. 5. 6. She that liveth in pleasure, is dead while she liveth. The ambitious man reckons it a glorious purchase, if with all his wit, policy, and advantage, he may obtain favor and esteem, applause and credit among men; but what hath he bought for his money but smoke, and the East wind? We may say the like of every other lust. There is no purchase but that of Salvation, but is dearly bought with the expense of our precious time, thoughts and care; all this sets you further from heaven and glory, and if you could purchase the whole world at the hazard, much more than with the sale and loss of your souls, you would deservedly procure the name of shameful unthrifths.

2. Seriously ponder and consider with yourselves what these courses will lead unto: Remember therefore that your times and advantages are given you to trade for eternity withal, whereas that is nothing which you are now taking care for less than that: Are you not building a rotten fabric that will tumble down on your heads? Are you not laying a sandy foundation which will be washed away with the flood? and then what will become of all your expense? What emolument, what comfort will you get by all? Do not these ways make you forgetful of Eternity? Do they not harden your hearts from the fear of God? and what but misery will be the fruit of such things? Think what an exchange you are making, what it is you part with, and for what; it's Heavens Glory, the love of God, everlasting blessedness which is set before you, and all things are to encourage you to embrace and make sure of it; this you part with, this you sell, this you put away from you for Esau 's mess of Pottage.

3. Consider what is the reason of all this, how it comes to pass that you are in a way to such a loss; is it not because (with the Prodigal)

you are gone from God, and gotten into a strange Country? there be wasted his substance; If you had kept with God, you might have done well enough: the very root of man's misery is departure from God, thence all his lewd and riotous courses derive their original: Let it then serve to convince you that you are at a distance from him.

4. Learn hence to account yourselves truly miserable, so long as you remain in this separation from God; and let it be an awakening consideration to drive you to be diligent in seeking after, and serious in returning to him: Know then, that all God's Talents must be reckoned for; what you waste away riotously, God will call you to a strict account of it, and woe will be to him in the great day of Judgment, that hath thrown away God's favors upon his own lusts: If the man that hid his Talent in a napkin was so severely dealt withal, what then will be done to him that cannot say here is thine own, but shall be enforced to this confession, I nourished my pride with thy favors, I sought mine own credit by the parts and understanding which thou gavest to me, I cherished mine own applause by the honor and power which thou didst afford me among men, I fed my lusts with the creature comfort I enjoyed, my visible privileges and Church membership made me secure and careless of my soul, I boasted myself in my wisdom, strength riches, Gospel-favors, and did not seek to make my boast in God alone; will not this be a sad and doleful account? What need have we then to be now very [concerned] in endeavoring to get our account cleared, whiles, in way of true Repentance we may obtain this favor through the blood of Jesus Christ, and, whiles we have time and opportunity, to get into a better way of improving ourselves? Could men but lay out that time, and strength, and heart for God, which they do upon their lusts, that would turn to their account, and that which is now justly accounted waste, would be found to be the best thrift: this would be the way to be happy in another world; then should we have a Portion to live on,

when the foolish worldling hath spent his, we should never be brought to want: Beg then of God to grant you this wisdom, and labor with so much the more diligence to redeem the loss that you have already sustained, who have hitherto been spending away so much without profit, knowing that if you waste and expend all now upon the vanities of this life, and the carnal delights of the present time, you will have nothing to live upon in the days of eternity, and then your present wastefulness, will be (too late) found to have laid that unhappy foundation of your utter and eternal undoing.

## **SERMON VI.**

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. - Vers. 14.

IN the younger Son's departure from his Father, there were two things proposed as observable. 1. His folly. 2. His misery. Hitherto we have been considering the former of these, the words read bring us to the latter. hence

It follows to consider of the misery which ensued upon this folly: As it is described, verse. 14, 15, 16. The spiritual intendment of this part of the Parable, is to show us to what miserable exigencies God brings a sinner, and what distressing difficulties he reduceth him unto in order to his recovery and return to the true way of blessedness: As also to discover the miserable shifts that poor sinners will make to redress their misery, before they will think of seeking the grace of God: these things will more fully appear in the prosecution.

This misery of the Prodigal is described by three things. 1. By the leading cause or occasions of it, with an awful effect: verse. 14. 2. The sordid course which he took for the relieving of himself in his distressed condition, verse. 15. 3. The utter failing of all relief and supply, even the poorest of all, verse. 16. of these in order.

1. The leading causes or occasions of it, &c. verse. 14. 1. The causes or occasions here mentioned are two. 1. The first is from himself, or his former prodigality, when he had spent all. 2. The other is from the place which he was then in, there arose a mighty famine in that land. 2. The effect of this noted in the verse. is, the distress which he was now brought to, He began to be in want. His misery began from himself, his own riot had wasted his substance, and now all was gone. It was a sad alteration which befell this poor young man, a few days ago he was swaggering and spending with the best, his Coffers full, and he scattered it by handfuls, but now nothing remains, all is gone and that not by some unforeseen inevitable providence (there had then been some room to have pitied and excused him) but by his own improvidence; he had lived to be his own Executor, He had spent all. The Word in the Text signifies to consume a thing, not in a way of prudent and frugal expense, but in foolish prodigality. That poor man is the blamable cause of his own misery; though it be a plain conclusion from the words, yet, having hinted at it before, I pass it over here. The main thing I would now take notice of in the words is, that his own stock failed him, all his portion came to nothing. Hence.

DOCT. All that which natural or unregenerate men place their confidence in, will fail, and leave them short of Salvation.

Let men have never so much of God's common favors, without saving grace all will come to nothing in the end: Man may make a

flourishing show with these things for a while but they will not last: There are things which the Scripture tells us perish with the using; such are all the common gifts of God. For clearing this truth, observe.

1. That is properly said to be spent which is laid out unprofitably. What men lay out for advantage, is not spent but improved; but that which brings in nothing again, is not only expended but mispent: The Scripture expresseth it by laboring for the East-Wind, by laying out money, for that which is not bread, by laboring in vain, &c. For a man to give his Gold or Silver, in exchange for Cockles, Pearls for Pebbles, Substance for Shadows, this is that which is deservedly accounted spending.

2. Nothing is profitably laid out, but what is expended for Salvation: This is the only saving purchase that any of the Children of men can trade for: A part in Christ is the only Riches, a Crown of Glory is the only honor, a place in the Paradise of God is the only pleasure which is worthy a Man's laying out of cost and care for; and other purchases are empty, and will be found loss, Eccl. 1. 3. What profit hath a man of all the labor which he hath taken under the Sun?

3. Though all mankind are (in some sense) trading for Salvation or Happiness, yet the greatest number are there trading for it where it is not to be found; they are seeking the living among the dead; they are seeking heaven in hell, happiness among an heap of miseries: One man's wealth is his God, another's pleasures are his felicity, another climbs the Pinnacles of honor to seek for the seat of happiness: Nature leads men no higher than something under the Sun, and therefore such as see no higher must of necessity spend their time, their wit, their estate, their all.

4. The best improvement that nature can make of God's common favors, cannot bring them to find and enjoy blessedness: Let men use

them never so frugally, and prudently, according to the measures which they take of prudence, and frugality, yet they will fall short. Nature could never by its own strength arrive at saving grace, nor by the outward help of all the common blessings of God: A man may have health, strength, understanding, ordinances, many advantages, but let him make his best of them, all will fall short: It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, Rom. 9. 16: these all are either but nature which is in a man, or but external things which he enjoyeth, and man cannot climb up to Heaven on the rounds of such a Ladder.

5. Hence when the natural man hath done his utmost, and taken the greatest pains in laying out his time, strength and estate, he loseth his soul: Nay, it is very certain, that though a man be never so proud and confident in those many blessings God which he hath conferred upon him, yet sooner or later, he shall have a through and sensible conviction of his poverty; that he hath nothing which is saving, that he hath wasted and missimproved that which he had to unprofitable mispense Job. 27. 8.

USE. 1. Here we see what a poor Portion unregenerate men have, and therefore what little cause have they of pride, or the people of God of envy. God gives his enemies a great deal, but alas, what is it? Poor perishing stuff, spending, wasting substance, not indeed worthy of that name: Think of this you that are proud of your wits, your wealth, your honor, your privileges; what it is that you pride yourselves in? or what will you do when all is spent? and such is the miserable exit of all that you are boasting yourselves of: you now flourish and spread yourselves, ere it be long all will be gone, and nowhere to be found, Psal. 37. 37, 38. There are thousands of casualties to which the object of your trust is daily exposed, you are sure of nothing; nay, there needs no more but yourselves and your own folly to spend it: You may for a while carry before you a breadth in the world, and

bless yourselves in what you have, but it will not be long ere your mouths shall put upon you the name and title of fools, Prov. 5. 11, 12, 13. Your wit will not direct you to happiness, your wealth will not purchase you honor and glory; if not before, yet certainly in a dying hour they will all leave you, and then your naked soul passeth into eternity with nothing to live upon forever: But if God intend your souls good, you shall, before that time, have your eyes opened to see that all this is nothing: your dependence upon these things shall be broken, and your hopes vanish: Lift not then up the born on high, nor speak with a stiff neck. And you that are the Saints of God, be not envious; go with the Psalmist into the Temple, see their end, and then shall you find all that, which your mistake hath called happiness and prosperity, to be nothing better than painted misery; yea, woeful infelicity. Little reason hath that man to make his brags, of the love of God, that hath no better an argument to ground his title upon. It had been well for some men if their Portion in this world had been less, some hopes there would then have been, that they would have been persuaded to have sought a durable portion in another.

USE. 2. Let it teach us all not to content ourselves with anything but saving Grace. Be not satisfied with no more but a Portion of outward favors; it is a great misery to think we have enough when we have nothing else: Let us not be well pleased to sit down with things that will not last or hold out: Remember thou art an everlasting creature, and must endure forever, and what good can a perishing portion do thee for eternity? Think with yourselves, what will all these things avail me, which will not last out those infinite ages in which I must have a being, and without a Portion, must needs be miserable? It is our Savior's advice to think of this when we are about laying up our treasures, Mat. 6. 20, 21. All God's common gifts and favors are liable to the moth and rust and thief; the present enjoyment of these things is so far from being an happiness, that it will be an aggravating



circumstance of our misery when they are gone, that once we had them, when we shall have nothing left of all, but the sorrowful remembrance: Learn therefore Luther 's resolute prayer, Lord, I will not be put off with these things. Remember the worlds wise men with their wisdom go to hell, wicked men will ere long be stripped naked; let this put you upon it, to seek for yourselves a Portion which endureth forever.

USE. 3. For encouragement and comfort to the People of God; I mean such as have gotten a part in saving Grace, you may want, or be scanted in all outward blessings, you may have but a little of worldly wisdom, a little Estate here, little favor among men, but be not discouraged with these things; have you saving Grace? you have the better Portion, and therefore better, because it shall never be taken away; this is durable riches; the hypocrites shall perish, but yours shall endure: All the wit, good nature, moral righteousness, specious profession, vain hopes and confidences of ungodly men shall all perish; they live now jovially upon them, but all will shortly be spent, and then where are they? or what shall they do? but your Grace, though little, shall not waste but increase, your hope, though languid, shall endure; saving Grace shall never go to decay; you shall live by your faith here in this world in despite of all adversity and temptations, and this faith shall never leave you, till having accompanied you in death, and waited upon you to eternity, it hath brought you to the possession of the Kingdom of Glory. That man is a rich man indeed, that hath believed in Christ; he is rich in possession, he shall never want; and he is infinitely rich in reversion, for Jehovah is his portion, and all the glories of Heaven are his heritage: bless God then for his grace; if wicked men owe God thanks for a spending portion, how much more do you owe him of gratitude for that which endures unto eternal life?

2. The other cause of his misery, was from the place that he was in; there arose a mighty famine in that land. Here are three circumstances, observable which made his misery exceeding great. 1. The time when the famine came, it was in conjunction with his poverty, when he had spent all. 2. The measure of the famine; a mighty famine. The word signifies strong, powerful, prevailing: It was far greater than ordinary. 3. The place where it was, in that land: which was in a far Country, where he was a stranger, at a great distance from his Father and Friends. Hence,

DOCT. The World then most of all deceives and fails, when men have the most need of help.

If the young man had now had a good Estate in his hands, as he sometimes had, he would not have been so pinched with the famine: Rich men usually rub through, it is the poor that are most oppressed in times of scarcity: or if the famine had been more moderate, he might with more ease have scrambled for some supply, but when all fails, who should relieve him? or if he had been among his friends and rich kindred, they would have so far pitied him, as not to have suffered him to starve: but he is poor, and in a far Country, and a famine raging, and now what shall become of him?

The famine deciphers to us the deficiency or of spiritual supplies, or of Soul-food: Whereas it is said, that then it arose, we must take notice that things are many times described according to appearance, and not reality: This spiritual famine was there before, but the young man, as long as he had something of his own, minded it not, but now when all was spent he began to feel it: The substance of this Allegory is, that a distressed sinner shall find that the world hath no relief for his soul; if a man feel anguish and misery coming upon him and go to the world for help, he shall find nothing there but want and

distress; all the world cannot ease an oppressed soul. For further Explication, Consider.

1. The natural man, standing at a great distance from God hath no other hope or help to take to in his distress but the world: This far Country is the place which this sinner dwells in, and therefore here he must look for his succor; he hath by his own grievous folly, put himself under the necessity, either to find relief from the world, or else to perish; i.e., he knows no other way.

2. Nay, he hath chosen and preferred the friendship and presumed fidelity of the world, rather than to have his dependence upon God, he went himself into this far Country; he was not driven to it by necessity, but went to it by choice, it was the place of his desires; he had rather trust in the uncertain world than a living God; this is a thing so natural to fallen man, that Paul is fain to give a strict charge against it, 1 Tim. 6. 17.

3. Hence in all his straits and wants he goes to the world, and seeks his redress there, with hopes to find supply: This is described by men's wandering from mountain to hill: The sinner concludes that if it be not here to be found, it is nowhere; he knows of no other content or soul-satisfaction, but what ariseth out of the dust, and is to be gotten by the worlds favor.

4. There is an hour of distress which the riotous sinner shall bring upon himself: It is certain that he shall find himself at a loss and undone; conscience will sooner or later speak, and tell him that he hath wasted all; hope will in a while fail, carnal confidence will shrink up to nothing, and his soul be filled with perplexing sorrows.

5. Now the world in which he trusted will without doubt leave him at a loss: The Magazine from whence he hoped to fetch his livelihood,

will be found empty, the Cistern will appear to be broken, and have no water in it; he shall be far from finding it able to direct him to true & solid comfort, or so much as point him to that which can indeed give him life. If a sinner be perishing, he must needs perish for all that the world can do to save him; here is not one morsel of the Bread of Life to keep a soul from Perdition; if he could gain it all, that would not save his soul, Mat. 16. 26. If he ask for bread, it gives him a stone, if a fish, a scorpion; he may wander from sea to sea, seeking the bread of life, and find none: Hence the wiseman, in answer to the great question, where good is to be found, or where a man may fill himself with substance, and find content, returns it in the Negative, respecting the world and all that is in it, and that because it is empty, vain, and vexatious, in the proof whereof he spends a whole Book, viz. that of Ecclesiastes. If a man wants eternal life, he may ask every creature for it, but all answer no, it is not in me: he that doth for the present rely here, and hopes it shall be well with him, doth but feed upon ashes, and cherish himself up with false expectations. As man cannot find his life in himself, so neither shall he mend himself in the world; he goes but from one want to another, from a famine within doors to a famine abroad; if he goes to the world he dies, and if he rests in himself he dies; he doth but rise to fall, he doth but go abroad to meet with that death which was coming home to him.

USE. 1. To teach us the certain necessity of the perdition of all those souls that have nothing else to trust to in their need, but this world and the vanities of it. What fools are the sons and daughters of men, that lay out their time, and thoughts, and care to get into the worlds favor, and secure to themselves a refuge here? What will you do when the day of distress comes upon you? Men think they shall inherit substance, but they purchase nothing but famine. The world seems full to a carnal mind, he thinks it affords all that heart can wish, if he can have this to friend, he fears no want: but the soul shall

to its cost find that it is empty, void, and waste. The soul of man must have something to live upon, or else it is undone, this is the great want, and for this want the creature hath no supply; whiles it feeds the body the soul starves: It is not itself soul-food, it cannot be the happiness of any man, neither can it be the price of the purchase of it; earths Money will not pass in heavens Exchange; riches profit not in the day of wrath, Prov. 11. 4. What is it then that the Children of Men are doing, whiles they dig deep, and labor hard to build up a fabric for themselves with such materials, with which they cannot ward themselves from wrath, buy themselves out of the hands of death, nor bribe the flames of hell? he that hath laid in nothing else to live upon to all eternity but this vanishing world, must needs famish: and therefore,

USE. 2. Let it be a loud and awakening Call to all unregenerate sinners, if you would not suffer the utmost distress of the most pinching famine, to get away from the world Make hast out of your natural state, live no longer in this far Country; your distance from God is your misery, return to him and you shall be happy: You that live jocund and pleasant, you that think all is well, and shall be so though you add iniquity to sin, be persuaded to take this warning: As much pomp and splendor as you now live in, as satisfied as you are at present, ere it be long a famine will come, a mighty famine, and what will you do then? Oh, fly from it before you come to the utmost distress: Did Abraham go to Egypt, the Shummite to the Philistines, being warned of a temporal famine? Do not you then despise the warning, to come out of Egypt and Philistia, to escape a spiritual famine: Be assured, it will be a sore and distressing thing to feel wrath and misery seizing upon you, and have nothing but a vain world to go to; miserable comforters shall you find all these things to be, they will not afford you one dram of consolation, nor give one morsel of quiet to your souls; you may cry and roar in your distress,

but there will be none to help you; God whom you have forsaken, it may be will not, and to be sure the world in which you have trusted cannot: It will be a complicate misery to be a bankrupt, and in a far Country, and there to be seized with a mighty famine; now you are called to avoid this: All you want is with God, for though the world be empty, he is full; that can supply no spiritual necessity, he can satisfy all; there you must needs perish, here you may be saved and satisfied: There is bread in Egypt when all other countries have none, but look one upon another, and pine and die: There is no want with God, there is nothing else but want everywhere else: Do but open your eyes, the Lord open them for you; the famine is upon you now though you discern it not; see and be affected with and fly from it: and let this be your encouragement, that though you have provoked God by going from him, and abused his goodness, yet, as there is with him enough and to spare, so upon your penitent return you need not doubt or fear, but to find relief and welcome with him, as will also appear in the sequel of the Parable: Only do you know your misery, and fly to God in time to get a redress of it; so shall you find in him, all that which is in vain and to no purpose you have been seeking in an howling wilderness, in a famishing world.

## **SERMON VII.**

2. Thus of the causes of, or leading occasions to this young Man's misery; it follows to take notice of one great effect arising from it, according as it is expressed in this verse. He began to be in want. The word that is used in our Text signifies to be, or to fall behind, and is wont to be used of such as come too late to a Feast, as the five foolish

Virgins, Mat. 25. 11. or of men that are left behind in a Race, as Heb. 4. 1. The meaning of it in our Text is, that he now began to be pinched with indigence, now the sense of the misery of his condition came upon him: Such is our English phrase, to fall behind, and to be brought into straits. Things are here expressed (as we heard) according to appearance, a man is not pinched with want till he feels it, and is oppressed with it: Hence,

DOCT. When God intends saving Grace to any, he first makes them effectually sensible of their own miserable and undone state.

God, in the ordinary and usual method of converting sinners under the means of Grace, begins with the discovery of their empty, needy, poor and miserable condition: Here began the ground and motive of the young man's returning to his Father, though it did not presently work to this end; had he not been reduced to the greatest straits, he had never thought of returning; his being in want was that which set him to seeking relief, and this is it which did at last (though not immediately) drive him home.

Among the works ascribed to the spirit of God, there are some which are called common and preparatory; common, because they may be found in Reprobates; preparatory, because they are wont (in the Elect) to be steps towards conversion, or works preparing the soul, as a rational Agent to entertain Christ as he is tendered in the Gospel.

The first of these works is Conviction, which hath two things for objects, viz. Sin and misery; one is the cause, the other the effect. Conviction usually proceeds Analytically, it first discovers the effect, and from thence searcheth after the cause. The conviction of misery is that which here hath its consideration, that of sin follows afterwards. The first remove of the young man was, he felt himself to be in want, he found when the famine came and increased, that now

he had nothing to live upon. In the Explication we may consider, 1. What is this conviction of misery 2. How it is wrought? 3. The reasons of the Doctrine.

1. What is this conviction of misery?

ANSW. It is the first legal work that is usually wrought in a sinner, making him to apprehend his present state of perdition, notwithstanding all that is either in himself, or in the world. It is, though not the full of a lost estate, yet leading to it, or a step towards it. In the Description observe,

1. I call it a legal work; now Divines are wont to call those works legal.

1. Which are usually wrought by the application of the Law, in which is the curse, and by which is the knowledge of sin, Rom. 7. 8. Misery ariseth out of the curse, and the curse comes upon the breach of the Law, Gal. 3. 12. The Law therefore firstly discovers it.

2. Which are common works, and not in themselves saving; and so the word legal is often used in Divinity, of which nature is this before us: Conviction of misery may befall hypocrites, Isa. 43. 14. Yea, of itself this is hell begun in the soul, or conscience.

3. I call it the first legal work: my meaning is that God usually begins here, and so man for the most part is made to look upon the effect, before he discovers the cause, yea is led by it thereunto: he first sees and feels misery upon himself, and thence is led to see sin as the blamable & meritorious cause of all this misery. Man usually apprehends that he is condemned, before he apprehends sin to be the just condemnation, he feels himself miserable, before he justifieth God: for though it be sin which the law condemns, and



hence he must so far see sin, as to know that he hath broken this law, yet he is not made to know sin in its just merit, but rather counts it a rigor of the law which makes him angry, with that and not with sin, Rom. 7. 5.

3. The proper effect of this conviction is to make him know and feel his perishing condition at present, that he is now going to perdition, viz. that he is under the curse of the law, bound over to eternal death, and that he is in the way to it, being held under the curse: the young man found himself perishing with hunger.

4. The efficacy of this conviction is that it unmaskes the former delusion under which he lay, making him to see that he hath no remedy against this misery either in himself, or in the world. In respect to himself, he finds that he hath spent all, in regard to the world, he finds that there is a famine in that land, and the conclusion that ariseth from hence is, that he is sensibly in what: i. e. he still wants that freedom from the curse, notwithstanding all God's favors, or his interest in the creature, this is the sum of this conviction: in which, though we must confess that there is a change now made in the sinner, yet it is not a saving change of his state. For,

1. His state was as bad before, only the difference is, he then saw it not, but now he doth, he thought himself rich, and the world a trusty friend: both these were mistakes, and now he finds them so to be; so that the substance of this charge is, now he is convinced that before he cheated himself: Hence,

2. His state is not properly mended by this conviction; for though he sees his misery in some degree, yet this sight doth not free him from it: Conviction is not Conversion, though God can, when he pleaseth, make it a step towards it: Conviction doth not make any man really better, though it doth give us hopes that where the spirit begins he

may carry it on; for Cain and Judas fared never the better by it, though many souls have, by Divine Grace.

2. How this conviction is wrought?

ANSW. 1. If we speak of the Author or efficient Cause of this work, it properly belongs to the spirit of God, who (in a work of common grace) brings the creature to the sense and apprehension of this misery. I deny not but that rational conviction may be gathered and applied from the rational consideration of things, but that this sensible conviction depends on a special work of the spirit, appears.

1. Because the same means of conviction are used with others, who yet are not thus convinced: We preach sin and misery to a great many; discourse with them of the distressed condition of the poor prodigal man; but it is but now and then one that is touched with remorse, and cries out of it, or acknowledgeth it sensibly.

2. Because the same means may have been formerly used with this person, and yet did not gain their effect: It may be he had heard the same thing many a time, and his judgment assented to it to be truth, but yet he regarded it not, nor was affected with it: yea, possibly he had had it more urged, with more strength of argument, and pressed with more morally persuasive motives by others, but yet it never gained upon or got within him till now; and why now rather than at any other time? there was as much to have driven it home before; it must needs therefore proceed from the power of the Holy Ghost working when he sees meet. But,

2. If we speak of the means by which it is wrought, I answer, God's spirit doth it sometimes by the ministry of the Word, sometimes by the concurrence of wisely ordered Providences, speaking in them to the soul; and it is a very frequent thing for God to back the Word in

his providence for the bringing of a sinner under the power of this conviction: yea, providence sometimes begins and gives a general conviction, the Word then sets in and more particularly points out his condition: Providence many times tells a man that he is miserable, and then the Word comes and tells him how he came to be so: More particularly.

1. The Word of God gives a full demonstration of the natural state of all mankind; it tells us both what we are, and how we came to be so; it declares the wrath of God, and shows how man came to be subjected to it; it convinceth by clear and plain evidence; it is a Glass in which a natural man may see his own face, without those paintings wherewith carnal reason is wont to varnish and hide it. It is one of the ends for which the Scripture is given, 2 Tim. 3. 16.

2. Divine Providence concurs to the setting home of this truth, thus.

1. God often brings secure sinners into an afflicted condition, who were before that prosperous, and whiles prosperous, they were secure; but now God's begins to open their eyes: Thus it was with this younger son, Text, and Context.

2. In this afflicted estate men are apt to ponder and think of their condition: Affliction puts men upon consideration, and makes them usually more ready to hear, and take into their meditation such things as may concern them, Hos. 5. 15.

3. Now God many times brings home the Word to them, and moves them to a more serious and particular consideration of it: Their own concerns are now in it, whereas they looked at themselves as unconcerned before: In prosperity they would not hear, but now the Word is made more to affect them than formerly.

4. Now the spirit of God takes an opportunity to make many truths which before were very unwelcome to them, and they had put them away, to be thought upon, and credited, so that,

1. They now feel that they are mortal, and must go shortly to another world, they could not endure to think of this formerly, nor did practically believe it, but now they apprehend it as a reality, and matter of concern.

2. They are made to discern that trust in themselves and in the world is vain, and that by reason of the foregoing truth: They now remember that they have been hitherto thinking of time, and providing for that, but had forgotten eternity: They thought of no heaven but in the enjoyment of the world and favours of it, but now they see that all this will not avail them for an everlasting state.

3. They now remember the curses of the Law against such as do these and those things, or against all the progeny of fallen Adam in a natural condition, and are convinced that they are the men against whom they are denounced; and now apprehending themselves hasting to eternity, and to have done nothing in way of providing for it, this becomes a terrible thought in them; and they are extremely terrified with the thought of a future state, for which they have been taking no care: The severity of the word, and the fears of death oppress them, and they know not how they shall do to go into another world, and now they begin to be in want, all is leaving them, and they are naked and have no portion, and the world cannot keep them alive, for there is a famine. The thoughts of dwelling with everlasting burnings, possesseth them with fearfulness, Isa. 35. 14.

REAS. From the usefulness there is of this conviction in order to Conversion: It is useful,

1. For the seasonableness of it: God intending to advance himself in man's Salvation, and his Glory being declarative (for his essential Glory is incapable of any advancement) hence the more gracious he appears to be, the more Glory redounds to his great Name: Now the greatness of grace herein appears in one discovery of it, viz. the greatness of the misery from which the subject of this grace is delivered: For the illustration whereof, this work is very fit and seasonable: For, 1. Man must see his own misery, or else he will never admire God's mercy. 2. The best knowledge of this misery, is by a sensible apprehension of the distressing efficacy of it. 3. The sense and apprehension cannot be so well after conversion, because then the apprehension of God's mercy, applied to faith in the promise, cannot but afford some relief against the sense of misery: Though it is true, the right improvement of this is after mercy hath been apprehended; yet still the remembrance of this distress is a main help to fill the soul with admiration, Isa. 53. 6.

2. For the necessity of it in order to the receiving of Christ in the tenders of the Gospel. For, 1. Christ's work is Salvation work. Hence he is called Jesus, the Savior, and said to come on this errand, 1 Tim. 1. 15. Christ came to save sinners. 2. Hence this work is for none but such as need Salvation, and that is such as are miserable: What should a Physician do among men that are hail and sound? Luk. 5. 31. 3. Hence till men feel this misery, they will certainly despise Christ; till then they will bid the Almighty to depart from them, Job 21. 14.

USE. 1. For Information hence learn,

1. That they make more hast than good speed, that are great Professors of Faith in Christ, before ever they were made thoroughly sensible of their own misery. A Faith that antedates Conviction may

justly be suspected: He that never knew his own distress, never went to Christ as a Savior. There are indeed divers steps from this conviction to true conversion, but yet this is one step from natural security, and usually the first: Though a man cannot see sin sinful (which is the true conviction of sin) but by an eye of faith, yet, by the common work of Illumination, he may see the woeful estate of it. God, like a wise builder, digs for a foundation, before he lays it. Conviction of misery is not our foundation, Christ is the only foundation, Faith is that which only builds us upon him; but by Conviction, the loose and unstable earth is removed, the false and failing hopes of men are dug up. God is not wont to give hope, before he hath brought the soul to despair; he applies not comforts antecedent to conviction. It may therefore put us upon it to enquire whether ever it were thus: It may be now you are rich in your own conceit, like Laodicea, but did you ever know yourselves to be poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked? if not your riches are but a fancy, and your hopes are empty.

2. That there are some grounds of hope for those whom the spirit of God brings into a needy and destitute condition; whom he convinceth of their want and misery; who feel the curses of the Law, and can find no help in the world: I say, there is some hope, for there may be reason for fears and jealousies too, For, 1. This is but a common work, and therefore is no sufficient evidence of God's special love, no sure Character of an Elect Vessel. 2. There have been many under it, who yet through Satan's temptations, and God leaving them, have lost it again; yea, and manifold experience gives in a sad testimony to this truth. 3. The curse and condemnation is still as really upon them as ever it was: That is not taken off till believing. 4. There is no special promise made to them that God will carry on this work in them to effect: He may or he may not, and if he do not, it will leave the man short of Heaven and Glory. But still

there is more hope than there was before; for while they lay secure in sin, and felt no wrath. they were in no order to Salvation, but now they are in such a way as God brings home his own by; and we may say they are a step nearer to the Kingdom than before: Though they are not under saving Grace, yet they are under the means to it: A man that is without the City gates, though just by them, is as really without, as one an hundred miles off, but yet he is nearer to

3. We have here a rule how to begin with men in our endeavors, for their spiritual good: Let us labor to show them their misery by sin: We must wound before we can heal, instrumentally: Be not afraid to show men their sins and the wrath of God for them: Misery is the first thing a secure soul is like to be affected withal, and that is preparatory to the rendering of Christ precious to them: We should indeed encourage all to go to Christ, but encouragements without convictions, are but the laying a foundation for presumption, and not the way to bring men truly to believe. Peter, in Act. 2 First preacheth his hearers to remorse, and then he directs them to Christ.

USE. 2. For Conviction; let every unregenerate sinner see here (as in a Glass) his own miserable state: This young man's condition is thine spiritually: Thou hast nothing of thine own to live upon, there is nothing in the world to relieve thee, thou art perishing if no help appear; and art not thou then in want? here take these Considerations:

1. Thou art a cursed creature by nature: Wrath is upon all the world of mankind, who are condemned before they are born, who are enemies from the birth, and come into the world Children of wrath, Eph. 2. 3.

2. Thou hast nothing with thee which can help thee out of this cursed condition, all the Portion of God's common favors which thou

enjoyest, will not redeem thee out of the hands of wrath, they cannot afford thy soul one drop of relief or supply; nay, all thy natural and providential enjoyments are themselves under a curse as they are thine, Rom. 8. 20.

3. Thou hast by a vain and sinful life, abused all the favors of God, and thereby made thy accounts the greater; thy condemnation is augmented: thou hast laid out all upon sin, and that is the worst sort of spending that can be, for thou art by it not only made poor, but greatly in debt also, and God will call thee to an account for all his goodness, and thy riot will enflame thy reckoning.

4. Thou hast been in vain seeking thy Salvation among creatures; the world thou goest to is under the curse too for man's sin, and can yield thee nothing but briars, and thorns, which will scratch and wound, but not relieve thee: They are but the shadow of a bramble which will but mischief him that betakes himself thither for shelter: nothing but what will reconcile thee to God, and bring thee in to his favor, give thee a part in Christ pay all thy debts, and save thy soul from hell will do thee any good, and this thou canst not find here.

5. Death and Judgment and Hell are coming upon thee: Thou art a mortal creature, thy day is coming, and may be nearer than thou art aware of; thou must ere long go down to the pit, and then Judgment calls thee to an account, and if thou art not better bestead, hell receives thee forever, from whence all thy vain trust shall not be able to deliver thee, Isa. 28. 17, 18. Know then and consider that it is an evil thing and a bitter, that thou hast gone so far away from the living God, Jer. 2. 19 Thou thinkest thou wantest for nothing, but I can assure thee that thou art oppressed with every want: There is a great deal goes to the eternal life of a soul, and thou hast none of it; thou wantest the love of God, which is better than life; thou wantest grace



which is indeed the inward principle of life in the soul; thou wantest the promise which is the support of the soul here in this life; yea, what is it thou wantest not? Oh that thou knewest it! thou wouldest not then be so secure and contented, thou wouldest bestir thyself, and seek for some remedy: Thou shalt find these words to be realities one day, God grant thou mayest be persuaded of them, and so persuaded as not to rest content till thou hast gotten good security about them: Wert thou but once stirred up to make inquiry, there is hope that God would of his rich mercy, in his own time point thee to the right way: This is certain there is no expectation that thou shouldest ever return to God, except thou first begin to be in want.

## **SERMON VIII.**

And he went and joined himself to a Citizen in that Country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. - Vers. 15.

2. We are now to consider of the sordid course which the young man took for his relief, expressed in these words. When once he felt his want, he sat not still: Sense of misery will readily drive the creature to seek supply: and so far he did well: God would not have awakened sinners to sit still: but yet he takes a very wrong course, and therein he discovered his folly: As good sit still as rise to fall. The course which he took is here expressed emphatically, and set forth notably; in two things doth the misery appear which he brought upon himself by this course. 1. The servitude or slavery which he voluntarily put himself upon, illustrated and aggravated in two circumstances. 1. It

was his own act, He went and joined. 2. It was to one of that Country, to a stranger.

2. The ignoble and sordid manner of life which he was put to, to feed swine, which was among the Jews accounted the basest life of all, men of that occupation were contemned, none would have any communion with them: Shepherds were of good account, but Swineherds were not admitted to the society of men.

That by this Citizen, Satan is to be understood, is the received interpretation, and his setting him to keep swine, intimates the contemptible employment and service which he occupieth sinners about. We may gather up the substance of this verse. into a few brief notes.

DOCT. I Those that will not serve God, shall serve a worse Master.

The Prodigal was weary of his Father's Government, and what comes of it? he is fain to put himself under the Government of a stranger: Man was not made for sovereignty, but for service, and properly for the service of God; if therefore he shake off this service God righteously provides him cruel and Tyrannical Lord's, that shall bear rule over him, 2 Chron. 12. 8.

USE. This may teach us to beware how we count the service of God irksome and tedious. If Christ's easy yoke will not be born, but we will pluck out our necks, and draw back our shoulders, Satan's iron yoke shall be prepared for us, and then we shall sooner or later know the difference.

DOCT. II. Man when convinced of his misery, had rather take any course to redress it, than go to God for his help.

He will first try all ways to repair his loss, and quite weary himself out in so doing; he had rather to enslave himself to Satan than become Christ's freeman. And the Reason of this is,

1. Negatively.

1. Not because there is indeed any help to be had elsewhere, for indeed there is none: Mans misery is such as the whole creation cannot repair it, it's vain to look anywhere for salvation, Jer. 3. 23. Man may try many conclusions, but it is a certain truth before he tries that he shall be wholly disappointed, they who forsake God, follows lies.

2. Nor because there is not help to be had with God for such: Fallen, back-slidden, wandering Prodigals may have hope with him in returning, Hos. 13. 9. Oh Israel thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help. Hence the following invitation, Chap. 14. 1. The Prodigal when he came home found it so. God is both able and willing, hence he never casts off a true penitent, but always gave to such the best welcome.

2. Affirmatively.

1. From the pride of heart which is in natural men: There is a proud shame (as I may call it) when a man knowing that he hath ill-deserved at the hands of God, and greatly provoked him to anger by sinful departing from him, whereby he hath become his own undoer, is now ashamed to come in God's sight, such was in our first Parents upon their Apostasy, Gen. 3. 10. Man is ashamed, i.e. in truth he is too proud to take that shame to himself, which he must, if ever he hope to find acceptance.

2. Because his former Conviction hath not taken away all his hopes; nay, although he feels his misery, & is convinced that the worlds help fails him, and will not supply him voluntarily, yet he hopes that he may do something whereby he may help himself. The young man thought if he could but put himself out to service, he might be in a way to earn a living; so convinced sinners hope they may, by their own pains taking, get some ease, some relief; and if they can but make any shift to silence conscience, or cheat their own souls, so that their present terrors need not to make them afraid, they are satisfied.

USE. 1. Here we have one reason why it is oftentimes so long after notable convictions of misery, before many are truly brought home to God: why the convinced sinner hath many courses to try, he sets his wit and invention to work, and though he hath lost his estate, lost the worlds favor, yet he hath his fingers ends; if he have it not in himself, yet notwithstanding he may earn it by his industry: Proud man is loath to come upon his knees, he is not willing to turn beggar; he may be stung with Conviction, and yet not killed with despair, he may be at some loss, and not a lost creature in his own apprehension; he hath some hopes that he may shift, and if he can catch at any straw, he will not swim to the Ark; nay, never expect as long as men have any project of their own, that ever they will come to God. And hence the Scripture speaks of going from mountain to hill, Jer. 50. 6.

USE. 2. To teach us what is to be done to and with such as are under these convictions; they are not yet fit for Christ, nor persuadable to go to him; no, but they must be yet driven farther; they must have their hands knocked off from every hold, and yet fall into the ocean of distress, before they will look to the Temple: our endeavoring therefore, and our prayers must be, that they may be shaken out of

all: a despairing soul is, though a sad, yet an encouraging sight, there is then hope, Isa. 41. 17.

USE. 3. It may teach us to pity the empty designs that many are driving, after that they have had conviction of their misery: Some there be that seek to repair it by their reformation, others to forget it by involving themselves in vain and secular business, and many there be that would sooth themselves up with a general notion of God's mercy, and by these and the like fancies, poor miserable man takes pains to make themselves more miserable, for all this that they do is to no purpose, Jer. 46. 11.

DOCT. III The folly of sinful man brings him into a state of necessary and voluntary bondage.

The Prodigal binds himself out for a servant. The two terms used in the Doctrine may seem contradictory, but they are not: His bondage is necessary; when he had spent all, and there was no friend to relieve him, what could he now do? he saw no other way, but either he must bind himself out or starve. The curse that fell upon Cham literally, fell upon all mankind spiritually: This servitude is therefore necessary, because, being a part of the curse, it falls upon the natural man undoubtedly, being a punishment inflicted upon man by God for sin, Joh. 8. 3. Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin. And ye it is.

2. Voluntary; men give themselves up to this slavery; they will do it, Joh. 8. 44. You are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. This bondage is man's own choice: Had this son been willing to return to his father, the necessity had been taken away; but men give themselves up to Satan; and the ground of this lies in the very nature of sin, which is a relinquishing of the service of God and enslaving a man's self to Satan. Now this bondage is not

bodily so much as spiritual; it is an enslaving or binding of the soul to his service, and consists in these things.

1. He is now at Satan's beck, and ready to hearken to, and attend every hint from him, to come and go at his pleasure; he hath given him the lordship of his soul, and bids him to take him under his government; hence he is said to rule in the Children of disobedience, Eph. 2. 2.

2. He is ready and forward to do all Satan's commands, let them be what they will; he refuseth none, though never so base; if he sends him into the field to keep swine, he goes readily, and willingly about his business, so sordid and slavish a spirit hath he gotten.

3. He is devoted to his own lust; for Satan rules in the unregenerate, by leading them after the lusts of their own hearts, which are also in the Scripture, called the lusts of Satan, because he busily sets them on work, and serves himself and his own ends by them.

4. Here he hath his whole dependence or reliance for relief, this is the utmost essay he hath to make, it is his last shift, and if this course fails him he is undone: As a servant expects (at least) food and raiment for his work, so the sinner hopes to get quiet and settlement in the service of Satan. Now the reason why men do thus often times, after they have been convinced of misery, lies here, because this conviction doth not so properly put man upon it to get rid of sin, but to get his terrors removed, to get off his fears; and now Satan persuades him with many wiles to yield to him, and he will effect it, but how poorly he performs it for them, we shall soon hear.

USE. Hence we may learn what to judge of all those who are remaining in a state of nature; they are in most servile slavish

condition, and let every unregenerate man lay it to heart, consider therefore.

1. Whom it is that you are enslaved to, it is Satan himself, he is that Citizen the Prodigal bound himself under.

2. What a manner of bondage you are in, viz.

1. It is necessary; I mean that which you have made so by your folly, for your natural condition leads you to it uncontrollably, and Satan hath gotten the possession of your wills, and all your faculties; and hence natural men are said to be led about by him at his will, 2 Tim. 2. 26.

2. It is your own doing and choice: thou wentest and joinedst thyself to him, hoping so to advance and meliorate thy condition, but all to no purpose, as will anon appear; and let this humble thee, to think that thou hast given Satan that possession of thy heart, that thou hast indented with him, and joined thyself to him: Learn hence also that thou canst not lay the blame of thy misery upon any but thyself; it is the course thou hast deliberately taken to rid thyself of misery by, but will be found a delusive project, and that which will involve thee in the greatest distress. Ah, what poor shifts are they which wretched sinners are driven to, when God makes them know themselves miserable, but reveals not to their souls the only way to recover out of it.

DOCT. IV. Satan exposeth his Vassals to all mean, ignoble, and sordid services.

This our Savior aims at, by the Citizens setting him to keep swine: Swine were of old by the Ceremonial Law reckoned among unclean beasts, and still they are of brutes the most brutish: A swineherd

among men is accounted the most low, sordid and contemptible employment: Such and so vile; yea, and incomparably more base are those services which Satan Employs wicked men about; we may conceive of this, if we consider what it is he puts them upon doing: It is called in the Scripture, a fulfilling of his lusts, Joh. 8. 44. and those are vile lusts so called, Rom. 1. 26. If we should examine in particular, what it is that wicked men do, in obedience to Satan's will, we shall find it all to be filthy and swinish: What is the drunkard's employment, but swilling himself, and turning his body into a living cask, and so losing that little of man which he had in him, and wholly becomes a beast? What doth the lewd and voluptuous man follow, but the giving scope to his lustful humor, and so throws himself into the perpetration of those base and obscene actions of which it is a shame to make any mention? As for the Epicure, Philosophy itself calls him not a swine-herd, but a very swine: *Epicuri de grige porcum*. And in truth all lusts are brutish; it hath its seat in the sensitive part of man, and its highest aspiring's are but to give content to the body and senses, with a total neglect of the soul. Let us but consider what man was made for, viz. the service of God, those high and noble employments which Angels delight in, and account their glory, and then look and see what a world of men are doing, one courting his pleasures, another chasing after honors, a third heaping up wealth, a fourth studying his revenge, &c. unto any of which (in a true judgment) keeping of swine is a noble and honorable employment: And yet these are the things with which Satan seeks to divert men, and in the pursuit after which he makes them to hope that they shall get a living in this famine.

REAS. From the malice which Satan bears against the Children of men: Who can expect favor or fidelity from an enemy? It is true, Satan promiseth men fair, and pretends to be a sure friend in a time of need, and makes them believe he proffers to do them a kindness,



and thus with many fair words and deceivable, he draws them after him; but in truth, he hates the whole race of mankind, and all his contrivance is to compass their utter and unavoidable ruin: He undid himself (as is thought by divers judicious) that he might undo man, and having by this horrid attempt of his lost his own felicity, without any the least glimmering hope of any retrieval forever, how is it possible we should believe that he can study man's welfare,? And the truth is, Satan's Kingdom is most properly a Tyranny, and it comes to pass through the righteous judgment of God: Satan being, of a fellow-servant, risen to be a master, and man having forsaken God, and joined himself to him, choosing rather to be at his courtesie, than under God's directions, the Devil now instead of a subject makes of him a slave.

USE. 1. See from whence we are fallen by sin, and learn to be ashamed of ourselves: Every unregenerate man hath reason to hide his head with shame: If one of his fathers family had come to this young man, as he followed his swine, ragged and tattered, and put him in mind of his former condition, how tenderly he was brought up by the care of a loving father, &c. how think you would he have looked? would he not have hid his head in some bush? what blushing and stupefaction would he have been seized withal? Why this is the very condition of all men out of Christ: Remember therefore what you once were, look back to your former state, when you were favorites of God, adorned with his Image, shining with his Graces, and dwelling in his Paradise, living in good fashion, and fitted for the best and most honorable employment: But how are you now changed into a company of swine-herds; yea, rather into mere swine? and that which makes it the more wonderful, is that we see men are proud of this employment.

USE. 2. Here we see a reason why it often fall out that men, after terrible awakenings, and convictions of wrath and misery, grow more loose, more vain, more addicted to folly and vanity than before: It shows us that they have been using of foolish courses, they have gone to Satan for advice, and not to the Spirit of God; and the truth is, Satan is now more busy, and urgent with the soul to hearken to him, and if it do, this is that which always comes of it. Satan evermore directeth men to some ignoble course or other; sends Cain to build Cities, that the noise of the hammers and axes may silence or drown the voice of Conscience, sets the drunkard to his cups, the wanton to his harlots, the vain man to his merry company, &c. and God often permits this, to the end that his Elect may be the more convinced of their own folly and impotency, and of the wonderful riches of his grace in bringing of them home: And as long as men will afford an ear to Satan, it is not to be hoped that ever they should do better. Let us therefore pity such poor souls, and yet let us hope and pray for them: Conviction may be a seed of conversion, and though God suffer it to die, and seem to be utterly lost, in its good time, it may revive again to efficacy, after they have unprofitably made themselves the Devils drudges, and wearied themselves in their way; they may be taken in their months, Jer. 2. 24.

USE. 3. To awaken poor enslaved sinners to think, and seriously to consider of their miserable and ignoble drudgery: Hadst thou one spark of that noble spirit of man in his creation, left in thee, thou wouldst rather choose to die, than live in such a service: Art thou poor and famishing? and dost thou think Satan can relieve thee? Alas, the best that he can promise thee is but that poor world, where thou hast once already found there is a famine, he doth but paint it over in new colors to cheat thee: And for it thou must keep swine, be a drudge to the vilest of his lusts, and he will never give thee any better preferment; nay, his very design is to make thee a miserable

slave here, that. thou mayest be a damned wretch hereafter. Stay then and consider before thou goest and joinest thyself to him; what canst thou promise thyself at his hands, who never did anything but undo all those that have placed themselves under him, and put their trust in him? God is a better Master, and if thou wilt come to him, he will give thee a better service, a high-calling; he will give thee a clean and not a dirty service, thou shalt be a freeman and no longer a slave, it shall be a Glory for thee to serve him, the service itself shall be thy honor and felicity, and in the end of it, thou shalt be advanced to a throne and a Crown.

## **SERMON IX.**

And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. - Vers. 16.

We now come to consider the miserable issue of all his endeavors, and the utter extremity which he was reduced unto, intimated in this verse, and is considerable in two things.

1. The base and sordid spirit he was reduced unto, the Citizen sent him to keep swine, but he would fain have made a swine of himself, and give himself leave to be a fellow-commoner with his hogs: Husk, and draff would now have contented him, if he might but have had his belly full of them: And would fain have filled his belly, &c.
2. That even this poor and contemptible succor failed him: No men gave him.

[He would fain] the word signifies to covet, to lust, to long earnestly for a thing, noting the reaching's and desires of carnal corruption.

[Have filled his belly] i.e., answered his desires, or satisfied his wants, or gotten content to his soul.

[With the husks] The word signifies, the rinds or parings of fruits, the pods of beans, peas, &c. with which in those countries they fed their hogs: and afterwards Acorns, and such like course things were called by the same word: it here intends the things of the world, earthly things, things of this life.

[That the swine eat] i.e. Such things as earthly minded men (who are here called swine) did feed themselves withal.

[And no man gave to him] i.e. He failed in all his endeavors; he could find out no way to attain them. Hence;

DOCT. I. The things of this world are but husks.

I know some by these husks interpret to be meant, the Doctrine of the Scribes and Pharisees, who would persuade a man to rest in his own righteousness: but I choose the former interpretation; and our Savior useth this mean and opprobrious word, to show us what a low and little esteem we ought to set upon earthly things. Now the things of the world may be called husks.

1. Negatively, not that they are things in themselves to be contemned undervalued, or in their place and use to be despised. For,

1. They are the creatures of God, and therefore good in their place and use for which he appointed them; God made nothing in vain, Gen. 1. ult.

2. They are outward blessings and so to be acknowledged by these that enjoy them; they are called his hid treasure, Psal. 17. 14. Yea, such blessings as God will call men to an account for, and if he takes them away, it is a punishment, Hos. 2. 8, 9.

3. They are things by which the people of God are in this life sustained, and comforted, and by the want whereof they are afflicted: They were made for the supply of their bodies, and when God chasteneth his Children, he sometimes takes them away, 2 Sam. 24. 13.

4. They are such things as we are to pray for in their place, and to deprecate the want of them, Mat. 6. 11. But,

1. They are husks when they are propounded to the soul as its adequate object: They are not food for souls, they cannot give satisfaction nor refreshment to the spiritual part of man; they are neither suitable nor sufficient for that, Mat. 16. 26.

2. They are husks; i.e., they are the object of low, mean, and vile spirits, they are only carnal and sensual appetites, that place their contentment in them; the basest spirited men are they that do most prize and pursue them.

3. They are husks, i.e., a truly illuminated, and savingly informed mind puts a low and inconsiderable account upon them, in comparison of those better things which the soul finds in Jesus Christ: and they plainly discover themselves in all these respects to be but husks.

1. Because they are not fitted to the soul of man; they are too mean for it: that is a spirit, but these are carnal things, that is a durable substance, but these are things that perish in the using, Col. 22. 22.

2. Because they are unsatisfying: The soul of man is of a large reach, and the desire of it aspire after more and greater things than this lower world compriseth in it; many men complain of too much of the world: i. e. Of the cares, and burdens, and perplexities that it brings upon them; but no man was ever yet satisfied with it: They are poor empty things, Pro. 21. 5.

USE. 1. Hence see their folly, who spend their whole time about the world, and the things of it: They spend their money for that which is not bread, Isa. 55. 2. Is it not a horrible debasing of a man's nature, to aspire no higher, nor seek for anything better, than that which can neither suit nor satisfy him? To gather husks, and more especially, such as, enjoying the Gospel, have a better trade opened to them? Such before whom the way is presented in which they might come to inherit substance? And what are such as are full fraught with the things of the world? shall we count them rich and happy? I pray what is a Ship-load, or a Ware-house full of husks worth? True grace, though it makes but a little show, is a Jewel more worth than a whole world of such pitiful lumber.

USE. 2. Let it then awaken us all to lay out our time, strength, and care about better things; be not content with this world: If these things are not better than husks, leave them to swine, if you are men, seek man's meat. Consider,

1. There are better things: There is a better happiness to be had from God in Christ, tendered to you in the Gospel, than all you can hope for in the world, Psal. 144. ult. Happy is that People, whose God is the Lord.

2. We are commanded to make these better things the object of our pursuit, Joh. 6. 27. Labor not for the meat that perisheth, but for that

which endureth to everlasting life. Hence there is hope that we may obtain it, if we diligently seek it.

3. Ere long there will be no husks: The things of this world will certainly fail in a very little time, and then woe will be to him that hath nothing better to trust to; distress and anguish must need seize upon him; he only is a wise man that now takes care to be provided against these things fail, Luk. 15. 9.

DOCT. II. Natural man would fain find content and satisfaction in these mean things of the World.

The young man, if he could have had his fill of husks, would have thought himself happy. It is a hard matter to persuade a blind sinner that his misery is anywhere else to be repaired, his great longings are to be filled with husks, to have his desires answered in the things below. This is evident,

1. From the restless endeavors which natural men use for the obtaining of the things of this life: That which a man's utmost desires and endeavors are laid out about, that is that which he builds his hopes upon, and such is the world to the men of the world: All men's projects, aims and endeavors run this way, their heads are always rolling, their hands and feet always moving to this; for this it is they rise up early, sit up late, wear themselves out in restless labor, that they may grasp in as much as they can of these things; yea, the Psalmist undertakes to tell us what are their inward thoughts, Psal. 94. 11. Their inwards thought is that their houses shall continue forever.

2. From the confidence which worldly men place in their enjoyment of the things of the world: If once they prosper, they presently grow high, and proud, and self-conceited, though formerly they carried

themselves low and humble: yea, now they begin to be become regardless of convictions, and too good for reproofs; yea, they are strongly confident, and presumptuously take up their rest here: They are upon this account called their strong City, Pro. 18. 11.

3. From the miserable complaint which they make when they lose these things: they are presently undone, their gods are taken from them, their hopes vanish, and they begin to despair; they now think all joy is departed, and they must never expect to see good day more; their bladders are pricked, and now they sink: And did not men lean their weight upon those things, they would not so anxiously perplex their souls at the loss of them.

REAS. 1. From the sensuality which possesseth the heart of every natural man: Man i become a slave to his sense, whence it comes to pass that he is persuaded to judge these thing to be most suitable for him: sin having thrown all out of order; sense is now gotten above reason; hence, as swine run after husks, because they suit their nature, and are proper for their kind, so natural men find and taste a sensitive sweetness in the things of the world, and that makes them to say, Happy is the People that is in such a case. Psal. 144, ult.

REAS. 2. From the natural ignorance which there is in unregenerate men of better things: Man by sin hath lost the knowledge and apprehension of spiritual and heavenly things, he understands not what they mean, 1 Cor. 2. 14. The natural man receiveth not (i.e., into his understanding) the things of the spirit of God. The highest reach of his understanding is to find and apprehend some seeming outward repast in the comforts and conveniences of this world, and hence he aspires no higher. As a beast is not acquainted with the excellency of a rational life, and hence he accounts his own the best,



looks after no better: Now every man is become brutish, as the Scripture informs us.

REAS. 3. From the delusion of Satan and the World, who promise to vain man more from the enjoyment of these things, than ever they can perform for him; and the credulous soul is ready to believe them, and the rather, because these things are seen, whereas spiritual things are not seen: Satan presents the world in a fine and fair dress, and the heart of man is easily deluded; he thinks it to be all out as good as it looks for, and so his affections are stolen away, Isa. 44. 20.

USE. 1. Hence wonder not to see the men of the world carried out so instantly, and with such eagerness in pursuit of the things of this life: their poor, hungry, starving souls want supply, and they hope to fill their bellies with these things; they are their happiness: could we but see the inside of the greedy worldling, and know what conceptions he entertains himself withal, how he promiseth himself all peace, comfort, content and felicity in the creature, (our savior characterizeth him to the life, in, Luk. 12. 17, 18, 19.) We would no more wonder at his violence, his eager and immoderate pursuit after them, every man loveth life, is doth to perish, and is therefore (in distress) ready to say, who shall show me good, and now through his own mistake, increased by the devils delusion, and the worlds flatteries, he conceives that he hath found it: Oh! thinks he, could I but have my belly full of these husks, I should be well of it: he envies the very swine their draff, and could he but be quartered with them, he would desire no more.

USE. 2. Here we are informed that an eager, resolute, and insatiable pursuit after the things of this world, is an argument of an unregenerate man; or an evidence of one that is not as yet truly converted unto God. It is clear and undeniable, that a man's chief

good is his highest pursuit; and hence if he makes those things his utmost reach, it is a proof that he never knew better, and that is the very reason why he is so violent after them: Wonder not then that covetousness is so often in Scripture branded with the odious name of Idolatry; it being a resolved and not to be questioned Truth, that the World is the covetous man's God.

USE. 3. Let this consideration be an incentive and strong persuasive to the people of God, to stir them up to the more eagerness in pursuit after heaven and heavenly things, and to look for your souls satisfaction in them: When you see the men of the world so eager and busy in seeking to load themselves with thick clay, how should it fill you with an holy emulation, and excite you with utmost endeavor to labor to outstrip them in this more profitable pursuit? And it may encourage you to be as diligent as; yea more solicitous than they, to consider.

1. That they labor for the things that perish, but you are an enduring substance: When they have gotten it (if ever they do get the World) it soon vanisheth away again; but what you have in your eye and aim, is a treasure that endures, and never will wax old or go to decay: With this argument the Apostle stirs up his Corinthians, 1 Cor. 9. 25. They do it to obtain a corruptible Crown, but we are incorruptible.

2. They seek that which shall never fill their bellies, never give them satisfaction: Their eye is never satisfied with seeing, &c. But God hath promised you to satisfy your most enlarged desires, Psal. 81. 9. Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. He hath told you that he will give you durable riches and righteousness, you shall be abundantly satisfied and filled: This is the way to enjoy abundance, to inherit substance; your labor shall never be lost, nor shall you ever see cause to repent of your care and pains, when you shall find, not your hands

full of husks which satisfy not, but your souls replenished with grace and glory.

DOCT. III. Wicked men are mere swine.

It is certain that our Savior by this term aims at these, and indeed they are very much alike, for,

1. Swine love to live upon husks and draff: The coarsest and meanest things best content them: Thus, give a natural man the things of this world, and let who likes it take heaven, hence it's said, their names are written in the earth, Jer. 17. 13. they aspire no higher; how like a hog did he express himself, that protested he would not change his part in Paris for a part in Paradise?

2. They are most unprofitable as long as they live, they do no good all their life time, they clothe us not as the Sheep, nor labor for us as the Ox, &c. but are a mere charge without service: and as little good do ungodly men whiles they live in the world, Rom. 3. 12. They are altogether become unprofitable. They bring God no honor, but dishonor him all their days, only, as swine when they are dead are for our service, so when wicked men die God will get Glory upon them in the eternal triumphs of Divine revenge.

3. They are a very mischievous creature, they are always doing damage, except carefully looked after; rooting up the ground, and breaking into the Corn, &c. Such are the ways of them that know not God, they are ever provoking him, dishonoring his Name, and doing mischief to his People, Psal. 58. 3, 4.

4. They are a nasty, brutish, filthy, loathsome creature, always wallowing in the mire defiling themselves, and polluting of all that comes near them, if you should wash them clean they will presently

fall to wallowing in the next slough they meet withal: And such is the whole life of wicked men, a mere pollution, they are always defiling themselves with unclean lusts, wallowing in the mire of sin, and never content but when they are entertaining themselves with filthiness: hence called corrupt and abominable, Psal. 14. 1, 3.

USE. Let this humble every unregenerate man: Are you out of Christ? you here see, that though you think yourselves of worth and excellency, persons of merit and account, yet it is a vile account which Jesus Christ sets upon you; how long and base you are in his eyes: and let it teach all those who desire to pass a right judgment on persons and things, not overmuch to admire, or set too high an esteem upon those that are out of Christ: It cannot be less than the basest Idolatry, to worship and adore a nasty filthy swine.

DOCT. IV. God many times, when he intends a Soul true good, withholds from him the thing of this world, though he long for, and lay out after them never so earnestly.

Men labor hard, take a great deal of pains, weary themselves in pursuit, and think why may not they obtain it as well as others? their opportunities are as fair, their understandings as pregnant, their endeavors as prudent and diligent, and still there is an unseen obstacle, a remora that is put to their endeavors, that they prosper not: That this is of God, the Prophet tells us, Hab. 2. 13. and he oftentimes makes it to be thus in order to their conversion and best good. And the reason why God takes this course is,

1. From the natural tendency which there is in outward prosperity to hinder a sinners conversion: for it is an occasion of making him proud, self-conceited, deaf to counsel, Jer. 22. 21. I spake to thee in thy prosperity, and thou wouldest not hear. When men are settled

upon the world and their hearts are at ease, they. like not to be disturbed.

2. Because the natural man will never go to God as long as he hath any hopes else-where: if he can but have his belly full of husks, he cares for seeking no farther; he must therefore be taken off from everything here, before he comes to rest upon Christ, who is the only foundation of true rest.

USE. 1. To teach us not to interpret God's providence in the worst sense: Do not be too ready to conclude that he hates you when he strips you of all, but observe the issue; be not angry if he hides all created good from you, that he may make way thoroughly to reveal all his own increated excellencies to your souls; for know it, this is the best love of God you are capable of.

USE. 2: To advise such as are seduced to the utmost straits what to do; i.e.: betake yourselves to God: Can you not get your bellies full of husks? are your enterprises defeated in the world, let that stir you up to think where there is bread to be had: It may be you have no husks to feed on, or if you have yet they give you no satisfaction: Let this put you upon it to inquire for that which is better, something which you may have to live upon in the famine, that when the men of the world, for all its draff, must famish and starve, you may have that bread to live upon which endures to eternal life.

## **SERMON X.**

And when he came to himself, he said how many hired Servants of my Fathers have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger? - Vers. 17.

The first part of the Parable, containing the Prodigal 's departure from his Father, with the effects following thereupon, hath been briefly handled: The second part containing his return to his Father, with the motives to, and manner of it, is next to be considered, and is described from verse, 17. to 20. The prime and general intent whereof is to express the ordinary way and manner of the conversion of a sinner unto God: In which there are two things to be observed.

1. A solemn and serious deliberation with himself, verse. 17, 18, 19.

2. His putting of this deliberation in execution, verse. 20. begin.

1. In his deliberation we may consider, 1. The season or occasion of it, verse, 17. When he came to himself. 2. The things deliberated by him, which are, 1. Motives and encouragements to his return, verse, 17. 2. A strong conclusion or firm resolution built upon those arguments, verse, 18, 19. I shall begin with the first, viz.

1. The season or occasion of this deliberation, in these words, When he came to himself: This is the proper English of the words: Piscator renders it, quum in se descendisset; when he descended into himself: i.e. by serious reflection and consideration, how profusely he had wasted his Patrimony, and what miserable exigencies he had brought himself to: Beza reads it, quum ad se rediisset; when he had returned to himself: in which sense the generality of Interpreters understand it, as intimating that he had been all this while not himself, or besides himself, by which phrase we express a mad man, or one distracted; one that hath not the use of his reason: And the phrase, ad se redire, or to come to one's self, is among the Latins used to

express a recovery from a frenzy, and restoring a man to his right mind. Hence,

DOCT. I. The natural man, whiles he is wandering from God, is beside himself.

As long as a man seeks happiness and soul satisfaction anywhere else but in God, he is spiritually distracted, out of his wits, a mere mad-man: Hence the Scripture call every natural man, a fool, Psal. 14. 1. a mad-man, Eccl. 9. 3. one that is without knowledge, Jer. 4. 22. It is the natural, habitual, and hereditary distemper of all Adam 's posterity. Man got a fall in the Cradle of his infancy, which hath not only lamed his feet, but crazed his brain, which craziness runs in the blood, and is propagated to his Children. Folly, dotage, and madness, are but the divers degrees of one distemper and are indifferently used in Scripture to hold forth the same thing. Now the evidence of the Doctrine will appear, when we have considered what are the symptoms and notes whereby a fool and frantic are to be known, and have seen the like to be in the unregenerate and secure sinner, and they are such as these.

1. An ignorant preferring of the worst things before the best: because he knows not the worth of things, but follows his own fancy, therefore his bauble is of greatest worth and excellency: If things shine, and make a fair show, they are the things in his account: He judgeth of things not by their worth, but by appearance: Such are unregenerate men, the little things, the trifles of this world, the shining glories of it, only win credit with them, and they incomparably prefer them to the glory of another world: A little earthly pelf is better than all the treasures of Heaven, a little frothy pleasure is more worth than everlasting joys, the worlds applause

out-weighs the Crown of Glory in their esteem: They call good evil, they see no excellency in God and his ways, Isa. 5. 20. Job 21. 13, 14.

2. In the choice which they make: And this follows upon the former: a crazed understanding, accompanied with a perverted will, makes a mad-man. It was a rule of old to try a fool by his choice, presenting him some gay nothing, and some other thing of worth: Thus every unregenerate man sitting under the Gospel, hath Heaven and Earth set before him, fading vanities and everlasting mercies; and he chooseth these poor things, and leaves those other, he runs away with the world, and the contemptible things of it, and scorns the proffers of Grace and Glory, chooseth a lump of earth rather than a Crown of Stars: The great things of the Law are counted strange things; the little things of the world are excellent things, Isa. 66: 3: They have chosen their own ways.

3. They are indiscreet and inconsiderate in all they do; fools deliberate not of their actions; they neither ask a reason, nor ponder of the event, but go headlong and precipitant into all, Pro. 27. 12. The simple pass on: just so do unregenerate men; they ponder not any of their paths, but are led blindfold after their lusts, Isa. 1. 3. Israel doth not know, my People doth not consider. Hence that expostulation, Deut. 32. 29. They never ask that question, what they are doing, or whether their ways are tending, Pro. 7. 22, 33. He goeth after her, — as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.

4. They are very bold and hardy, they fear no dangers that are before them, and will therefore run themselves upon any mischief: If their way be through fire and water, they are not daunted at it, hence our proverb, foolhardy. So are sinners; warnings, threatening's, terrors of the Almighty fright them not; though the sword of Divine vengeance hang over their heads, though God's judgments are abroad in the



world, and their wicked companions are swept away thereby, yet still they hold on their course, hence compared to the horse, Jer. 8: 6: Everyone turneth to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. Of whose rashness see, Job 39. 21: &c.

5. They are incapable of receiving counsel, or being convinced of their foolish and mad ways: There is no persuading a fool or madman with reason, for wisdom and counsel is out of his reach: If you fetch all the Topics in Logic, and all the Tropes and figures in Rhetoric, you may move a stone sooner than him from his notions: Thus unregenerate men are unteachable; you may teach an Ox and an Ass sooner, Isa. 1: 3: Tell them of the evil of their ways, the unreasonableness of their courses, bring the witness of natural conscience, the testimony of reason, the light of Scripture, and all will not move or persuade them: Plead, entreat, woo, solicit by all that can be said or thought of, surdo canis. They are deaf adders, Psal. 58: 4, 5: Which will not hearken to the voice of charms, charming never so wisely.

6. They are easily cheated and imposed upon: though they will not hear reason, yet they are readily beguiled and abused by fair and fallacious pretenses, they may be cogged to give all they have away for a trifle: Truly thus doth Satan, that great juggler, abuse unregenerate men, he leads them about at his pleasure, rooks them out of all that is good, persuades them to neglect God's day of grace, turn their backs upon heaven, despise a Savior, trample upon the pearl of price, and all for the sake of a few fading, perishing shows of carnal content, and vain delight: Thus he beguiled our first Parents with an Apple, and daily gulls multitudes of sinners, with rattles, and noises, and poor empty gay things to the eternal loss of their souls.

7. They mischief themselves and all they come near when let loose, and left to themselves: It is a property of madness to be mischievous: Fools throw fire-brands and say they are in sport: Thus unregenerate men delight in nothing but mischief, undoing their own souls, and the souls of all they have to do with as much as in them lies; they run themselves to everlasting ruin and destruction, and draw as many after them as they can, they will entice, allure, persuade others to be their companions, Pro. 1. 10. Cast in thy lot with us.

8. They are most angry at those that endeavor to do them the most good: He that binds or stops a mad-man, though he loveth him, yet he vexeth him: he accounts them for his greatest enemies that would give him any hindrance in his mad pranks; it is as safe meeting a Bear robbed of her whelps, as standing in his way: Thus unrenewed men cannot bear to be told of their ways and courses, they will count a Paul their enemy if he tells them the truth; endeavor never so gently and compassionately to persuade them that they are going away from good, and bringing mischief upon their own heads, it is the way to be hated, back-bitten, reviled, and spitefully used by them: Ahab hates Micaiah, and thinks he never prophesies good to him: And takes Elijah to be the troubler of Israel, because he reprov'd his wicked courses.

9. Correction or punishment will not reclaim them, and bring them to better frame, but rather make them more mad, Pro. 17. 10. A reproof enters more into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool. A hundred, nay, if it were a thousand, his folly would remain with him; yea, you may separate his soul from his body, but not him from his folly; although you reduce him to atoms, yet his foolishness abides still, Prov. 27. 22. Thus are unregenerate men so rivetted to their sin, it is so intrinsically seated in them, and diffused through them, that all the awful judgments of God make no impression upon

them to reclaim them; God may smite till he is weary of smiting, but they are as bad as ever and worse, Isa. 1. 5. Why should ye be smitten anymore, ye will revolt more and more: Like Ahaz, in their affliction they will sin more than ever.

10. Folly and madness discovers itself in all they do: A wise word or action may steal unawares from them, but this is the tract of their life, you may read it in the tenor of their course: so spiritual madness is in all that unconverted men do; what is the life of the proud and ambitious, but a pleasing and priding themselves in a gay Coat, an handful of dirt, a cap and a knee, an empty title? which is mere foolery. How looks the covetous man, who like a boy spends his time in rolling up a great snow ball, which melts before the sun? What but madness are all the actions of the voluptuous, who put off man, and put on beast, being brutish in all their prosecutions? what doth the passionate man, but scatter coals, and throw about fire-brands, as if he had nothing else to do, but set the world in a flame?

USE. 1. It may teach us not to wonder at all the exorbitances and confusions which we see acted in the world: when fools and madmen have gotten the reins in their necks, and act all their own pleasure without any control, what better can be expected? The workers of iniquity all of them have no knowledge, no marvel then that they act so foolishly: Nay, much rather have we cause to wonder at the power and wisdom of God, that so wisely orders, and powerfully manageth this great Bedlam, as to carry on his own ends and designs in it without control or let, causing even the folly of men to pay tribute to his wisdom.

USE. 2. Here we see a reason why the means of Grace, where they are never so powerfully dispensed, are yet so ineffectual to the conversion of sinners: why convictions fasten not, threatening's take

not place, promises allure not the Children of men, but they continue senseless under all: the wise man gives the reason of it, Prov. 24. 7. Wisdom is too high for a fool. The saving knowledge and spiritual improvement of these things is out of their reach: It is labor lost to go about to instruct a man that is beside himself: hence it is not in the power of means to work it; none but God, who can restore lost man to his wits again, and bring him to himself, is able to give efficacy to any endeavors of this nature, and till then, line upon line, and precept upon precept, are but as so much water spilled upon a rock.

USE. 3. It may also teach us how to carry it towards unregenerate sinners in their unregeneracy, viz. as we would do to a man that is beside himself: i.e. First, pity and pray for them; we are not wont to be enraged at a frantic, though he play mad tricks, because we know it comes from his distemper: Thus our Savior, Luk. 23. 34. Father forgive them, they know not what they do: And so Stephen, Act 7. 60. Lay not this sin to their charge. They need your pity and prayers who can do nothing for themselves. 2. Be not afraid to anger them, so you may but do them good: Think it not hard to be scorned, reviled, when you rebuke and entreat them: Alas, if we should say or do nothing to them but what they like, we should let them undo and destroy themselves, and become guilty of their blood. 3. Choose them not for your counsellors and companions: Who would account it his commendation or profit, to associate with a fool, or make himself the intimate of one that is out of his wits? None but fools delight in fools.

USE. 4. It may exhort the people of God, (true Believers) to great thankfulness to God for his wonderful love to you, that you are by his grace restored to a sound mind: as, when we look upon one that is distracted, and see what strange, imprudent, misguided, foolish actions he performs, it is a lesson to all that look on, showing them how deeply they are bound to thank God, and how much they owe him

for their wits and understandings: so when we see what mad courses prodigal sinners drive, how they are carried head-long after their own lusts; go from God, spend all in riot, enslave themselves to Satan, and waste away their time in the midst of restless and unsatisfying vanities, neither knowing nor regarding an higher happiness; laboring for husks, and not filling of themselves, and yet presuming that they are in a way to do well; Oh, how should you acknowledge that Grace, from whence you have received more noble principles, and are disposed to higher employments? That he hath given you a judgment and spirit of discerning between good and evil; especially remembering that you had been once of that society, and had lived in their Bedlam still, if he who alone is the great Physician of souls, had not applied his grace, and so cured you of this distemper.

USE. 5. It may also serve for a word of conviction to such as are in their natural estate, let such be persuaded that they are beside themselves. Were you but willing to consider of it, there is enough to make it evident: 1. In your departing from God, and bidding him to go away from you, who only can make you happy, and who can make you miserable: You forsake the fountain of living water. 2. In your resolutely continuing in a course of sin; which is nothing less than running upon a sword's point, and exposing of yourselves to fearful plagues. 3. In placing your hope and confidence in the creature, which is empty and deceitful, a broken cistern in which is no water, Jer. 2. 13. 4. In laying all out upon your lusts, which fight against your souls, and are but sed and nourished to your utter undoing. But I pass.

DOCT. II. God, in order to the conversion of a sinner, first works upon the understanding.

The first step to true conversion is Divine Illumination. The Prodigal, before he thinks of returning to his Father, first comes to himself: The ground of this is in three things.

1. Man is a reasonable Creature, and a cause by counsel of his own actions: The understanding in man is the light in him, by which he regulates all his ways, and as he seeth so he practiseth. The reason why sinful men place their hopes in perishing things, is because they call evil good: This therefore is a main part of man's misery, that his understanding is perverted, Psal. 53. 2, 4.

2. Faith, which is wrought in conversion, is grounded upon knowledge, Psal. 9. 10. God dealeth with his creatures according to the manner of their being and acting: Faith is a choosing, and so a closing with God; but every choice ariseth from a rational and convincing discovery of the suitableness of the object chosen, and preference which it is conceived to deserve above others: now this discovery is made to the understanding, which is the eye of the mind whereby it seeth and judgeth of things. Hence,

3. It is impossible that the heart of man, which is naturally glued to the vanities of the world, and hath been deeply settled in his high opinion of it, should ever be made to renounce, cast off, and utterly to refuse to have anything more to do with them, or to place anymore confidence in them, and make choice of God in Christ, and prefer him above all, till he be thoroughly enlightened in, and fully persuaded of his own misery, the creatures emptiness, and the glorious fullness that there is in God: The things which he hath so loved must appear to be evil, and the God. whom he hath forsaken must appear to be good: an unknown evil is not forsaken; an unknown good is not chosen: Hence the absence of saving knowledge is the ground of destruction. Hos. 4. 6. Hence conversion itself is

often Synecdochically, called knowledge, and understanding, because that is a main ingredient in it: And then a man begins to come to himself, when he becomes to have a discerning of the truth of things.

USE. 1. Here we have a rule directing us what course to take for the conversion of sinners; we must imitate God in this, if ever we would do sinners any good; we must endeavor their conviction; we must first deal with their understandings; to raise the affections, without informing the mind, is a fruitless unprofitable labor, and serves but to make zeal without knowledge: Man must first see before he will repent of his evil; he must first know if ever he will love God, Psal. 9. 10.

USE. 2. It tells us that there are great hopes of men when they begin to come to themselves: If God begins once to cure men of their frenzy, to take them off their wild opinions, and vain conceits of happiness, in the profits, pleasures, and honors of this world, to make them see the emptiness of these things, and their own misery for want of a better stay to trust to, these are in a hopeful way to conversion. hence,

USE. 3. To teach us what to pray for in behalf of unregenerate sinners: i.e., that they may come to themselves: that their eyes may be opened, that God will illuminate their understandings, and give them to see things in their nature, truths in their plainness: It may be they may think you beside yourselves for so doing, but it's the greatest love you can show them, and the blessing which they nextly stand in need of. Would God be pleased but to settle men's minds, and open their eyes, we should soon hear them cry out of their own madness and folly, and condemn their prodigality and riot, and be earnestly enquiring after God and Christ, and seeking something

better than the world affords, to save their sinking souls from perdition, Act. 2. 37.

## **SERMON XI.**

2. We are to take a view of the things deliberated, which are two.

1. Motives and encouragements to return to his father, in the rest of the verse, 17. in the which we have both the motives themselves, and the way in which they became beneficial to him. The general truth contained in these motives was before a matter of conviction to him, it was that which made him to be in want, but it wrought not kindly upon him, till he came, by serious consideration, to apply it more closely to his own condition. Before I speak to the motives themselves, we may a little consider how he came to improve them, intimated in that word, he said: there is a speech of the tongue, and a speech of the heart: the young man had none to discourse with in that far country, he therefore communes with his own heart: the meaning is, he pondered of the matter, considered and weighed in his mind, concluded of the truth, and made application of it to his own condition. Hence,

DOCT. Consideration is the first step towards conversion.

The first thing we find, this young man doth after he came to himself is, he begins to consider, and discourse with himself: he first ponders, then concludes, then acts. Conversion is properly the returning of a sinner from sin unto God, emblemed to us by the



Prodigal 's return from a far country, to his father's house: The sinner, before conversion, was going away from God, now he is returning to him. Conversion is considered either passively or actively; the soul is said to be passive in conversion, in as much as he can do nothing savingly, till he hath received a principle of saving grace: but still we mistake, if we think that God's deals with men as with stocks and stones, and brute creatures: The will of man, which is the first mover in him, must not be forced, but led: The spirit, though he dealeth irresistibly, yet not violently with it; hence he doth not compel but persuade: which persuasion is a rational conviction, whereby impression is made upon the understanding, and will, the one being to see and approve, the other to embrace the object, which may be called active conversion; when the soul viewing and discerning the force of those arguments used by the spirit, and imprinted upon him, turns from sin to God: and thus, though the Spirit of God be the author or efficient of this work, yet he makes use of us in the working of it: This is that which I say begins at consideration, and this will appear in a few things.

1: The natural man's sinful way is right in his own eyes, unregenerate men, though fools themselves, and foolish in all they do, yet think they are the only wise and prudent: They call evil good; i. e. they so judge of it. The Prodigal, in his vain humor, thought it the only happy life to get abroad into a far country, and riot it among strangers, where he might live at large: Sinners think the way to hell a fair, large, broad, pleasant way; here they promise themselves to find pleasures, profits, preferments; they see no hurt in their courses, and can laugh at the ways of God and godliness, as foolish and unprofitable. Of these the wise man speaks, Prov. 14. 12. There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. The truth is, the greatest number of sinners think they sin with a great deal of reason.

2. Nay, the sinner hath many strong engagements lying upon him to follow his own ways and courses: his heart is naturally set upon them, sin is connatural to him; he hath all his dependence for happiness upon these designs. Ever since man went away from God, and forsook him, he hath had his dependence upon lying vanities, and in those his hopes are laid up: Nay, there are many enticing promises, fair words, and deceiving flatteries which draw his heart away; his lusts do as Prov. 7. 21. With much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattery of her lips she forced him. The carnal concupiscence's of the heart of man, are no otherwise to be satiated, but in the prosecution of their sinful ways.

3. More than this, he is deeply rooted in his way: He is practically fixed in it by custom; it is the trade which he hath lived in all his days: He took to it naturally, learnt it readily, and hath lived in it long. Now custom is a second nature, and therefore of much difficulty to alter or remove: Men's essays in it are like the washing of an Ethiopian to get off his blackness, as Jer. 13. 23. It is a hard matter to persuade men to leave off old customs, though never so bad: but besides this, he is also rooted in it by the approbation of his mispersuaded judgment; it hath gotten room in his heart, and is high in his opinion, and that opinion is strengthened by observation and experience: He hath found it a profitable way, as they, Jer. 44. 17 It hath been very pleasant to him, Prov. 9. 17. Stollen waters are sweet: Hence it must needs be exceeding difficult, if not impossible, to make him out of love with it, or think other than well of it: The covetous man finds a sweetness in gain, the voluptuous man in his amorous embraces, the ambitious man in his adorations, &c.

4. Besides this he hath taken up strong prejudices against the way of conversion; and that partly through the contrariety of his heart and nature to it, in which there is a congenerate averseness to all which is

good; and partly through the temptations and misrepresentations of Satan, who endeavors to exhibit it before his thoughts in the blackest and ugliest colors that may be; and that both against the beginning and progress of it; Godly sorrow, mourning for sin, forsaking of our evil ways, turning into the strict ways of God, and living a life of Godliness; these are harsh lessons, and hard sayings, not readily entertained by a soul that loves jollity, and cares not to be molested: the thoughts of such a work and way are frightful, and set him violently against conversion in the very first motions of it: These are dull, dark, strait, melancholic ways; besides the cross and persecution that is in them: Hence the natural man is persuaded to think that there are none who live so miserably and unhappily as the People of God, and if they should be converted, farewell to joy and quiet, they must over after be men of sorrows and contention, and good days must be at an end with them.

5. To true conversion is necessarily required the full and free consent of the will: for God regardeth the heart, and judgeth of men's actions according as that is in them; so, the will is the regent in man, and the first mover to every action: If that be true in it, the work is real, if that be deceitful, the work is hypocritical: Conversion is a turning of the whole man from sin unto God, it is a leaving off the old ways of sin, to take up a new life of holiness; and how can this be done, so long as the heart loves to wander? besides the will of man never stands neuter, though it may halt a while, till the understanding hath pondered and weighed things, yet it always comes at length to a conclusion: Men will either love God or Sin, they will either serve God or Mammon: Man is a traveler, he will keep some way: Hence you shall find in the Scripture, that unconversion is ascribed to the will: Psal. 81. 11. Israel would none of me. But when the will is turned the work is done, when the heart is given to God, all is his.

6. The Will, will never be gained till all the forementioned obstructions be taken away. For they are so many fortresses in which it serleth and secureth itself: As long as the heart remaineth deceived, it is also unpersuadable, Isa. 44. 20, A deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul. Whiles men call good evil, and evil good, whiles a man's own way is right, and pleasant, and accustomed, and God's ways are uneasy and unprofitable, whiles he finds substance in a way of Sin, and fills his house with spoil, and he sees no profit in praying to God and serving him, how can he desire the knowledge of his ways? Nay, he will say to the Almighty, depart, 44. 16, 17, 18. And till he finds Sin to be bitter, the way of it dangerous, the end death; till he grows weary of this way, and sees the beauty in holiness, he will never reject his old, and make choice of a new way.

7. The way wherein the spirit of God worketh this conviction, is by bringing man under serious considerations; nor is it to be expected other ways to be effected, for,

1. There is no truth any further affects us, or moves with us, than as it is applied particularly to our minds and consciences. The truths of the word of God are ever the same, for they are everlasting truths: It was ever a truth, that the ways of Sin lead to that chambers of death, that they are bitterness in the latter end; that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and their latter end is peace: but these are general truths, and the reason why men practice not accordingly, is because they never applied these truths to themselves, or compared their ways by them; hence that complaint, Isa. 1. 3. My People doth not consider. And hence that is the first direction of the Prophet, Hag. 1. 5. Now therefore, thus saith the Lord, consider your ways.

2. This particular application of the truth to ourselves, is the work of consideration; this lets in the first distinct light into the soul, whereby it is made privy to its own state, and stirred up to seek the bettering of it: Consideration then may be thus described, It is a deliberate pondering of such things as nearly concern us, giving credit to them, and drawing useful practical conclusions from them. All this is implied in the word, He said: Consideration is an inward discourse, or ratiocination: but more particularly.

1. The act itself is a deliberate pondering in the mind: called Communing with the heart, Psal 4. 4. The mind of man is naturally roving, consideration fixeth it; it is compared to chewing the cud, wherein the food is turned over and over: It is a looking upon, and into a thing with diligent inspection, it is called, a laying a thing to heart, Isa. 42. 25. which is a close and serious minding and weighing it.

2. The matter which it is conversant about, is such things as nearly concern us: It is every ones work to look to the concerns of his own soul; if thou be wise, be wise for thyself. Our conversion is not advanced in being busy in other men's matters, but in our own, thy ways, and thy doings, is that which the Scripture directs us to be thinking of.

3. That which gives weight to these things within us, is that we give credit to them; If we do not believe the things, they will be of no moment in our consideration; many a man hears weighty and seasonable truths spoken in the ordinances, but he believes them not, and so rejecteth them: Truth must be believed before it can be improved: Hence that Psal 106. 24. They despised the pleasant land: they believed not his word.

4. The improvement of it, is to draw useful practical conclusions from it. All truths lead to practice; and that consideration that issues not here is fruitless: The work of consideration is to say, what have I done, or what have I to do, if these things be thus or so? Now, till the soul comes unto this, it is not so much as in the way to conversion; for, though the spirit draws, yet the soul follows, and that not as a blind or dead thing, but as it is affected or persuaded by the efficacy of that which leads it sweetly after, and whereof it can give an account, and render a reason for what it doth: Thus Lydia 's heart was touched, and she hearkened &c, Thus the Prodigal, comes to himself, and then he reasons within himself.

USE. 1. For Information; we may hence learn.

1. The reason why there are so many under the clearest Gospel dispensations, that live and lie in Sin: It is not for want of light, for Scripture truths are written with Sun-beams; it is not for want of evidence, for they are full of demonstration; it is not because men are not concerned in them, for their everlasting concerns are therein contained; but it is for want of due consideration: Men come and go, they hear the Word, the most pertinent and profitable truths; but few make personal application; few enter into their own souls and debate the matter with themselves: It is God's complaint, Jer. 8. 6. No man repented of his wickedness, saying, what have I done? Men rush into the ways of Sin, and are bold and fearless, though God seeth and threatens, and why? Because they do not consider of this, Hos. 7. 2. They consider not in their hearts, that I remember all their wickedness. Jerusalem is obstinate, till she be ruined, and why? see, Lam. 1. 9. She remembereth not her last end, therefore she came down wonderfully. The young fool followeth his harlots, till a dart striketh through his liver, and how is this? Prov. 7. 25. He knoweth not that it is for his life: The sons and daughters of men are willfully

blind, because they shut their eyes, and will not receive counsel. If men would look into their sinful ways, and compare them by the word of God, they might find enough to terrify and fright them therefrom; but they cannot abide to think of it: If they would inquire into the ways of God, they might discover the purity and pleasantness of them; but they will not suffer their thoughts to dwell there: Hence they are called sottish children: Nay, if the spirit of God begin to touch and prick them, they are never well till they have banished all the thoughts of seriousness, or sense of regret; hence they are compared to men that are drunk and asleep, that cannot abide to be awakened, and if they are made to rub their eyes, they soon fall asleep again: Hence also it is that they cannot endure soul searching truths, lest they should be disquieted; and thus men go on till they drop into hell for want of consideration.

2. The reason why Satan, especially under powerful means, so much endeavors to keep men from consideration, and to divert their minds from pondering the truth; why, if he sees a soul once come to this, he is afraid that he shall lose him: Nothing more affrights this politick enemy, than to see souls begin to be serious: he knows his kingdom is maintained by fallacies, kept up by darkness; hence when a beam of light flasheth upon any conscience, he labors to extinguish it, by drawing the mind off; and therefore in the house of God, and in the dispensation of the Ordinances, he seeks to stop their ears, divert their thoughts, occupy them some other way; some he lulls asleep, others he invites to private discourse, to others he presents some object on which their eyes may be fixed, and he fills others with fancies, which occasion roving thoughts, that they may not attend: And if any are touched by the word, and begin to be affected, he hurries them away, not to their closets, but either to their vain company, or secular business; he finds something or other to employ their minds, and fill them with diversion, that so (if possible) they

may not have no more serious thoughts of those matters: This is Emblemized to us, by our Savior, in the high way ground, those fowls of the heaven which pick up the seed, are Satan; and by those means it is that he keeps up his authority in the hearts of men.

3. The reason why worldly occasions or delights, are to carnal hearts so great an obstruction to their conversion; why they choke good thoughts, good motions, and this is discovered in the thorny ground: Cares and deceitfulness of the world are these thorns; alas! men have so much to do in the world, that it is a wonder if they do not (with those guests, Mat. 22.) desire to be excused from coming at the Ordinances; but if they do in complement attend them, yet they have no time or leisure to improve what they hear, by consideration: Men have so much to do here in this world, that they cannot find a convenient time to think of the affairs of their souls: The clamor of outward business, speaks so much that they have no time to say a serious word to themselves about eternity and the things of another world: they are always in a crowd and hurry, and there is no room for meditation; one hath his Shop to look after, another his Ship to fit out, lawful things, and duties in their time and place; but it is great pity that there should be no thoughts meanwhile of those greater matters: And hence no wonder that our Savior speaks of it as a difficult, and miraculous thing for a rich man to be converted, because his mind is so taken up, his heart so fixed, his thoughts so occupied here, that he hears not the trumpet sound, nor takes the alarm of the word, nor ever so much as seriously thinks of an after state, and how much he is concerned in it.

USE. 2. For a word of Counsel and Exhortation unto sinners: Oh, be persuaded as you love your souls, and desire their good, as ever you would be converted and healed, that you would be entreated to call your hearts to an account, and put yourselves upon serious and



solemn consideration; consider your state, your ways, your end, and for Motive.

1. Consider, your misery is not less, but your danger is greater, because you do not mind it. Naturalists tell us of a great (but foolish) creature, which, when danger is near it, thrusts its head into a bush, and presumes, because she seeth not, she is secure: Just thus it is with poor sinners, when God threatens wrath, and declares Judgment against them, they shut their eyes, or stop their ears, will not mind it, and now they think all is safe: But know it assuredly that God will be as good as his word, and what he hath spoken shall come to pass, Whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear: He that sleeps at the top of a Mast, is not in less, but more danger of being thrown into the Sea and drowned, because he is asleep: And be sure, hell will be no whit easier to bear, because you drop into it unawares.

2. Know and assure yourselves that you are laboring under dangerous mistakes: you think you are safe and all is well, but you are under the wrath of God, and condemnation of hell: You think your way is your wisdom, but this way, and this thought is your folly: you conceive a way of sin to be a gainful trade, but you shall find it the greatest loss, when you shall know that it hath lost your souls; you account God's ways, those ways of holiness to be unprofitable, but it is nothing so; and if you would rightly consider, you should find all these to be great and gross delusions, and very dangerous, for they are undoing: It's certain that on these principles you must needs perish forever.

3. Seriously consider, that there is yet hope that you might do well: Though you are in the way to destruction, yet there is an opportunity to withdraw your foot, and take hold of the way of life: This the poor Prodigal found though he had run far; and indeed there is nothing

that hinders your conversion and salvation but your ignorance, inadvertency, and thence proceeding obstinacy and willfulness; all that obstructs is in yourselves: There are better ways than those you are going in, think of them: The wise woman considers a field and buys it, the wise Merchant considers a Pearl of great price, and purchaseth it: What if you part with all for it? it will recompense all your cost.

4. It is great rashness in you either to commend the ways of Sin, or condemn the ways of Godliness, before you have well considered of both: Why should you take up things upon trust? Why should you say of Godliness, This way is everywhere evil spoken of? How know you but that it is done injuriously, and by such who do as little know, and have as little considered of it as you have done? The Apostles counsel is to prove all things, and hold fast that which is good: Prove them by consideration, hear what each can say for themselves; what God hath to say for his ways, as well as the pleading of Sin and Satan for theirs.

5. Think, it will shortly be too late to consider to any comfort or profit: They that will not consider now, shall consider at the last, Jer. 23. 20. But it will be a sad consideration, when all the fruit thou canst reap, by thy reflections, will be only the accusations of Conscience, retorting thy incurable and irreparable follies upon thee; when its best language shall be to upbraid thee with precipitancy, and tell thee thou wouldest have thine own ways in despite of admonitions, warnings, counsels; thou wast told of this, what would be the end of these ways; how undoing a course thou wast taking; thou wast entreated to be a little serious, and open thine ear to instruction, thou wast proffered better things; thou mightest easily have seen, plainly have discovered, and so prevented that which now thou feelest; they were words of weight which were spoken to thee,

but thou wouldest not hear, nor consider, and art therefore justly fallen into that pit from whence there is no recovery, and drowned in that destruction, from which thou mightest have been delivered: And is it not better to consider now, than to defer it till then? If now thou wilt consider, it may tend to life, and the saving of thy soul, and so prove thy happiness; but assure thyself, hells considerations will be torments, and fiery reflections; yea, that eating worm that dies not, but shall pray upon the soul forever: Be wise then in time. The matter of this consideration is the next thing to be taken notice of, in the following words of our Text.

## **SERMON XII.**

Having thus considered of the Prodigals deliberation in general, we now come to look upon the motives themselves, by which he argued himself into a resolution to return to his father; and these are two, which do comprise under them in general, the two main heads of consideration; the one respects his father, the other himself: The order of them is Rhetorically propounded, where the first argument is last placed, in the deliberation: for doubtless man's necessity first drives him, or else God's goodness would never draw him: Proud man will live at home as long as he can. The motives are joined together, because neither alone will do, but both together are needful to make a full persuasive to a Sinner to return to God. Man's misery thoroughly apprehended, without the discovery of God's mercy, would drive to despair; and God's mercy propounded to a man that is insensible of his need of it, would be slighted and refused: But where these two meet in one, the former drives a man out of himself, and

the latter draws him to God. I shall endeavor to speak of them severally.

1. The first motive is taken from the consideration of his own condition, in these words, I perish with hunger. As the word bread, is Synecdochically used to express all manner of necessary supplies, so is hunger for every want of what is needful for the comfort of man's life; and here, in a spiritual sense, it intends the absence of all that might save the soul from destruction: Hunger also is, by a Metonymy of the effect, put for famine, which produceth hunger, by taking away that which should prevent it. The words express the deep distress which the young man was reduced unto, sensibly apprehended by him, and is Emphatically set forth. 1. By the cause of it, hunger or famine, he hath nothing whereon to live (<H&G>, deficere) there was a failing, or want of provision. 2. By the effect of it, sensibly felt, and personally applied, I perish. The word in our text is of a harsh signification, the best sense of it is, to die; but it signifies not death barely, but Destruction; it is q.d. this hunger will certainly destroy me; I have no hopes to live in this famine; I might here observe.

DOCT. I. The Soul of Man, without suitable spiritual supplies must needs perish.

There is a natural consequence of dying, upon a famine, if no relief come; and if the soul have nothing to live upon, it must needs die forever, which might learn us.

USE. 1. Their folly who take care only for their bodies, and neglect their souls: and truly every unregenerate man is such a one; he takes heed to provide for the feeding and clothing of his body, but lays in no provision for his better part: and so much the greater is this folly, in as much as ten thousand bodily deaths are not comparable to the death or loss of a soul, Mat. 16. 26.

USE. 2. To teach us to prize the means and supplies which God affords for the relief of our souls: That is a terrible famine mentioned, Amos 8. 11, 12. Not of bread, nor of waters, but of hearing the word of God. Deprecate it as the sorest evil: And having such provision made for your souls as God is pleased to give you in a place of such plenty of the means of grace, labor to love, to prize, to feed and live upon it; starve not in the midst of plenty, lest you be found willful self-murderers. But I shall not insist on this, the main thing follows, therefore.

DOCT. II. In order to the conversion of a sinner, God makes him deeply apprehensive that he is perishing with hunger.

We must carefully distinguish between the reality of a man's state, and the sense that he bears of that state: The famine was all over that land, but none feels the destructiveness of it but this poor Prodigal: All mankind, whiles in a state of nature are famishing creatures, but it is but some few among them that feel it. the rest perish insensibly.

The work we are here speaking of, is that which Divines call a lost state, and it comprehends in it the first part of preparatory humiliation, which is properly the beating of a sinner wholly off from himself, and all that is in himself, in point of sufficiency. In the Explication of the Doctrine we may consider, 1. Some thing of the nature of this work. 2. The necessity of it in order to Conversion.

1. Concerning the nature of this work, of what it is for a Soul to be sensibly perishing with hunger, and how he is brought unto this sense, observe; The Spirit of God raiseth in him a manifest and irresistible conviction of three things, which laid together do reduce him to this exigency or distress; and all this is the work of the Spirit in the means, for; all men's conditions being really one and the same by nature, why else should not all that enjoy the same means of

Conviction, be alike apprehensive of it, but the spirit imprints it upon some and not others? Now the things are these;

1. He kindles in him an eager and pinching hunger: note that besides that spiritual and gracious hunger of the Soul after righteousness mentioned, Mat. 5. 6. there is also a preparatory hunger, which is oppressive to, and grievously distresseth the soul, see Isai. 65. 13. My Servants shall eat but ye shall be hungry: Now this hunger is made up of these two things, Viz.

1. A deep apprehension of distressing misery lying upon him, and making his spirits to fail, and heart to faint. God opens the Sinners eyes to see and find that which before he neither knew nor believed; that the wrath of God is upon him, that he is a cursed creature, that he hath lost all grace, and is in danger of the miseries of Hell: he finds his Soul to be in a condition extremely dangerous, exposed to the executions of divine Vengeance, he now believes because he feels, that wrath is upon him, sees a Sword of vengeance drawn against him.

2. An earnest longing to be rid of, and free from this distress: as the hungry man longs that he may have some food; so doth the Sinner wish earnestly that his misery may be eased, the cause taken away, and the wrath of God impending, removed: he is fearfully amazed at the apprehensions of the anger of God, he cannot tell how to bear it, or to be able to endure it, and fain he would, if there were any possibility, be delivered, Isai. 33. 14. Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? although he doth not know whither to go in particular for a redress, yet in general he saith, Who shall show me good? yea he cannot satisfy himself, he is restless, his soul is disquieted and filled with tumultuations, these terrors make him afraid. 2. He makes him to find and discover that there is no relief to

be had in any of these ways and courses which he hath been taking; and this makes his hunger to be the more distressing: when an hungry stomach meets with a well-furnished Table, it is a pleasure to have a good appetite; but when hunger and penury meet together, this is tormenting: When the cravings of the soul are insatiable, & there are no supplies to be gotten for it, this is terrible, such is the condition of the soul now, where it thought to have meat, there it can find nothing but husks, and that both,

1. In the world, in which he formerly trusted, and in the enjoyment whereof he was wont to say to his soul, eat, drink, and be merry, for thou hast goods laid up for many years. This world cannot satisfy him now; it will not still the cry of Conscience, it will not comfort him against the anger of God, and fears of hell, Riches cannot profit him in the day of wrath. He cannot feed and refresh himself upon its fair promises, and glossing insinuations-It will not ease his troubled mind; but like Belshazzar, he cries out in the midst of his cups and companions; his hiding place of deceit is washed away, and he sees that the world is empty, and void, and wast, Nah. 1. 10.

2. In himself, and his own duties and righteousness: He was wont to please himself in them, and feed himself with vain hopes, thinking to appear with them, and hold up his head before God; but now he finds that these will not suffice, they cannot atone God, appease his anger, turn away his fury, or procure him happiness: They are unprofitable, he hath now no more self-sufficiency, he cannot do what the Law requires, nor pay the debts he owes it, nor pick up any resolution out of his best services, Conscience now tells him all this is nothing, Num. 17. 12, 13.

3. He causeth him to draw this positive and sad conclusion, that in this condition he must certainly perish: He is now shaken out of all

his vain hopes, fond expectations, wherewith he was wont to feed his fancy, and cherish his soul: There is now nothing but misery, hell and destruction in his eyes and thoughts: The Law is rigorous, and will be satisfied; God is holy and will be glorified; he is by this Law condemned, and hath no satisfaction to make to it; the world is a priceless thing, and if he had it, it would not be taken in exchange for a soul; and thus, between longing and despair he is ready to faint and die: This whole condition is amply described to us in apt and pertinent metaphors, Isa. 41. 17. The poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst.

2. Touching the necessity of the work in order to conversion, we may observe.

1. That conversion is the turning of a sinner from sin to God: Now Sin is properly the reliance of the creature upon something else which stands in competition with, and opposition to God, which therefore it must leave, or else it's impossible that it should come to him: he that goes to one contrary, must in so doing go away from the other; the Apostle opposeth these two, 1 Tim. 6. 15. That they trust not in uncertain riches, but in the living God.

2. In Conversion the spirit of God comes into the Soul, and fills it with his Grace; in order to which filling it is needful that the Soul be first emptied, for as long as a Man is full of himself, of the World, of his carnal hopes, of his legal righteousness, there is no room for the spirit of God, hence he comes to the poor and needy, Isai. 41. 17.

3. In active Conversion, there is a voluntary motion of the Soul: the will of man is that which doth first renounce Sin, Satan and World, and lay hold upon Christ; now a voluntary action is the action of a reasonable creature, applying himself to his object, not upon compulsion, nor by the force of instinct, but by the inclination of his



own mind; so that as he doth it willingly, he also (and therefore) doth it rationally, or upon some apprehended grounds: and from this it will appear, how needful it is that a Sinner be made thus sensible in order to his Conversion: For,

1. Man by nature is a proud Creature, and loath to go or be beholden to any other as long as he hath any hopes to do well of himself: This appeared before, in the consideration of the sordid course the needy Prodigal took to supply his want.

2. Man is naturally most opposite and contrary to God, and will not (be sure) come to him until he be driven: It is very evident, that he will try every way, turn every stone, use all means to do well other ways, before he will betake himself to God: the Prodigal will live meanly, fare hardly, scramble, and debase himself if that will do rather than return to his father's house: as long as a sinner hath any hopes that he can make a shift to keep up himself from sinking, he flies not unto God: (the Raven; if he can have carrion to light upon and feed of, returns not to the Ark:) for till now he hath no need of God: A man must: be sick before he will send for a Physician, and dangerously sick, heart sick, before he will send for one whom he hates, other Physicians must first fail him.

4. In Conversion there must be a whole reliance upon God, and that must presuppose an utter rejection of all other helps and props, Hos. 14 3. Ashur shall not save us, &c. Now man hath naturally such an opinion of himself, and of the creature, that till he be thoroughly convinced of its emptiness, he will not forsake it, and till that he cannot close truly with God, who will not be a divided trust, or part glory with another, Isa. 42. 8.

USE. 1. For Information, here we see,

1. The reason why Jesus Christ and his salvation are no more welcome and acceptable to the most of men, and so why the work of conversion is so rare and infrequent even there where the Gospel comes with most clearness; it is because the most of men have yet something of their own to live upon; they have not spent all, they are not nipped with the famine. Though all natural men are prodigals, yet they have not as yet made away with their portion, they still have something to support them; they do not feel themselves poor perishing creatures; but are like Laodicea, Rev. 3. 17. Rich and want for nothing. Tell them of the riches of grace in Christ, the full supplies that are with him, that he hath where withal to satisfy the hungry soul, what care they? they need it not, they are not hungry and pinched; the most of the children of men think they can do sufficiently without Christ, therefore they say to him depart from us, Job 21. 14. The Gospel invitations are presented to poor, blind, sick, perishing sinners, and therefore men do not take it to themselves, they hope they are not such: and therefore, till we see men distressed, till we find them despairing, till we hear them crying out sensibly of their woeful misery, we must not expect they should do any other then complement with Jesus Christ, and, with them that were invited to the Gospel feast, Mat. 22. to frame excuses, and use delays.

2. What need there is of preaching the Law, or legal truths in the days of the Gospel: It is true, Christ is the end of the Law, and Christ only ought to be preached: i.e. as the ultimate scope of all Divine truths: But, as the Law was of old, so it is still, a School-master to Christ, i.e. to make men see and feel their need of Christ: And truly, without it men will never give him that true welcome which he deserves in their souls: This is the right Glass in which man is made to see his own condition, and to understand his misery; this is it that discovers man to be a bankrupt, the world an empty, hungry place;

this displays man's sin, God's Justice, and our own utter inability, and all this is the very ground-work of bringing us to feel ourselves perishing: God will humble sinners before he will save them; he will make them come to Christ for need, and not in complement. They are therefore strangers from the methods of God's grace, that brand this with the aspersion of legal and opposite to the Gospel, whereas it is necessarily introductive.

3. The usefulness of affliction in order to the conversion of sinners, and the reason why God is many times pleased to lay these chains upon them; why they are very suitable for the helping forward this great affair in the soul: Hence when God would do Ephraim good, he afflicts him, Hos. 5. 15. with 6. 1. and see for this also, Job 37. 16. &c. Man is high minded, and self-conceited, when he hath his health, strength, wealth and honor in the world; he is too good to be spoken to: but affliction depresseth him, it helps to bore his ear, it puts him upon consideration, which we heard is the first step to conversion: Affliction is a School in which a sinner is set to study, here is his folly and vain trust anatomized; here his misery begins to appear, and he finds how he hath deceived his own soul. Not that affliction of and by itself will open a blind eye, or soften a hard heart: There are many that are hardened, and made worse by it, but when God is pleased to set in with it, it hath that in it which is of use to help man to see something of himself: Be not then angry with afflictions.

4. That a soul sensible of, groaning under, and ready to dy by reason of the oppression of his spiritual distress and want, is not far from the Kingdom of Heaven: I know there is a despair through the weight of horror, that sets a soul further from good, and drives him to hell with violence, such was Cain 's and Judas 's. And truly, separate this state from the sweet invitations of the Gospel, and it is the clearest Emblem of hell upon earth that can be: But yet in the Gospel-way

Christ is near to such a soul to tender himself to him, Isa. 4. 17. Yea his special invitations are to such, and all encouragement is set before them, Isa. 55. 1. Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come to the waters. Mat. 11. 28. Come to me ye that are weary and heavy laden. Rev. 22. 17. Let him that is athirst come. Till it comes to this, our hopes for man are built but upon general propositions, God may call them, it is possible, because they live under the Gospel, and under the means, &c. But now there is hope that God is doing the work: And, as when the pain of a travelling woman increaseth, there is expectation that she will ere long be delivered, so these cries give encouragement, that it will not be long ere Christ be formed in such a soul.

USE. 2. For Exhortation, let it serve to call upon and invite every unregenerate sinner to serious and solemn consideration of this truth, viz. that he is perishing, starving, famishing, dying: It is the saddest sight in the world to see poor miserable men and women dying, and they ignorant; dropping every day into hell, because they have nothing to live upon, and yet not consider. If you ask me who is intended by this perishing Prodigal; I answer, if thou art unconverted thou art the person; and that thou mayest be convinced of, and made to apprehend it, take into thought these things.

1. Thy poor soul must have something to live upon, or else it will perish everlastingly: This is a truth that man little thinks of, hence he cares only for his outward man; but it is evident, man is every way a dependent creature; if the soul have not spiritual food to live on, it must needs die: as the life is lost without food, so is the soul lost without Christ, hence called our life. Col. 3. 4.

2. Thou hast nothing in thyself to live upon, and therefore in thyself art certainly perishing: Such is the condition of every soul out of

Christ, he is going to destruction: Look upon thyself and thou shalt find in thee all the symptoms of a perishing creature: all thou hadst to live upon is spent, or, I am sure, will be spent without thy profit: Original righteousness and holiness thou hast lost already, and thy vain and carnal hopes thou wilt lose sooner or later: thou art a law breaker, art under the curse, sentenced to die everlastingly; God, in whose favor alone is life, is thy Enemy; the Law, in obedience to which thou mightest have lived, is broken by thee, and calls for thy destruction; thou hast nothing to redeem thee from the efficacy of it; thou hast no power to obey it, no price to satisfy with for thy violation of it; thou hast lost the Image of God, thou hast lost the favor of God, thou hast lost strength to obey him, thou art fast bound in cords of vanity, Divine vengeance is pursuing hard after thee, the mouth of the pit is open to receive thee; and who then is ready to perish, if thou art not?

3. The things which thou seekest to and reliest upon for thy relief, they are not bread: They will not feed and support a dying soul: the worlds fairest banquets are but a show, and have no substance in them, they are husks, Swines, but not man's meat: Dost thou trust in riches? They will not profit in the day of wrath. Dost thou rely upon friends? They cannot by any means redeem thy soul. Dost thou content thyself in pleasures? Thou art dead alive. Dost thou feed thyself with honors? neither they nor thou can abide, but thou art like the beasts that perish. Strip thyself out of these things, for God will else strip thee shortly; and then see what a forlorn estate thou art in: Thy hungry soul is put off with a stone for bread, and for a fish, a serpent; and all thy hopes here are perishing hopes, and when they leave thee, thou must perish too.

4. Jesus Christ only hath that bread which can satisfy thy hunger, and save thy life; but thou art at an everlasting distance from him,

thou art in a far Country a great way off: In particular,

1. Thou art far from having any will or desire to go to him for it: The unregenerate sinner, though dying, yet will not come to him for life, Joh. 5. 40. It is the great misery of sinful man, that he will die, Ezek. 33. 11. Why will ye die? i.e., he will do so rather than repent and return to God, and seek his grace in his way: There is bread in Egypt, but you will not go thither for it, eternal life is only for comers, but you refuse to come that you may have it.

2. You are far from having any power or ability to come to Christ; that rock, which is the Magazine or Store-house of bread for famishing souls, is out of your reach, higher than you are, and, without an Almighty arm to lift you up into it, you will ever fall short of it: God must draw before ever the sinner can come: Your Pit, as it hath no water in it, so it is deep, and you have no ladder to climb upon, nor legs or hands to ascend withal, if you had one; thus it is with you, and now what will you do?

3. God is under no engagement or obligation to you, to do this kindness for you, viz. to bring you this bread of life to save you from famishing; nay, he hath many provocations to refuse so to do: You have undone yourselves, your riot hath brought this poverty upon you; yea, you have been putting of this Grace away from you; you have loved lies and deceits, embraced lying vanities, and hated your own mercies. Think of these things, and now say whither it is good, a safe, a desirable condition you are in? So are all unconverted ones; let this affect your hearts: One would think it should make men's souls die within them, to think and consider of the death which they are dying; a death of hunger, the very worst, and most oppressing and calamitous sort of death: Oh that men felt this now! there were then hopes that they might have relief, whiles the bread and water of

life are exhibited in Gospel tenders: but if you will not know nor believe it now, you must be made sensible of it in a more amazing hour, when you shall tire heaven with endless and fruitless cries, and shall not be able by them all to prevail so far, as to obtain, in that everlasting famine, so much as one drop of water to quench the heat of your torments.

## **SERMON XIII.**

2. The second Motive is taken from his Father, in whom he observes two things. Viz. Plenty, and bounty: for he had enough and to spare: Bounty, for so much was allowed to his hired servants, from whence he argues, he will not, if I go, suffer me, who am a Child to perish; and therefore joins to these, his relation to his plenty, it was his father that had it.

The main difficulty in the words is to know what is meant by, or alluded to in these hired servants that were so well provided for: some by these understands visible Members of the visible Church, that were only outward professors, and not sincere, who, like hirelings, only serve God for sinister ends; and then by bread they understand Ordinances, as Prayer, Preaching, and the Sacraments, of which they have enough and to spare, more than they would care for: The word is, do abound, a Metaphor from a fountain that runs over; nor doth I wholly reject this interpretation from being part of the meaning, and may teach us thus much; That an enlightened soul expects his spiritual food in and by the Ordinances. But it seems to come nearer the condition of a sinner in such a state as we have been

considering, if we look upon the phrase to have no particular allusion, but only to be a comparative illustration of Divine bounty: Hired servants in great houses are not wont to be greatly cared for; he is a bountiful housekeeper indeed that feeds such plentifully. Or it may be an allusion to the general care which God takes of all his creatures, as he is Lord of the world and provider of the great family of the earth, even the worst and meanest of creatures, Job 38. ult. but I shall not be over curious. Hence,

DOCT. The consideration of Divine sufficiency and bounty, are great encouragements to the soul, that feels itself ready to perish.

It is wondrous relief to a despairing dying soul, to consider and believe that God hath enough to answer his wants, and is a God very bountiful to his Creatures. In the Explication consider. 1. What manner of encouragement this affords? 2. What of encouragement ariseth therefrom? 3. That it is proper for perishing sinners.

1. What manner of encouragement this affords?

ANSW. We are here to consider that the Prodigal was not yet returned, nor returning to his father, but only upon deliberation about it; nor yet come to a resolution in the thing; in which resolution may be observed (when we come to it) the first working of saving Grace, so that the encouragement which is here denoted is that which helped him to a preparatory hope, and was a mean to keep him from utter despair. That there is such a hope, is asserted to by our Divines; a hope before faith, keeping the soul from falling into deadly discouragement, or utterly refusing to attend upon any means for his good, which must needs be the fruit of utter despair. Hope of obtaining the end, is the very motive to using the means: Did not the perishing sinner conceive some hope that he might find good in the ways of God's appointment, he would certainly reject them. Now this



hope is not an effect or fruit of justifying faith, but precedent, and oftentimes in order to it. And if we carry in mind, that the spirit of God deals with sinners after the manner of reasonable creatures, we may the better conceive of this hope, and the encouragement arising from it; which may be in a few things.

1. The soul of man absolutely needs some object to rely upon; man's dependence for soul as well as body is out of himself; that must have something to live upon, or else it cannot do: Man was made for an end, and the attainment of his end is the fruition of his object, hence the Church calls God the portion of her soul, Lam. 3. 24.

2. Hence the soul can hold up no longer than it hath some object to depend upon, either really or imaginarily able to support it: The soul therefore sinks when it hath nothing to trust to; and that is the proper nature of despair, viz. the sinking of a soul for want of a stay: and the reason why every sinner is not a desponder, is only because he stays upon the things of the world, and hopes they will support him; hence they are said to trust in them, Psal. 49. 6.

3. God and the creature cannot both be a man's stay: These are set in opposition in the Scripture, and will alone be our confidence, or not at all, Deut. 32. 12. Therefore the Apostle opposeth these two trusts to each other 1 Tim. 6. 17.

4. Hence in order to conversion the soul is broken off from his hope, trust, or reliance upon any created being: he is made to find himself, with the Prodigal, a bankrupt creature living in a famishing world, which hath nothing in it but husks, and he cannot feed upon them: he sees Ashur cannot save, he is in a pit wherein no water is, and now he is ready to die, perish, can find no comfort here.

5. In this state there is nothing but hope can sustain the soul from utterly despairing, and without this the heart would certainly break: For, that man who knows that he must certainly perish without help, and all help which he relied on utterly fails him, hath only this to relieve him, to hope that help may come some other way, else his heart must sink and die within him. Now this hope must be preparatory, for,

1. It flows not from an interest in Christ, for it is the encouragement of a soul that hath been estranged from him to go to him; for God allures the soul to Christ, by setting this hope before him, and effectually persuading him to embrace it; and it is the usual method, of the spirit to come in with it into the soul; so Ephraim, Jer. 31. 18.

2. It ariseth only from a possibility, or at furthest a probability that he may here find acceptance, and obtain a full supply of all the good he needs, and not from a certainty, or promise, or covenant in which he may claim it: you have it expressed in Jonah, 3. 9. Who knows but the Lord may be gracious? The sinking soul hears news that there may be a redress had for him, that there is one who not only can do, but hath done as much for such as he, which makes him to bear up, and puts him upon waiting in the use of means.

2. What of encouragement ariseth from these considerations?

ANSW. Here is the only Rational encouragement of a humbled sinner: He can find none with looking elsewhere: if he look upon the world he sees nothing but famine; if upon himself, he hath spent all, and is utterly undone, it is only in God that he can expect to find any relief. Now the Soul is not first made to believe, and then see the reason of it, but the spirit of God draws the soul to believe, by making it see the excellency of the object, and so persuading it; he is first made to see the ground of hope, and then to follow, as the

Prodigal here. Now both of these Attributes are full of encouragement.

1. The sufficiency of God; it cannot but animate the Prodigal, to think that there is bread enough and to spare in his fathers house: Starving beggars are not wont to ask relief of beggars like themselves, but they go to the rich: Men account it vain to ask an alms where they know there is nothing to be had; but where they understand there is enough, they will be very importunate, because they know such an one can, if he hath an heart to it, do them a kindness: So, here the soul discovers a possibility that he may have succor, because God is able; there is all fullness in him, he can save him from hell, and wrath, and misery, and bestow life and salvation upon him if he sees meet: When Jacob heard there was bread in Egypt, he said to his Sons, Why do you sit still and look one on another, and dy? So, when a soul hears there is all Grace with God, it prompts him to say, why do I tarry here then, and perish? God therefore thus propounds himself to destroyed Israel, Hos. 13. 9. In me is thy help. And Christ propounds it as a question to them in order to their cure, Matt. 9. 28. Believe ye that I am able to do this? Now possibility apprehended gives ease to extreme necessity, and when a soul hears of it, it will not cast off all hope, till it hath made utmost proof, and hence the soul is helped to come to Christ believing, hence the poor Leper makes this his argument, and comes with it: Mat. 8. 2. If thou wilt thou canst make me clean.

2. The bounty of God added to his sufficiency gives further strength to hope, in that it discovereth more than a possibility, viz. some probability: The Fathers bounty to hired servants, made the son think, he not only hath enough, but is very free of it, why then may not I, who am a son, though a Prodigal, make proof of it? Beggars go more cheerfully to, and knock more liberally at a bountiful man's

door, because they are ready to promise themselves relief; not that they deserve more of him than of another, but because he is more ready to communicate his favor than a churl is: When a poor sinner considers how kind God is, how full of mercy, how liberally he distributes his favors, how he deals his kindnesses undeserved; and scatters them, not with a sparing but bountiful hand, now, thinks he, why may I not speed? why may not I come as well as another, and hope to find him kind to me, as well as others have done? Hence God puts this argument into their mouths, Hos. 14. 3. With thee the fatherless findeth mercy. You find David makes a plea of this, Psal. 86. 5. Thou, O Lord, art good, and ready to forgive. Now, though the soul have never a promise to rely on (for that is received in believing) yet he hath a support against despair, and argument to drive him to go to God for his mercy.

3. That this encouragement is of use only to perishing sinners: The Prodigal comes not to this thought till he is at an utter loss, and he joins it to that consideration, I perish with hunger: And there is great reason for this, for,

1. As long as a sinner hath anything at home, he minds not nor regards God, but saith to the Almighty, depart; men that have supplies within doors will not go abroad, and knock at other doors for relief: Hence, to a proud and carnally confident sinner it is no encouragement, that God hath bread enough, and is ready to distribute it to such as come and ask it, for what is that to him who needs it not, who is full, and wants for nothing? He feels himself well and lusty, the Physician may go about his business he hath no need of him.

2. Hence also these encouragements are not nextly and immediately exhibited to sinners, till they come to this state and sense: The

Gospel is not properly preached to men till they are prepared for it by the Law: Christ therefore saith, that he did not come to call the righteous: i.e., men rich with the opinion of their own sanctity; but sinners, i. e. such as were sensible of sin. It is the hunger-bitten soul that longs for bread, the faint and thirsty that hearkens after springs of water. Christ propound his Grace to souls when it is like to be welcome: these therefore are wont to go together, sense of utmost distress, and a discovery of the riches and readiness of Christ for succor; the first of these without the second breeds despair, the second without the first meets with scorn and contempt,

USE. 1. For Information;

1. That he that would have any encouragement to wait on God for grace, must seek it in God alone and not in himself. The thoroughly awakened sinner must indeed look both on God and himself too; but he must see in himself nothing but ground of despair, and all his hope in God, Hos. 13. 9. This therefore dasheth their hopes, who would fain find in themselves that which may encourage them; and are therefore made to despond, by their unworthiness, the greatness of their sin, &c. this also may encourage those that see the worst in themselves, none like them for sin and misery; why God is the same.

2. That they lay blocks in the way of their own conversion, that only sit poring upon their own misery, and look no further: What good would it have done the poor Prodigal, to have only sat, and wrung his hands, and cried, I perish, I perish? If he had looked no farther, he had perished indeed. Though we must begin here, yet we must not end here, but look further for encouragement. The distressed man's enquiry is, where shall I have help? and so must yours, and now the spirit of grace is ready to direct you to one that is both able and full. therefore,

USE. 2. Let it be for a word of encouragement to those that are at the point of death, who feel themselves miserable, but neither in themselves nor elsewhere can find deliverance, and are (possibly) ready to pass a sad sentence upon themselves, that there is no hope for their souls. Thou hast seen an end of all created perfection, thou hast come to the bottom of thine own confidence; thou hast found an empty world, felt an empty soul; but didst thou never hear of God, or hast thou never tried him? If not, do not yet despair; first see what he can and will do for thee: you will say, I have tried many courses and they fail, and I am dis-heartened; well, but this is a way never yet frustrated thee, and let these Attributes put a little comforting hope into thy soul; consider then and believe.

1. That God is able to help thee: He hath all that, and more than all that which thou needest: He hath eternal life with him to give to all those that ask it of him; thou art starving, but he can feed thee, thou art perishing, but he can save thee: God loves to commend his power to us, that we may take hold of it, Isa. 27. 5. Let him lay hold of my strength, that he may make peace with him. Look upon him,

1. As he is God: That word is enough to tell thee he is able; God thinks it a word big enough to encourage his desponding, and almost despairing people, Isa. 45. 22. Look unto me, for I am God. The reason why thou canst find no help among the creatures, is because they are not God, Isa. 31. 3. The Egyptians are men, and not God. And that you may know what he can do as God, look upon the work of Creation: when God would hearten his people to rely upon him, he calls up their consideration hither, Isa. 44. 24, 25. 12. 15. What cannot he who made a world out of nothing, do? Could God call for a world, and it answered his call, and cannot he save a poor sinner from perishing? doubtless he can: what serve all the Divine

Attributes for, but to display the greatness and immensity of the power of God?

2. As he is God in Christ: And there you shall see how he is not only absolutely able, but also suitably laid in with sufficient supply to save the perishing souls of prodigal sinners from perdition: Christ is a great Store-house, in whom is laid up all provision needful for the famishing posterity of fallen Adam: the great discouragement of a convinced sinner is, how can God do it and be just? Though there be a fountain of goodness in God, able to satisfy the soul that enjoys it, yet sin hath stopped up the channel, and Divine Justice interposeth, condemning the sinner to die: But now in Christ all these Channels are opened again; he hath satisfied Justice, and so broken open a new and living way to God, and presented him sitting on a Throne of Grace; and thus God is able, notwithstanding his Justice, to open treasures of many to sinners, and fill every hungry soul with good things. Divine sufficiency is by this means rendered communicable to the Children of men: And it is in this sense the Apostle speaks, Eph. 3. 20. He is able to do more than we can ask or think. Otherwise it had been a mockery put upon dying sinners, to have told them of abundant store of Grace and good, which it was no ways possible for them to come at. Now it is your work and business to apply this to your condition, and say, though I am perishing, yet there is a possibility that I may be supplied; though the world cannot relieve me, yet God can, and that not only by absolute power, but in a feasible way of his own finding out: I may then live and not die: And the very belief of this probability hath driven many a soul to him; and thou mayest, as well as the poor leper, frame a petition and argument out of it; If thou wilt, thou canst. Out of doubt it opens a door of hope, for a soul to know and believe, that if God will, he can both save him and be just.

2. That God is bountiful, and ready to relieve such as are in want: This may add to thy encouragement and hope, though thou art not certain that he will help thee: The Prodigal did not know that his father would look upon him, but he knew him to be kind, and that put him forward; so it should do thee; hence God hath written his Name in letters of goodness, Exod. 34. 6, 7. And to help here,

1. Consider how much God doth for such as never return to him, nor ask mercy of him: God's general goodness should lead sinners to repentance, Rom. 2. 4. When you see how God spares profane and wretched sinners, and suffers them to live; yea, provides liberally for them; fills them with hid treasures, gives them more than heart can wish, and the waters of an overflowing cup are wrung out unto them, so that their hearts are filled with food and gladness, they crown their heads with Rose-buds, and spend their days in wealth, and leave the residue to their babes: Argue from hence, what goodness hath he then in store for them that humble themselves, forsake their sins, repent, and return to him with their whole hearts?

2. Consider how many repenting Prodigals have upon their return been entertained and made welcome by him, who once did as thou hast done, run themselves out, spent all, and were ready to famish, but, betaking themselves to him, they were fed, and saved alive, and this may give you hopes to find the like favor at his hand; Consider therefore,

1. They were such who as little deserved this favor as thou: they had nothing of merit for which they should be bid welcome, and relieved in their distress, for all mankind stand guilty before God, Rom. 3. 19.

2. They had gone away from him, and wasted all in riot, as thou hast done: What a Prodigal was Manasseh? how miserably had he run



himself out? yet he obtained favor: What a great sinner had Paul been? yet he was accepted,

3. They were such as had as little to plead for themselves as thou hast: They had nothing to plead but mercy, condescending mercy, undeserved mercy: they had no more to say for themselves than the poor publican had, Lord have mercy on me a sinner. For themselves, or of themselves, all they could say, was only to make this poor Prodigal 's acknowledgment, verse. 19. and yet were not rejected, but found mercy.

3. Consider what relenting's there are in the hearts of men, especial of Parents towards their Children: for, that is the scope of the Parable, to argue from the less to the greater; q. d. If a father can have so much mercy, a poor man, that hath but a little kindness, a little pity with him, what may we hope then that God will do? Can a Prodigal so argue from his fathers bounty, and encourage himself by it? how much more a poor guilty sinner from the bounty of God, with whom are everlasting mercies?

4. Consider how richly God hath entertained returning sinners. The poorest, meanest Believer hath enough and to spare, no Believer in Christ's family wants for anything; that promise is fulfilled, Ps. 34. 10. God hath done for them more than they can express; and though they sometimes seem to complain, yet it is their infirmity and infidelity: What can a Believer want which he hath not? Pardon of sin, title of inheritance to all good things, favor with God, grace to serve him, a fatherly care for him; yea, and to spare, he hath joys, consolations, ravishing of soul; he may, not only feed, but feast it by faith on Jesus Christ: If you say, what is all this to me, who have no lot or share in this matter? I answer, it is this to thee, it should encourage thee to hope, and not utterly to despair of finding mercy;

and from hence to animate thy soul to go to God, and wait upon him for it, to seek him diligently in the use of means; and to resolve not to sit still & die of the famine silently, but to make thy moan to God, and pour out thy complaint before him; to arise and leave this far country where there is nothing but famine and death, and, with the Prodigal, take up a resolution to return to God, and ask gracious entertainment with him for a poor dying perishing sinner, who is he alone with whom the fatherless findeth mercy.

## SERMON XIV.

I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee. - Vers. 18.

And am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants. - Vers. 19.

In the former verse we had the Prodigal quickening and encouraging himself to return to his father, which is the first part of his deliberation.

2. In these words is set down his deliberate conclusion, or consultation and determination what improvement to make of these arguments, which is, in sum to make proof of his fathers love in the most penitent and humble manner. More particularly, he resolves upon two things: 1. That he will return to his father, I will arise, and go to my father. 2. How he will demean himself when he comes to him, viz. in the most submissive and self-abasing manner that is possible, and this appears, both in his confession and petition. 1. In his confession, in which he acknowledgeth, 1. His sin, aggravated in two things. 1. The object against whom, against heaven. 2. The presence in which, before thee. 2. The merit or desert of his sin, I am no more worthy to be called thy son. 2. His petition, submitting to his fathers disposal, Make me as one of thy hired servants. Before I enter upon particulars, it will be needful to inquire, to what head in Divinity this is to be referred; whither to a preparatory or to a saving work: and I suppose it may be made evident that it refers to a saving work, and that true conversion is here deciphered, and set forth in these and the following words, verse, 20. begin.

It is true we have in these words only his deliberate purpose expressed; but we must remember that the will is the first subject of Religion, and when that is truly turned to God, there is a saving work wrought, and the whole man will follow, and so it did in this, verse. 20 he hath now renounced his far Country and made choice of God. The work here described is Repentance, but not a separate from, but joined with & flowing from saving faith: for it was the spirit of Grace working faith in him, and acting of it who made him to draw this conclusion from the premises; that enabled him to adventure his soul upon God, and withal taught him how to do it in a penitent manner.

Hence those that place true Repentance in order before Faith, mistake: Though Faith usually first discovers itself to us in act of Repentance, and the comforts of it are sensibly felt after Repentance; yea, the greatest and noblest acting's of faith are those that are exerted in Repentance; leading the soul in deepest sense of sin and unworthiness, to adventure itself upon the mercy and power of a justly offended God, in returning to him.

Furthermore, we are not to think that because this resolution is ascribed to the Prodigal as his act, therefore our Repentance prevents the Grace of God: Our Savior's design being not to describe conversion by its Author, but by its subject, and by the effects on the subject. If it be inquired whence Repentance comes, there are other Scriptures which point us to the Author; but if we ask how Repentance works, here we have it.

But I come to look more particularly into the words, and here; if we consider when and how the Prodigal came to draw up this conclusion, by referring it to the verse. foregoing, we shall find that it ariseth from the discoveries made of his fathers fullness of benignity: whence we might observe this,

DOCT. I. The goodness of God, is the great motive to true Repentance, Rom. 2. 4.

God wins the soul to himself nextly, not by terrors, but his benignity. It is true, God prepares them to entertain his kindness, by terrible discoveries, that so he may make it the more welcome; but still, these do but terrify, amaze, make afraid; but this is that which wins the soul, breaks the heart, encourageth hope, and by this way the spirit worketh the soul to Repentance. Hence that, Job 13. 20, 21.

USE. Thus may teach us that for Ministers to preach nothing but terrors, or for poor awakened souls to look upon nothing but terrors, is not the way to promote the work of the Gospel, or conversion of Souls: This drives only to despair: All our Doctrines, and all our hopes, must center in the free Grace of God. But I come to the words themselves.

1. The first part of his resolution is general: viz. that he will return to his father; I will arise, and go to my father. In this the work of Repentance is generally, and comprehensively intimated, in which there is;

1. The terminus â quo: the place from whence he came, viz. his far Country: where he was, though not locally, yet spiritually distant from God, far from him in heart and life; this is it he will leave:

2. The terminus ad quem: or whether he will go, to his father: How God may be said to be his father, who is an unregenerate profligate sinner: I here intend not to make particular enquiry; though it may possibly be intimated to us by this words, being so often used in the parable, that by virtue of the Everlasting Covenant of Redemption, every Elect Person, in his greatest degeneracy and Prodigality, is

looked upon as a Child, chosen in Christ to the Adoption of Children: But it here mainly intends his going to God as a Father of Mercies.

3. The form of Repentance itself; I will arise, and go: Where is the beginning of that motion, I will arise, and the progress, and go? or the respect that it bears to both the terms; to the far country, I will arise, i.e. I will sit or tarry no longer here, I will leave it: to his father, I will go to him: In the Greek it is, rising, I will go: And the word [rise] properly signifies, rising again: q. d. after some fall: and hence the noun is used for a resurrection, either from sin, or from the grave: and because this Anastasie, presumes a former Apostasy, hence,

DOCT. I. If ever the perishing sinner hopes to be saved, he must rise again, and go to God.

As he formerly went away from him, so now he must return to him: Hence God in the proclamation of his Grace thus invites, Jer. 3. 12, 13. & 4. 1. Hos. 14. 1. In the Explication we may consider. 1. The import of this rising and going to his father. 2. The reasons of the Doctrine.

1. The import of this rising and going: we heard in general, that it denotes the act of Repentance, not as separated from, but as the first fruit of saving Faith, and therefore both implying and including of it: Faith and Repentance are propounded in the Gospel as conjunct, Mark 1. 15. Repent, and believe the Gospel. Because they are practically inseparable: Now this Repentance of Faith is suitably expressed by these two phrases, and if they be well pondered, they will give light to the nature of it: Repentance is of two sorts, Legal, and Evangelical; it is the latter of these we are now speaking of, which is a saving turning from sin to God. Of the motives and means

of it: I shall not here speak, only of the act resembled by these allusions of rising and going.

1. Rising implies these things.

1. Rising being an Anastasie, implies the sinner before conversion to be in a state of Apostasy, or a fallen state: it speaks that man was once in a good state, but now hath lost it: God therefore useth this as an argument to quicken them to Repentance, Hos. 14. 1. Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. A man that never was up may rise; but he was once standing that riseth again: God made man upright, in our first Parents we once had a standing in God's favor, but have lost it by Sin, and now the whole race of mankind, till Grace raiseth them, lie groveling in iniquity; nay, they are dead in Sin, for this rising is a resurrection, Eph. 2. 1. And this shows that it is not a man's own strength, but the Almighty power of God that giveth Repentance.

2. It implies that in order to true Repentance, the soul must be furnished with a new principle of spiritual life: Self-motion, such as rising is, is a life act, and supposeth a life habit: It is the property of dead things to lie still and move no further than they are forcibly moved; they are only living things that move by a power implanted in them: It therefore presumes that the Spirit of God hath been at work, moving upon the dead soul, and breathing into it the breath of life: our Savior saith, it is the spirit that quickeneth: He gives life to dry bones, and then they rise and walk, else they had never forgone their Graves: A dead carcass cannot so much as will to arise.

3. It implies that in true Repentance there must be a forsaking of all Sin: we must not lie in Sin, if we will return to God: those are directly opposite terms, Sin and God are contraries; the far Country in which the Prodigal was, is the Kingdom of Sin, which he must leave, else he can never come to his father; nor can a sinner ever come to

God, till he hath rejected and abandoned his sinful life and way: Hence that counsel, Isa. 55. 7. Let the wicked forsake his way. There is no salvation to be had by sitting still.

2. Going to his father implies these things.

1. That every natural man, in his unconverted state, is at a great distance from God: Sin is therefore said to make a separation, Isa. 59. 2. This means not a local distance, for God's Omnipresence fills all places, and is with the sinner to eye and observe diligently all his ways: but it intends a distance in heart and affection, an alienation; that God and the sinner are enemies; he hates God's law and ways, as God hates his way and course; God is therefore said to see the proud afar off, Psal. 178. 6. And the sinner is said to be far from God, Psal. 73. 27.

2. That in Repentance it is not enough to leave off sinful ways and courses, but we must also put holiness in practice: rising out of sin is neither true nor sufficient, except there be returning unto God, hence they are both put together, Isa. 35. 7. This is but like the Pharisee's negatives which could not declare him justified: we must not only cease to do evil, but we must also learn to do well.

3. That God alone is the object of true Repentance: He goes to his father. It is vain for an awakened sinner to go anywhere else; it is but to wander from mountain to hill, from one vanity to another; hence that restriction, Jer. 4. 1. If thou wilt return, return to me. The distressed soul is full of projects, and would try many conclusions, but the repenting Believer is resolved in this, that he will go to God, and no whither else, Jer. 3. 23. Joh. 6. 68.

4. That in the work of conversion, there is not only a passive reception of grace, but also an actual improvement of it unto active



Repentance. If God gives us life we must stir; if he gives us legs we must go, Cant. 1. 4. God so calls a sinner in conversion, as that he makes him answer his call, rise and come away.

REAS. 1. From the nature of saving faith, which is a trusting in God for life: Now such trust of the soul necessarily requires repentance in both parts of it: for, if God be trusted in, all other trust must needs be forsaken and rejected: to dwell by Cisterns argues the fountain is relinquished: He that will find mercy, must say Ashur shall not save; and if God be trusted in for life, then the soul must needs go to him for it, Isa. 55. 1. Faith without exercise is dead, and the working of faith and love is the exercise of Repentance, as without faith there is no salvation, so faith cannot be, but it will bring forth fruit in Repentance.

REAS. 2. Because, as happiness and misery are contraries, so the way to the one and the other must be contrary: Now the way in which man brought himself into misery was by departing from God and falling into Sin. The Prophet describes it, Jer. 2. 13. and as long as the cause of misery remains, the continuance of it must be: As long as a sinner lieth in Sin, he must needs be miserable: the foundation of happiness is laid in saving us from Sin, Mat. 1. 12. He shall save his People from their sins. And therefore the way to Salvation must be retrograde: i.e. by rising from Sin, and coming back to God. Man's felicity consists in his enjoyment of God; he cannot enjoy him till he comes to him; every distance from God is a misery: Sin is contrary to God, he therefore cannot in that sense come to us, his holiness forbids. Christ doth not save us in our sins, but from our sins, and that is by working us to a true and through Repentance: a sinner must become holy, else he cannot see God, Heb. 12. 14.

USE. 1. To teach us that it exceeds the power of a natural man to effect his own conversion, or bring about his own salvation. Man by nature is dead in trespasses and sins; and is it possible that a dead man should rise and go by his own strength, till a vital principle be put into him? as well might Lazarus, dead and ready to stink, have by his own virtue shaken off his grave cloths, and come forth without a Divine word, as the sinner, fallen and dead in sin, rise and return to God: this is an act of spiritual life and requires a principle of it, and that can proceed from no less power than Omnipotency: Paul therefore compares it with the work of Creation, 2 Cor. 4. 6. and with the power of Resurrection, Eph. 1. 19. 20. It is true, it is the man that riseth, and goeth; the act of Repentance proceeds formally from the Believer; but it is God by his Spirit that informs him with this power and grace, whereby he is enabled to do it. Hence also we see how ineffectual means of themselves must needs be, unless they be influenced by the spirit of grace: how vainly do they dream who attribute to man a power of converting himself, and put a Divine honor upon Moral suasion, as if it could of itself attract and draw the heart after it? No, though God require means and ordinances, yet they are but the staff of Elisha, and except the Lord God be there, the touch awakens not the dead man. Ezekiel must prophesy over the dry bones, but it is the spirit that moves to bring them together, and puts life into them. Let no man then ascribe this to himself; it may be thou knowest not how this wind blew, or how this babe of grace was formed; no more doth the Child how it was begotten and formed in the womb: but if you find the effect, that you are enabled to arise and go to your heavenly father, you must say the singer of God was here, and ascribe all the glory of it to him.

USE. 2. This discovereth their vain and presumptuous hopes, who live and lie in sin, and yet expect to be saved: and yet there are a great many of these; they boast of their hopes, and yet tarry in their

far country, live among the swine, and feed upon husks, they are far from God, and will not return to him by Repentance; they hold their vain courses, and approve not of the ways of holiness; these certainly forsake their own mercies, and will be found among the dead and not among the living: had not the Prodigal resolved to rise and return, he had perished, and so must all these, Psal. 73. 27. They that are far from thee, shall perish.

USE. 3. For Examination; it may put us upon it by this Rule to try our hopes of Salvation, whither they be rightly grounded, and hopes that shall not perish: Thou art by nature a Child of wrath; thou hast been a poor Prodigal, hast destroyed thyself, and in this state there is nothing but misery to be expected, Rom. 3. 16. Destruction and misery are in all their ways. In God only is help, and that is only to be had in going to him, and thou canst not go to him, except thou risest and forsakest thy vain and carnal trust in lying vanities: Where art thou? what hast thou done? art thou pursuing lies? art thou sitting still and despairing? or art thou going upon thy return to God? art thou yet deliberating, or art thou resolved? art thou consulting with flesh and blood? or hast thou said resolutely I will arise and go to my father? If thou art in the full purpose of thy heart set against sin, and for the glory of God, resolving by his grace so to do, it is well; this is accepted of God, and he that gives to will, will also give to do: But if it be not so, what is thy hope built upon? what are thy comforts but delusions? what are thy assurances but undoing deceit?

USE. 4. For Exhortation; and let me direct it particularly to such as, being under the sense of perishing in themselves, have made discovery of the great power and goodness of God, and received some preparatory hope by it; he hence encouraged and counseled to arise and go to God: Do you feel yourselves under a condition so miserable, and have you discovered an object so glorious and

suitable? take heart, and resolve to adventure into his presence, and throw yourselves upon him. Consider, God therefore reveals himself to be such a one to such as you are, to this very end that you may be wooed and won to him; and if now you put him away by unbelief, you will slight Mercy. Remember withal, though there be so much supply with God, as is enough to make you completely happy, and to spare, yet it is only for comers: If you will taste of this Feast you must accept of the invitation, and come and be guests; you must come out of those hedge-rows, and high-ways in which you lie starving, you must go to the waters, if you will have wine and milk, Isa. 55. 1. Halt no longer between two opinions; if it be good perishing, sit still, but if it be good to be saved arise and come away; come to a resolution, draw up your conclusion. If you object and say, I can resolve nothing of myself, except God put his Grace and resolution in me; I answer, It is true, but remember also, that as God is a free Agent, so we are obliged by duty, and the ty of it is such, that we must, except we will bring guilt upon ourselves, set about it; and this is our duty, to believe, and resolve, not in your strength, but in the strength of God; nay, it is one of Satan's cheats, to tell us we must wait before we resolve, till we discover Grace coming in, whereas the habits of Grace come in undiscerned, and the first fruit of Grace is to be found in the resolution itself: If God helps us to this resolution, we must by that know that his Spirit is come into us; and it is our duty, in the use of means to stir up ourselves to believe. Resolve then in the strength of God; here thou art perishing, there is mercy with him that he may be feared: he saith, if thou comest he will not upbraid thee: he saith, The hungry he will satisfy with bread, and give the longing soul the desires of his heart: he saith, he will give the weary rest; in a word, if ever you obtain Salvation it must be with him; hills, mountains, all created beings will not afford it: Thou hast tired thyself to no purpose in seeking it there already, and why shouldest thou again make a vain essay? if God will he can; and he is a merciful God; the

fatherless have found him so: Do thou but resolve to leave all for him, and make choice of him for thy trust, and he will do it for thee, whatever it be that thou wantest, grace, glory, and every good thing will he bestow upon thee.

## **SERMON XV.**

Thus of the Prodigals resolution to return:

2. His purpose how to demean himself on his return follows to be considered: in which are shadowed out to us divers necessary concomitants of true Repentance, or qualifications wherein the truth of it doth appear; and serve to instruct us in the true and genuine working of saving Grace, to the humbling of the soul, and rendering him vile in his own eyes: And this is in two things, viz. his Confession, and his Petition: In the one he makes himself as bad as he can be, as little, as low, and sinful; in the other he yields himself to be whatever his father would make him. To begin with the first:

1. In his confession he acknowledgeth his sin, and the merit of it:

1. In the acknowledgment of his sin: 1. He makes it his own, I have sinned. 2. He aggravates it, 1. By the object against whom, against heaven: 2. By the presence in which, before thee. The phrase [against heaven] means against God himself: the word, Heaven is used both by Hebrew and Greek writers for God, either as one of his names, or else Metonymically, because heaven is the place where he most

gloriously appears. Divers useful truths may hence be gathered; I shall draw them all up into this one.

DOCT. Where God gives true Repentance, such an one will confess his sins with the greatest aggravation.

He will not mince or extenuate, and go about to make them look little and small, but acknowledge them in their height & greatness; present them in their blackest and ugliest colors: so doth this Prodigal son resolve to go to his father, and so did.

Though every sin in its proper nature nakedly considered, as it is a Transgression of the Laws of God, an affront offered, and an offense given to the Majesty of Heaven, is on that account great; yet there are several circumstances with which it is clothed, which, if truly looked upon, do exaggerate or heighten the vileness of it: these the Hypocrite endeavors to cover over, and hopes thereby to excuse himself â tanto, as the Pharisee, I am not thus and so: but contrariwise, in sound Repentance, when the sinner comes to humble himself before God, and confess his sins, he makes himself as vile as he can: Sin is made exceeding sinful. A hypocrite hopes to plead that he hath not been so bad, therefore he may hope for mercy; but Paul was of another mind, 1 Tim. 1. 25. Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am chief. And David, Psal. 25. 11. Pardon mine iniquity, for it is very great. Now the aggravations in our text are three, under which heads the most that can be said may be ranked; these let us a little look into.

1. He takes the whole blame upon himself: I have sinned; it is I have done this thing; so David calls it his own sin, Psal. 51. 9. q. d. Whatever blame or guilt there is in it, I take it all to myself: He confesseth it roundly, and plainly, without any excuse, or extenuations, or putting it off to any other cause, occasion, or

tempter. And this is one difference between the repentance of a hypocrite and a true penitent; the one would put off his sin as much as he can, seek excuses, find others to lay it upon, and bear as little of the blame as possibly he may; he would divide the fault, that he may leave the least part of it to himself; and he finds many occasions, or causes to change it upon.

1. He throws it upon everlasting decrees, and would make the holy counsel of God to have a causal influence into his wickedness; and will say, if God had intended me so to have been, I should have been as holy as the Angels, but if he purposed me to be such a sinner, how could I help it? Such the Apostle confronts, Rom. 9. 19. Thus Hypocrites, like Spiders, suck poison out of the precious Doctrine of predestination.

2. He will charge God himself for the Author of his Temptations: will say, Divine all efficiency is the first mover, and if he had not assisted, I had not committed the sin: He presented the object or I had not followed, such the Apostle James sets himself against, Jam. 1. 13, &c.

3. Nay, he will blame the very goodness and kindness of God to him, and a curse, or at least a reason of his sin, and so God, instead of being acknowledged for his favor, shall be upbraided: So Adam, Gen. 3. 12. The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, &c. God had given her for a meet help to him, he could not have done well without her, and yet if he abuse this favor, God is charged for it; and why then did he bestow her upon me?

4. He will turn it off upon those that were his Tempters; they solicited me, persuaded me, drew me in: Thus Adam lays the fault upon the Woman, and she upon the Serpent; and thus men are oft ready to say, I may thank such an one, who drew me in, who would

not let me alone, but followed me, and prevailed upon me with importunity; if it had not been for him, I had not drawn away.

5. He will excuse and mince it with all diminutive circumstances, to make it look like a very little fault, as, 1. He did it ignorantly, he knew no sin there was in it but thought that he had done well enough: Thus Saul excuseth himself for sacrificing, 1 Sam. 13. 11, 12. 2. He did but follow his natural inclination, it was, at worst, but a trick of youth, &c. 3. It was no great matter, a thing of no great consequence, and others frequently do the like. 4. He was provoked to it; yea, had many great provocations which bare him down. These, and many the like excuses, the corrupt heart of man is ready to frame: But when God sets sin home upon the soul with the right conception of it, he then lays the blame upon himself, and that with greatest aggravation, in which,

1. He acquits God; lays it not in the least to his charge, but declares him to be altogether blameless: David takes his sin to himself, that God may be righteous and justified, Psal. 51. 4. q. d. I have nothing to accuse God of, he is holy and righteous.

2. He looks not too much upon instruments and occasions; he lays not his own blame to another; doth not charge it as Satan's fault, that he yielded to the Temptation, but counts it his own; Peter blames Ananias, that Satan had tempted him, Deut. 5. 3. It was Satan's fault to tempt, but his to be tempted.

3. Chargeth it upon his own vile heart and nature, that fountain and original of all actual Transgression: he is therefore led up to it, and made to bewail that before God, as the root of all, Psal. 51. 5. I was shapen in iniquity. q. d. Hence comes all this, here it is fountained; thus the Prodigal, Father, I have sinned, I asked my Portion, and was not content till I had it in mine own hands; I took it and went away



into a far Country, and wasted all there in riot; I dishonored my original by becoming a slave to a stranger, keeping swine, and feeding with them upon husks: I did all thus voluntarily without any compulsion; I did it against the law of nature, and bond of filial obedience; he doth not say, it was a trick of youth, and these good fellows, pot companions, gamesters and harlots, drew me in, and so I did it. The truly penitent, so sees his own guilt and willful obstinacy, that he can look nowhere else: whatever his occasions or temptations were, yet still he sees that the Law of God was against it, which he ought to have hearkened to notwithstanding all Temptation; and his heart was in it, else they could never have prevailed; he gave his consent, or else it had never been.

2. He aggravates it in that it was against God. q. d. Had I only wronged a creature, it had not been so much, but this is it that renders it heinous; it was against Heaven: All sin is against God. Wrongs are valued according to the person wronged: A thing is counted Treason when done against a Prince, which would be a little fault if only done to a subject. It is remarkable, that in the Parable itself, the younger Son is brought in acknowledging his sin to be against Heaven, rather than against the Father: Nothing, that the wrongs we do to others are therein mostly to be bewailed, in that they are against God. Hence David confesseth it with an emphasis, Psal. 51. 4. Against thee, thee only. It was against Uriah, against Bathsheba, &c. but that was little compared to, and therefore swallowed up in this. True Repentance runs sin up to the last object against whom it is, now all sin is against God in that it is,

1. Against the Law of God; for that is it which makes it to be sin, 1 Joh. 3. 4. It is not the hurt which another receives, nor what we ourselves suffer, but what we do, that firstly demonstrates it sin; but

it is the contrariety it bears to the precept, and holy revealed will of God: He that breaks thy King's Laws, wrongs the King himself.

2. Against the love of God; his good will, his bounty and beneficence to his creatures, by which he doth invite and engageth all men to serve and honor him; it is therefore called a despising of his goodness, Rom. 2. 4. The Fathers bounty made the Sons sins the worse, he had readily given him a plentiful Portion, and yet he spends it in riot.

3. Against the promises and threatening's of God; they slight the one, and contemn the other, are not in love with the promises, nor afraid of his wrath: There are great promises made to obedience, but they forsake these mercies, count them as worthless things: See Psal. 81. 9, to 13. God hath fearfully menaced, and denounced heavy judgments against sin and sinners, and bids them beware of sin because of them, Jer. 6. 8. Be instructed, lest my soul depart from thee. And because these are from God, who is able to honor his servants, and to make inexpressibly miserable his enemies, this is a sore aggravation.

4. Against God's earnest and heart-breaking calls and counsels; yea, strongest Motives and persuasions: What stronger plea can God use against sin, than to declare that it is abominable to him, & his soul hates it? yet it is a grief to his spirit, and will oppress him? and yet thus God pleads with sinners, Jer. 44. 4.

5. Against his Honor and Glory: There is nothing so much against the declarative glory of God as sin is; yea, nothing at all is against it, but sin: Every sin dishonors his Name; by secret sin we dishonor him in our hearts, by open sin, we do it in our lives: God is a holy God, and it is only holiness that honors him. Now this is to see sin sinful, when we are brought to see that it is against God, wherein properly the

sinfulness of it doth consist: Nor can a soul ever know how great an evil sin is, nor the meritoriousness of it, nor the equity of the penalty threatened against it, till he be fully persuaded and made to acknowledge that it is against Heaven.

3. He aggravates it, in that it was not only against, but before his father: Thus also David aggravates his sin, Psal. 51. 4. and done this evil in thy sight. The word [**<H&G>**] signifieth, in the sight: and Sin is committed in the presence of God; he stands by & look on; not only such sins as are committed in the sight of sun, but such also as are done in the dark, & out or the sight of mortal men: he sees into every corner, Psal. 139. 12. Divine Omnipresence fills all places: and this is a great aggravation of Sin; it argues either,

1. Great heedlessness; that men do not regard the presence of God; and that shows much of Atheism: Did men know or believe that God stood by and overlooked all their actions, would they dare so to do as they do? This was that which made them so impudently bold, in Ezek. 9. 9. They say, the Lord seeth not. And thus men deny that glorious Attribute without which he were not God, Or,

2. Horrid profaneness: If men do acknowledge, and yet regard not that God seeth them, it argues that men have cast off the fear of God from them, that they have lost the awe of his Judgments, and are not afraid of his wrath. It is the aggravation of Sodom's Sin, Gen. 23. 13. They were sinners before the Lord. God comes to men and presents himself in his strict commands, and severe threatening's, tells them in his Word and Ordinances that his wrath shall burn against such Sins, and such Sinners; and yet they care not: God speaks by his Word, and speaks by conscience, but to no purpose; this proves men's obstinacy.

2. The reason why God makes the true penitent thus see and acknowledge Sin is not to drive the soul beyond hope of mercy, but it is.

1. To make the creature so touched with the sense of his own sin, that he may thus see it in its worst colors, and thence learn to loath it, and himself for it: that he may see Sin hateful not only in its consequents, but in its self, and thence what reason God hath, and how just it is for him to be so severe, and bear such a dreadful witness against Sin, as he doth in his word and works, Ezek. 36. 31.

2. That the greatness of the riches of his grace may appear, and be known to be unsearchable: that every believer may experience the meaning of that, Rom. 5. 20. Where sin hath abounded, grace did much more abound. Hence Paul shall not only acknowledge grace, but with an emphasis, 1 Tim. 1. 15, 16. The blacker the Sin looketh, the brighter will grace appear, and the more intense will the love of the soul be to God: It is our Savior's argument, Luk. 7. 47. To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. That believer that hath seen, and known the worst of himself, ever hath the most precious thoughts of Christ.

USE. 1. Here we see how far those are from true Repentance, who instead of aggravating, do mince and extenuate their Sins, and endeavor to make them look as small as they can, that they may be little affected with, or humbled for them. Many pretend they have come to God, and believed in him, but how did they come? Why, as the Pharisee, with their proud boastings, not as the Publican, with a Lord have mercy on me a sinner. They have looked for Grace and Mercy, not on the account of Christ alone, but their encouragement hath been, they have been better than others, have good a nature, have not been tainted with such Sins, nor so dishonored God, &c.

This is not the way of Gospel-Repentance; such as these are far from true conversion; there is yet a great work to do for and upon them if ever they come to be made sharers of saving mercies.

USE. 2. This may serve to answer that usual objection or discouragement which many awakened sinners are exercised withal, and deterred by, from coming to Christ; viz. the greatness of their sins, their heinousness, their amazing aggravations, they have not sinned at the ordinary rate, but exceeded, and none have sinned like them; they have gotten to speak terribly against themselves: and hence they are ready to draw a desperate conclusion, there is no hope for me: This you see directly contradicts the Gospel method; whereas you ought thus to argue, therefore there is the greatest need for me above all: Let those that think their wounds small, that hope to cure them themselves, or to out-grow them, let such tarry away; but for me, I must perish if I go not to the Physician; yea, this may animate you to this, to consider, this is the way of Christ; he makes sin very bitter, Jer. 2. 19. Where he intends to afford his grace and salvation; and till you find it to be so, you are not fit for mercy: there is no plea for mercy more acceptable to or prevalent with Christ, than that which is framed from the sensible acknowledgement, of its Sin in its greatest aggravations: The worse we count of ourselves, the better he likes us, and the fitter we are for his grace to work upon; let this then drive thee the more resolutely to him.

USE. 3. From counsel to such as are encouraged with the hopes of mercy, and would go to God for it, how to go so as to find acceptance, i. e. in sum, labor to be as vile in your own eye and esteem as can be: get the deep sense and apprehension of the greatness of your sin: charge Sin as God chargeth it, aggravate Sin as the word of God aggravates it; judge yourselves by the righteous law of God; feel the weight and burden of Sin, and groan under it as those that are weary

and oppressed with it; such are encouraged, Matt. 11. 28. Come to me ye that are weary and heavy laden. Add every proper weight to Sin that may make it the most burdensome and insupportable thing in the world: In particular;

1. Make it your own, and take the blame to yourselves, Sin ever affects us more or less, according as we find ourselves interested in it, so much as we fault others, so much of self-Justification will follow; and the less we have known Sin to be our own, the less will the grace of Christ be sweetened in our apprehension: When Cicero would set forth Caesar 's great clemency, he makes his own fault every way his own: Nullâ vi coactus, judicio meo, & voluntate meâ, ad ea arma profectus sum, quae sumpta sunt contra te. Pro Ligar. Thus must you do, and thus shall you bring glory to pardoning mercy; See and say, it was your own choice, your heart was in it, you were not compelled, but acted freely, resolutely, and therefore have justly deserved to be rejected when you have nothing to plead for yourselves, then you are fit to plead mercy. Remember therefore that God made man upright, it is he that hath sought out many inventions. God hath given to no tempters, either Men or Devils, power over your wills to compel them.

2. See how vile your Sin must be, in that it hath been against God: you never look aright upon it until you bring it up hither. It is true, Sin cannot rob God of his essential glory, which is out of the reach of the creatures malignity, but his declarative glory is thereby abused: you have not only wronged man that is a worm, but you have injured the God of Glory: It is his holy Law that you have broken, else it is not Sin; you have preferred a base lust, a lying vanity before him; you have rejected the rule of infinite wisdom, which only can direct man to his end: you have despised and trampled upon the great reward of happiness, which was propounded to you: you have cast off the yoke

of supreme sovereignty, under which you ought to have put yourselves: You have placed Sin in God's Throne, and given it the precedency; you have slighted the gracious and precious invitations of the Gospel, which have been set before you; you that are worms of the dust, have risen up against an infinite Majesty: And is not this a sore and grievous thing? Can you be too much affected for that Sin which is of so deep a die? this is the true and kindly sense which every penitent Soul, enlightened by the Spirit of Grace, hath of his Sins.

3. How bold must that Sin needs be, which hath been committed before the face and presence of God. Would you not have been afraid and ashamed, if sinful men like yourselves had stood by and looked on when you committed these and those Sins? how then were you not afraid to do them when God looked on? if you did not consider it, was not that an Atheistical Spirit? or, if you cared not for, nor regarded it, was it not a brazen face? you were not afraid of his terrors, nor awed with his judgments, you either forgot God, which is desperate security, or you despised him which is high Profaneness; Thus confess your Sins to God, if you hope to find mercy: hide not, cover them not under your tongues, be not afraid to make the worst of them; you cannot confess worse than God knows: judge yourselves if you would not be judged of the Lord: if you now hide your Sins, God will unmask them before Angels and Men; but if you thus confess, God is just to forgive. Be not afraid to confess yourselves the chief of Sinners; this cannot set you beyond the hope of mercy, since Christ is more able to save, than we are to destroy ourselves, since it is before a God who can abundantly pardon; since Christ's business is to save Sinners, labor to know and confess yourselves to be really and truly so: and the more you know and feel yourselves to be such, the more encouragement you have to go to Christ. Remember Sin hath taken away all other Pleas from fallen man, and left no room for

him to say anything more or other, for, or of himself, but that he hath sinned, and thereby exposed himself to wrath, and hath no other thing to fly to, but the Grace of God in Christ Jesus; on which account it is that he hath this one plea left him humbly to present. For thy Name sake, O Lord! pardon my iniquity, for it is very great.

## **SERMON XVI.**

2. Thus of the Prodigal's Confession of his Sin; it follows to consider his Confession of the merit of it, expressed in these words, I am no more worthy to be called thy Son. The Words are a Meiosis, or a diminutive expression, in which less is said than intended. The thing here aimed at is Gospel Humiliation, an ingredient into Repentance, and concomitant of saving Faith; and is consequent upon the right apprehension of Sin, and the aggravation of it; and he that hath known what Sin is indeed, cannot but acknowledge himself unworthy of mercy, and worthy of misery: and so this negative compriseth the contrary affirmative. Hence,

DOCT. Where God gives true Repentance, he makes the Sinner to see and confess himself to be utterly unworthy of any mercy, and worthy of all misery.

The Grace we are here considering of is true Humility, a fruit and discovery of Faith, and concomitant of sound Repentance. You shall see that our Savior finds and acknowledgeth true and great Faith in it, Mat. 8. 8. with 10. It is a Grace which God requires and earnestly calls for in Scripture, and is made the end of many solemn



dispensations of God to his People, Deut. 8. 14, 15, 16. now this Humility hath two things in it: viz. 1. A low and vile esteem of one self. 2. Which follows, a yielding oneself up to God's dispose: the former we have now to consider; the latter follows in the next words: This first is an utter renouncing of self-excellence. Man by nature is very proud, he thinks himself to be of some desert and worth; hence he counts all the evil that befalls him, an injury, and all good, a debt: the Soul is not fit for Christ, but God, when he draws him home to himself, makes him know that he is the most worthless creature in the World to receive any good, and worthy of all evil. And that we may make some particular discovery of this Grace, we may consider it in two things, viz. 1. The root of it. 2. The fruit proceeding from it.

1. The root of this Humility, and that which influenceth each part of it, is a deep sense and apprehension of his own vileness. The Spirit of God gives him to see, find and feel himself to be a vile creature: this is Job 's Confession, Job 40. 4. I am vile, the word signifies contemptible, or worthy of no esteem: he finds and confesseth himself every way vile.

1. Vile as he is a Man, a piece of Clay, a little dust of the Ballance. God made man so as that he might ever see cause to have low and little thoughts of himself, Gen. 2. 7. his body a lump of dirt, his breath a blast, himself a Brother of worms: God must stoop to take notice of man in his greatest excellency; hence the Psalmist thinks of it with admiration, Psal. 8. 4 What is man, that thou art mindful of him?

2. Much more, because he is a sinful creature: the sense and apprehension of his own Sin, renders him unspeakably abominable in his own eyes: he sees Sin to be a vile thing, & himself, being a Sinner, to be defiled with it. Sin is not only vile in itself, but it renders everyone so that is polluted by it: the best of creatures are

vile, if compared with God, but sinful Man much more, Job 11. 14, 15, 16. this hath rendered Man loathsome to God, whose pure eye hates Sin; and shall render him so to himself, when God shall do him good, Ezek. 36. 31. this hath pulled off his Scarlet, and thrown him upon a Dung hill: this hath defaced his beauty, and covered him with deformity; degraded his Glory, and filled him with Ignominy; yea, overspread him with wounds, ulcers, and putrefying sores; so that now he can see nothing in himself that might attract love, but justly cause loathing.

3. Vile in all that he doth: Such as is the principle, such are the acts: Like tree, like fruits, Mat. 7. 16. see Job 14. 4. If he look on none but his best actions that he doth, yet here he seeth his own filthiness so deriving itself into them, that he cannot place any esteem upon them, but declare them vile things, Isa. 64 6. Filthy rags. Filthy; the word is variously translated, and by all to set out loathsome vileness. The like you have of Paul, Phil. 3. 8. dung. The truly humbled soul sees no excellency in himself, which he can call his own, nor anything done by him which is not polluted. So Paul, Rom. 7. 18. In my flesh dwells no good thing. So that he dares not put his actions upon the trial, but deprecates it, as David, Psal. 14. 3. 2. Enter not into Judgment with thy servant. This is the root of Humility.

2. The fruit that proceeds from this root, is the debasing of him in his own esteem, and firstly, the sensible acknowledging his unworthiness of mercy, and defect of misery.

1. His unworthiness of any mercy: the Prodigal confesseth that he deserveth no kindness from his father; so doth the truly humbled soul see that he deserves nothing at the hands of God. In particular.

1. He acknowledgeth that he is unworthy of the least outward mercy, so far from being worthy to be treated as a son, as not to deserve to

be treated as a creature: and here he acknowledgeth,

1. That he is unworthy of his life, that he is a Child of wrath by nature, and doth not deserve that God should suffer him to breath in his world, it is a great kindness that he is not consumed, and destroyed from off the face of the earth, and turned down into the pit long before this, Lum. 3. 22.

2. That he is unworthy of livelihood: he cannot challenge, as a debt from God, so much as the least bit of bread, or draught of water, but if he do bestow it upon him, it is a condescending favor, Gen. 32. 10.

3. Unworthy that God should condescend to step aside to do him the least courtesie at all; that he should visit him with any mercy, Matt. 8. 8. Hence he wonders at all, saith, as David, Who am I? or as Mephibosheth, 2 Sam. 9. 8. What is thy servant, that that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am? The ungrateful sinner is quarrelling with God, let him show him never so much kindness; but the humble sinner wonders at God, let him show him never so little kindness, because he judgeth that none can be little to such a worthless creature as he.

2. He acknowledgeth that he is much more unworthy that God should pardon his Sin, and take him among the number of his Children, that he should relieve his famishing Soul, and bestow his Grace upon him: it is such a thing that he dareth hardly speak of, Luk. 18. 14. when Paul speaks of his calling to the Ministry, how doth he set it forth? see Eph. 3. 18. To me, who am less than the least of all Saints: how much more may everyone say so of his Conversion? he will acknowledge, that if God refuse to come and save him, he doth him no wrong, Rom. 9. 19, 20. if he do it, it is mere Grace, Eph. 2. 8.

2. He acknowledgeth his worthiness of all misery: that he is not only undeserving, but ill-deserving; that he hath not only forfeited all mercies, but procured to himself all woes; is not only unprofitable, but is also a great provocation to God. In particular,

1. He acknowledgeth that all the sorrows and sufferings of this life, are not only his desert, but less than his desert, Ezra 9. 13. Job 11. 6 He will not only justify God's anger, but magnify his mercy in all the sorrows that befall him here in this World, Lam. 3. 22. if God take away his Estate, comforts of his life, strip him naked of all, yet naked as he is, he chargeth not God, but blesseth him, Job 1. 20, 21, 22. the threatening's of God are just, his executions of them righteous, and his moderation of them merciful.

2. That the utmost of the wrath and curse of God is duly and truly his merit: that he hath done things worthy of Death, and that it belongs to him as his wages, Rom. 8. ult. Dan. 9. 8. he sees Hell to be a place proper for him, and confesseth that it is mere patience that hath hitherto kept him out of it, else he had been there ere this: he sees weight enough in his Sin to sink him down into the nethermost Hell, and that he is not there as well as others, undergoing endless, easeless, remediless torments, is not because he is better, but because God is more merciful to him.

Now when the humbled Soul is thus made sensible of his own worthlessness, hereupon these further fruits of it discover themselves.

1. He is really taken off from all confidence in himself: he now dares to rest no longer upon anything that is his, whether of nature or grace, to give him favor with God, and plead for him in his presence. He now dares not to rely upon his duties, though done with never so

much seriousness and sincerity; no, they are Loss, Dung, Rags to him; they are not to be trusted in, or accounted of.

2. He is taken off from exalting himself, and his own duties: all self-conceits are beaten down; and his business is to undermine them, and undervalue them; he denies himself, this is true humility, Mat. 16. 24. He despiseth his own services, they are nothing, nor is he ever the more worthy for them.

3. He comes before God with self-abhorrence: comes not as a proud man, that thinks he comes for nothing but what he may expect and challenge, and it will be an affront to deny it him, as they did, Isa. 58. 3. No, but he lays all his excellencies, and all his moralities, and all his good duties in the dust, under God's feet, and acknowledgeth that he may, if he sees meet, trample upon them, and do him no wrong, Job 42. 6. If he had thought a thought or spoken a word in defense of his own worth or deserving, he loathes himself for that word or thought; he eats it again, and professeth he will speak no more, and condemns himself for what he hath spoken already.

Now the Reason why God works this grace in conversion, is because his great design in the New-Covenant, is to bring about man's Salvation in a way of Grace, the Glory of which Attribute is the bottom end of his counsel concerning his Elect, Rom. 9. 23. Now then grace appears to be grace, in respect of the subject, it is applied to, when this subject is made to appear the most undeserving; and every circumstance lowering the creatures desert, heightens the excellency of this Grace: Hence you shall find the Scripture loves to set it oft with this, Deut. 26. 5. &c. Ezek. 16. begin. Eph. 2 begin. And, inasmuch as man is actively to give God the glory of this grace, it is therefore needful, that he see and feel in himself, that which may put the Emphasis upon it: Thus the Apostles argument was, Rom. 5. 7, 8.

To see good, honest, innocent men taken to heaven, would be no such great matter to be spoken of, but to see such as had been wicked, had provoked God, were sinners of the Gentiles, &c. saved, this is matter for heaven to ring of to all eternity: none will so wonder at their own salvation, as those that have been deepest apprehensive of, and humbled for their own sinful unworthiness of mercy, and provocation of God to wrath; they will glorify God indeed, who see that he hath saved them from lowest hell, in which he might have left them in chains, prisoners, to have suffered wrath forever.

The more full application of this truth will fall under the following Doctrine; containing the other part of Gospel humility, it may suffice to hint at one here.

USE. To convince and persuade poor sinners of their worthlessness: If ever you would come unto God acceptably, you must come unto him empty of all self-conceits, renouncing all worth or excellency in yourselves: so long as you think you deserve anything so long Christ will refuse you: He will have you to cast yourselves upon mere mercy, unto which you have no claim of your own, but sue for it as beggars, who can no way oblige their benefactors to do them a kindness. See then and view how unworthy you are that God should do anything for you; unworthy of common favors, much more unworthy to be called his Sons or Daughters: For motive, consider,

1. None but the humble soul can expect acceptance with God: He sees the proud afar off, but the humble he will exalt: When you lie lowest, you are nearest the height of happiness: it is from the dungeon, from the lowest pit, that Christ fetcheth those whom he makes his Nobles; it is the meek he will teach his way.

2. None but the humble soul takes a right scantling of himself: this man only is he that knows himself: and we can never know God

aright in the Covenant of his Grace, till we have a right apprehension, of ourselves. Now that you may clearly understand your own unworthiness. Consider,

1. That you have never done anything in all your lives, that can render you worthy in God's account: the Godly themselves must say of all they do, they are unprofitable, Luk. 17. 10. The best deeds of sanctified men call for forgiveness; yea, for the merits of Christ to render them acceptable unto God, which makes them so far from boasting, that it puts them upon it to ask forgiveness. According to the first Covenant, those works were accounted worthy of acceptance and reward, whereby God was glorified in perfect obedience; wherein the heart and life were exactly conformed to the mind of the Law of God, that was given man for his rule; but since the fall, the best of men cannot thus do: And as for thee, thou hast been a sinner, how justly mayest thou take that to thyself, which the Prophet charged that wicked King withal? Dan. 5 23. Thou hast kept no command of God, but fallen short of all, and what worthiness canst thou plead? those services which thou thinkest thou hast done, even they are worse than filthy rags; for the Church concludes here to be no better, Isa. 64. 6.

2. How much thou hast done to render thyself unworthy: Thou hast not only done nothing for God and his Glory, but hast been doing very much against it; nay consider.

1. What an unworthy creature thou art in thy natural state; so far from being amiable in God's eyes, that thou art by nature a loathsome object: Thy pedigree, original, state, all speak all against thee: thou mayest see what thou art, Ezek. 16. begin. Though thou hadst done nothing against God, yet thy very being is hateful: Who

counts toads and snakes worthy of preservation, but rather of destruction?

2. Thou hast carried it unworthily towards God in the whole course of thy life: all the days of thy vanity and unregeneracy, all thy course and carriage, hath been to set thee out of his favor. If vile and profligate abuses will give a man worth, thou mightest claim it, for such hath all thy life been. Consider,

1. What God hath been doing for you: how many ways he hath been expressing kindness, pity, favor to you: The being he hath given you, the preservation afforded to you, the provision he hath made for you, the bounty he hath heaped upon you; but above all, the precious Salvation he hath set before you, and all the means given you for the promoting of it: innumerable have been the obligations, strong the cords that he hath laid upon you.

2. What you have requited him with; in one word, Ingratitude (& si ingratum dixeris, omnia dixisti.) Nay, opprobrious contumity: For,

1. You have driven a trade of sinning against and provoking him all your lives long: it hath been your custom from your youth upward; nay, you have done it with delight; you have made nothing to break his holy commands; yea, it hath been a sport and recreation to you, you could not sleep without it.

2. You have abused and mis-improved all his mercies, taking encouragement by them to sin against him: with his own you have dishonored his great Name; with his flax, and his wool, &c. Hos. 2. 8, 9. You have spent that substance which he lent you in riot, have made his creatures to serve your sins, and so armed them against him, and thereby made the creation to groan under your oppression.



3. You have sought for succor, relief, comfort, to other things, and not to him, have trusted in creatures and not in the Creator, you have lived upon husks, and fed on the air, and have made yourselves servants; yea, slaves to Satan and the World, and thereby disgraced your Original, and forgotten your end, which was to serve God, and depend upon him for all.

4. You have despised his Redemption and Grace, that hath been tendered to you in the Gospel: Jesus Christ, that precious Savior, hath been less esteemed by you than your vile lust, and filthy pleasures; his patience hath been slighted, and grace refused; you have turned a deaf ear to his counsel, the back and not the face to his proffers of Salvation; thus hath he been of no worth in your eyes. And now say, What are you worthy of? Ask your own Consciences, and they will tell you, that you do such things as are worthy of death: A heathen's Conscience will say so much, Rom. 1. ult. You are worthy to have all those mercies that you have thus abused, taken from you, and to be turned down into the place of woes and miseries: Hell is a place fit for you, and the torments of it a due reward. Thus thou art unspeakably unworthy that God should show thee any mercy: Get then to be deeply abased, and ashamed of thyself; hang down thy head with the Publican, and so go to the throne of Grace, and ask mercy of God for his own sake, for Christ's sake; this is the way in which God is to be found, and entertainment to be had with him: God is not wont to send such away ashamed, but contented.

## **SERMON XVII.**

2. We have heard of the Prodigals confession, now follows his petition: Make me as one of thy hired servants. True humility (as was hinted before) hath two things in it, viz. 1. A low esteem of one-self: 2. A yielding one-self to God's dispose, this latter is here presented to us. The world is much altered with this younger son; time was when the place and condition of a son in the family would not content him, but he must have his Portion and take his liberty; but now he would be glad so he might but fare as a servant in his Father's house. God, in the work of Conversion will hide pride from man, and make him very low. There is naturally a self-sovereignty in every Child of Adam; though beggars, they would yet be choosers; and if they may not have their will, they will rise up in rebellion: This God breaks him off from, whom he takes to himself. Make me, &c. i.e., handle me, treat me: as one of thy hired servants: hired servants are, 1. Members of the family. 2. The meanest sort of members, except slaves. It intends two things. 1. The son desires admission into his fathers family, under his favor and care. 2. Submits to be disposed of as he sees meet, and will not repine, but account it a favor. Hence,

DOCT. In true Conversion a sinner is brought to a voluntary resignation of himself to God's dispose.

He voluntarily throws himself down at God's feet, and leaves him to do with him as he sees meet. This is the highest part of self-denial, which Christ requires in those that come unto him, Mat. 16. 24. And this will follow upon a true sight and sense of our own unworthiness; and both of these are rooted in the right apprehension of our own vileness. It will not be amiss to look into the nature of this Grace, and its operation in a humble soul; and there is in it something Negative, and something Positive.

1. The Negative part of it is, that he will be no longer at his own dispose: He finds that he hath been so long enough already to his cost: The Prodigal found that it was the taking upon himself the Government of himself, that brought him to all his misery, and this taught him to see how unable he was to rule and guide himself. He hath no wisdom, no discretion, but is a mere childish thing; hence resolves against it, as they, Hos. 14. 3. He confesseth himself to be brutish and ignorant; readily consents that it is not of man of himself to direct his own way, or make a good choice for himself.

2. The Positive part of it is, that he is willing God should do with him as he seeth meet; to place and order him according to his wisdom and pleasure. But me thinks, in the very front of this discourse, a great and puzzling question seems to assault us, viz. Whether in this part of Humiliation, God requires the souls to be so low as to be willing to be damned if he sees meet? Some have been troubled about it, else I should think the question unnecessary: But lest any may think themselves not humbled enough for want of this, I shall answer it, and I may safely lay it down as a positive assertion. That no man is bound to be willing to be damned. You see how the Prodigal, though he yields to his Father's wisdom and will in disposing of him, yet he begs for a place in his family, and be as one of the household; he would be there where he may have bread and not famish. Thus ought every son and daughter of Adam, to labor to escape damnation; to use utmost diligence in it, and to pray, and weep, and strive against it: For.

1. A desire after happiness, and an abhorrence of misery are naturally seated in a man by a concreated principle: Now such principles as God put into man's nature in Creation, and stamped indelibly upon his being, not capable of being obliterated, were therefore put in him to be helps to lead him right to his end for which he was made: &

therefore to be willing to be damned, is a transgression against the nature of man; it is a violence offered to his own being and inclinations.

2. God hath made it the duty of all men to seek after, and use means to obtain happiness: yea, all that duty which God hath laid upon men in the first and second Covenant, it is with an eye and aim at happiness: This is the motive in each to spur man on to his duty: God promised life to Adam if he obeyed, for life therefore was he to obey: and Christ also promiseth salvation to him that believes, he is therefore to believe for salvation, or that he may be saved, 2 Thes. 2. 10.

3. Man was made to glorify God: i.e., the end of the precept for which man was by duty obliged, was that he might serve, honor, and glorify him: and having lost this power by the fall, it is every man's duty to labor after true Grace, whereby he may again please God; for without this principle, we cannot do it, and where this principle is, it necessarily includes, or involves Salvation in it. We cannot desire to be converted, but we do withal desire to be saved. We are to pray for Grace, without which we can do no service for God: Now Eupraxia is happiness formally; to be willing to be damned therefore, includes in it to be willing to be without Grace, and consequently dishonoring God forever, as the damned do.

OBJECT. But no unregenerate man knows whether he be Chosen to life, and he ought to be willing to be disposed of according to God's Decree.

ANS. This Objection labors of great ignorance. For,

1. Not God's Decrees but his Commands are the rules of men's actions, Deut. 25. 29. It is not for us, in enquiring after our duty, so

much as to propose what is decreed, what not: For though God hath made it a rule of his own works, yet he hath given us another of ours.

2. No man can know whether he be elected or no, till he can make his calling sure, 2 Pet 1. 10. As for reprobation, there are no ordinary infallible notes known to a man of it, nor doth God reveal the other but by drawing the soul effectually home to Christ.

3. The invitations of the Gospel are to all where the sound of it comes; and all such are bound by the precepts to obey them, except they will bring guilt on themselves, and increase their condemnation, Joh. 3. 29.

4. Men are not damned under the Gospel because they are reprobated, but because they slight the Gospel, and willfully refuse to accept of Christ and his Salvation, *ibid*.

5. It is both lawful and a duty to pray for things that God hath never purposed to bring to pass: Stephen else have sinned in his last words, Act. 7. ult. Nor could we ever know whom to pray for, lest we should sin.

Quest. If it be then inquired how far the soul should resign itself up to God's dispose; I answer, He doth in this act submit himself to the Sovereignty, Justice, and Mercy of God: He throws himself down at the feet of these Attributes; not one alone, but all of them.

1. He submits himself to the Justice of God, acknowledging him to be righteous in all his dealings with him; yea, that he cannot in any wise do him the least wrong: He is incapable of injury from the Almighty.

1. If he bring long, sore, and heavy Judgments upon him, wasting and perplexing calamities, such as make him groan, yet he is

righteous, Neh. 9. 33.

2. If he should delay to hear him, or give him any answer of peace, though he have prayed and begged, yet it is no affront; it is right, and it is his duty to wait till he will, let it be whensoever he pleaseth, Isa. 8. 17.

3. If he should judge and condemn him, by passing a sentence upon him, and declaring his reward to be with sinners, still he must be justified, Psal. 51. 4.

4. If he please to damn him everlastingly, to harden his heart against him, yet even this also hath he truly deserved; and it is at his liberty whether he will do otherwise with him yea or no, Dan. 9. 8. He hath but that which doth properly belong to him, it is but his wages, Rom. 6. 23. Thus, though the poor creature is loath to be damned, and earnestly deprecates it, and cannot think of it without trembling and amazement; yet he yields this to God, that he may with all equity do it, and if he do, he shall forever have cause to be silent, and nor in the least to complain against him as unjust.

2. He submits himself to the Sovereignty of God; acknowledging it to be his prerogative, to dispense himself to his creatures at his pleasure. And hence,

1. He owns and yields himself to be at the Sovereign dispose of God, being one of his creatures, and he may appoint him to what he will, without wrong: If the Potter may order his mass of clay (though his fellow creature) to make vessels of the same lump, for several uses, some honorable, some dishonorable; much more may God dispose of him, who gave being to the lump itself of which he was made, Rom. 9. 21.

2. Hence he lays himself down before God's Sovereignty, and yields himself to become a subject of it: he puts himself into God's hands as a Sovereign; as a rebel yields himself up freely to his Prince; resolving with himself that God shall do with him what he will, whether it be in judgment or in mercy: He will not strive, contend, or make any rebellious resistance against him. Thus did Eli, 1 Sam. 3. 18. and David, 2 Sam. 15. 26. Here I am, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.

3. Hence he resolves not to reply against any of God's dispensations, be they never so sharp or sever upon him. There is a great difference between being willing to be damned, and being willing that God should be Sovereign: God commands us to fly from hell, and yet he expects of us, both to acknowledge that we have deserved it, and also that we cannot lay claim of title to any such favor at his hands, as Salvation, till he doth freely bestow it upon us; and that if he doth, we ow the acknowledgement of it to his Sovereign good pleasure, Rom. 9. 18. He hath mercy, on whom he will have mercy. We must desire and seek to be saved, but we must submit those desires to him who hath the Key of David, and unlocks heavens doors, to none but to whom he pleaseth.

3. He submits himself to God's free mercy; to which alone he repairs, and on which only he depends for acceptance: and he submits to this,

1. By a free and constant acknowledgement that all that he hath ever received of God, hath flowed from this fountain; his life, his livelihood, the proffers of Grace; and if ever he obtain Salvation it must be from mercy: If God should deny him Grace, he should be just; but if for his own names sake he will take him up into everlasting arms, this is mere mercy; and every inviting call, every

encouraging promise, every smile of his countenance is undeserved mercy.

2. By a free, ready, willing, earnest desire to be saved in a way of mercy, and in no other way: he now looks no more for any merit in himself, or any righteousness of his own by which he might please God, satisfy the law, deserve favor; he no longer sticks at any of these things, but would have mercy to reap the whole honor and praise of his salvation, Psal. 115. 1.

3. He takes up a firm resolution to lie and tarry at the door of mercy, to repair to this fountain for all good, and to expect and wait for all here.

1. He hath not, nor will he make use of any other Attribute, or plead for acceptance by; and this hope is in God's Grace, and all his pleading is, For thine own Name sake. As far as mercy may be moved to look favorably upon him, so far his hope reacheth, and no further.

2. Hence he resigns himself to mercy's disposal: Text. Let God but accept of me, take me into his house, and now let mercy, do what it sees fit: May I be but a subject of saving mercy, I will trust that for the rest.

3. Here he will wait God's time for the discovery of himself in his love: He knows he is at the foot of mercy, and here he will not limit the holy one of Israel, but will tarry his leisure, Isa. 8. 17. He remembers it is mercy he hath to do with, and therefore it must not be commanded, but waited for.

4. If mercy seem to turn from him, and indignation to burn against him; If mercy seem not to regard (as Christ to the Canaanitish woman) yet he will bear all this, and still wait. If mercy seem (like



that unjust Judge) to stop its ears, anger to sit in the countenance of the most high, he will submit, and yet throw self upon the mercy of an angry and offended God, Mic. 7. 9.

4. He is resolved that if God will accept him, witness his love to him, and acknowledge him in Christ, his free mercy shall have the full and whole Glory of it, and he will engage his heart to magnify mercy, by degrading himself, and keeping in mind his own unworthiness: God shall have the praise of all, his heart shall echo, grace, grace, through all his life, and heaven shall ring with these glorious acclamations to all eternity.

This is the true Gospel humility, which the spirit of God worketh in every soul whom he draws home to himself: This is a true qualification of Repentance of Faith, and the modification of it in respect of the term to which the sinner returns, viz. God: and those that so come shall find mercy. For the Reasons why God brings the soul thus to his foot, they are such as these.

REAS. 1. To take away all boasting from the creature: that the soul may have nothing at all before it to confide in: man is emptied of himself as long as there is any self-sovereignty remaining in him: he doth not, cannot acknowledge all to come from God, till he utterly relinquish the disposal of himself: He cannot see that his Salvation is wholly out of himself, as long as he thinks he may capitulate with God about it. Now God will hide pride from man.

2. That his glorious Sovereignty may be fully subscribed to: Hence God will save none till they do yield that he might damn them, and hath no obligation from them to do otherwise: God will be seen in his royalty, to dispense grace from a throne, or not at all, hence we are to go to a throne of grace, Heb. 4. 16. God's Sovereignty is a most precious pearl in his Royal Diadem, and he will not suffer it to be

plucked out: Job shall be convinced of this before he returns his captivity.

3. That the grace of God may not lift them up, but keep them low and humble: That they may not despise others, nor think of themselves beyond what is meet: that they may not be high minded, but fear; that they may always remember who hath made them to differ from others, and may dwell upon that, that it is by Grace they are saved, and not of themselves.

USE. Give me leave here to improve the former and present Doctrine, in a serious word of Exhortation; as you would prove yourselves true penitents, to get and keep humble before God: Ply this work of humiliation, and exercise the grace of humility: get humble, walk humbly before the Lord: Renounce self-sufficiency, and cast off self-sovereignty. For Motive.

1. Consider how acceptable a humble soul is to God, and how displeasing pride is to him: God takes great delight in those that are humble, he dwells with them, Isa. 57. 15. If any are like to have more of God's refreshing and comforting presence than others, it is those that are humble: where this grace is in exercise, God will give more grace. Their services are highly esteemed by God, Psal. 51. 17. he hath a peculiar respect to them, Isa. 66. 2.

2. Consider how much reason, and how many causes you have to be humble, to see and count yourselves vile creatures, and to lie low before God:

1. Your sins should make and keep you humble: The sin of your heart, the leprosy of your nature, the body of death, that heart-full of filthiness and corruption: your daily sins of act, in omission of duty, in transgressing the command; especially your particular enormities,

Psal. 51. 1. This evil. It will be a truth forever that you have committed things worthy of death, and are not worthy to be called sons and daughters of God, a hired servants place is too good for you.

2. Your duties should humble you: Hast thou done anything for God? it was not thou didst it of thyself, but the spirit in thee. And in all your duties you may see humbling considerations; how cold your affections? how little impression had they on your hearts? of how little continuance, even as the morning dew? How little sincerity, how much hypocrisy? How little grace, how much corruption?

3. All your afflictions should humble you: God hath hung many weights on thy heart to crush thee, and thou shouldest be ashamed that they have brought thee no lower: All personal, & all public rebukes of God's Providence, all Wilderness Trials, are to humble the people of God, Deut. 8. 15, 16.

4. All God's mercies should humble you; you have not deserved them, but the contrary. The mercies of your being, preservation, special deliverances; above all those saving mercies, the grace of God in Christ, and the promise of eternal life: In a word; whoever thou art, whether Believer or unbeliever, thou hast abundant cause to be always affecting thy heart unto a low frame, and to bring thee down to the foot of the great God, and lie there as a poor despicable nothing, resigning thyself up to, and placing all thy hope upon his mere love & mercy in Christ, and endeavoring that that may have the praise and glory of all.

## SERMON XVIII.

The Directions may be: 1. To the awakened sinner to come humbly to, and wait humbly upon God for his grace. 2. To the believer to carry humbly all his days.

1. Art thou one, who finding thine own misery, and hearing of God's plenty, art thinking to make proof of it: Wouldest thou speed? then, in a deep sense of thy own unworthiness Throw thyself down at his feet: would you find God merciful, be you sure to be humble: And for help,

1. Remember how much you have done to provoke God to reject you, and hide his face from you. Think what manner of lives you have led; and in special how you have slighted the Gospel, despised the Calls, counsels, reproofs, encouragements that have been given you; how often you have refused to accept of tendered Grace and Salvation; and therefore well may God refuse to hear you when you cry unto him, and bid you go to the God's that you have served, Jer. 2. 28.

2. Think how useless and unprofitable creatures you are in yourselves; no ways fit to be active in glorifying of him: The whole world is become unprofitable, Rom. 3. 12. Have neither will nor power of their own to glorify God till he restore it, Philip. 2. 13. What can you do for him, till your enmity be taken away, your rebellion subdued? Nothing but his grace can fit you to do him any the least service.

3. See that you have nothing by which you can challenge the least favor from him. It is true, the Gospel saith, If you believe, you shall be saved; but it also tells you, this believing is not of yourselves, Eph. 2. 9. Till you believe you are under condemnation; the first grace

must come from him; and it is at his pleasure whether he will give you to believe or no. He hath indeed freely engaged himself in promise to believers; but he hath not promised to you that he will make you such, and if he do not, you cannot: since then the case is such, that without Faith no Salvation, and you no way deserve that God should give it you, but have many ways provoked him to deny it; what remains but that you cast yourselves down at his feet, and ask it, not only as beggars that deserve no alms, but as traitors that have forfeited your lives, and stand to the courtesy of their Prince of his own free favor to pardon and restore them.

2. You that are believers, here is that which may teach you to carry it humbly all your days, and in all respects: There is none hath more reason to be humble than a child of God, whose all is of grace, hath nothing but what he hath freely received: in particular, walk humbly towards God, and towards man.

1. Carry it humbly towards God; and that both in respect of his special and spiritual grace, and in respect of his outward Providences.

1. In respect of his special and spiritual grace; and the both in regard of the first gift of saving grace, and progress of it.

1. In respect of the first gift of saving grace; let the constant remembrance of it serve to make and keep you humble. And therefore remember: 1. Who thou wast to whom God brought this grace? Ezek. 16. begin. One in thy blood. 2. That thou didst nothing to the working of this great work, Eph. 2. 9. Not of yourselves. 3. How much thou didst to obstruct it; how often thou didst resist God's calls and counsels, wert obstinate, rebellious, not hearkening to his Spirit, shutting thine eyes, stopping thy ears, rising up against reproofs, &c. God often came to thee, and entreated thee, but thou

hadst no mind to hear him, but didst all thou couldst to have undone thy soul. 4. The patience which the great God used with thee; how long he waited upon thee, pitying chine obstinacy, bewailing the hardness of thy heart, and would not let thee alone, though many a time thou biddest him depart from thee. 5. Much meditate upon the distinguishing grace which was revealed in thy conversion. 1. How few are saved, and that thou shouldest be one of them. 2. That thou art no better than they, hast nothing more to commend thee to God than Cain or Judas had; nothing out of God could move him. 3. Thou didst many ways more dishonor God before thy conversion than any of them did; that young man, Mat. 19. might shame thee. 4. That the same means which hardened others converted thee. And when thou hast laid all these things together, put thy mouth in the dust, and let God's converting grace make thee nothing in thine own eyes: and let this grace never be forgotten, but always magnified by thee: only by humility is converting grace glorified.

2. In respect of the progress of grace in your souls: the people of God meet with many changes, exercises, temptations; and in these, diversities of out-lettings and withdrawing's of grace, and without humility cannot carry it right in these interludes: in particular.

1. Limit not God to such a measure or manner of the dispensation of his grace: as we should desire all grace, so we should be thankful for every portion of it: Beggars must not be choosers. Paul would have grace to vanquish temptation; God would have him content with grace sufficient to keep him from being vanquished by it: If you have any Grace, it is a gift, and if you would have more, you must be humbled, 1 Pet. 5. 5.

2. Be humble when God denies thee the special communication of grace: Whether it be of enlarged assistance; though ragged and poor,

and canst scarce do anything, but art ready to slip and fall: thou hast earned nothing, and God knows what is best for thee: Or in respect of consolation, thou hast not those ravishing apprehensions which thou wouldest, but he seems to hide the light of his countenance, complain not, he is sovereign and just, resolve to wait, Isa. 5. 17. Be not discontented: Thou takest much pains, waitest diligently on all means, and there seems to be but little coming in; let not this make thee weary: thou art sowing, it is not yet harvest: grieve but fret not; pray, but pine not, and know the harvest will come in God's time, Gal. 6. 9.

3. Be willing to follow hard after God, though through many difficulties: We are forward, while our way is fair, but if grace comes to a trial, now we shrink, and are discouraged: But this is a time that calls for us to be humble: we must now follow God; as good soldiers we must endure hardship: God is worthy to be followed; it is his mercy thou hast any grace which may be exercised, and the end shall be happy, 1 Pet. 1. 7.

4. Humbly depend upon, and go to God for all supplies of grace in every work you have to do: Proud man would have his stock in his own hand, to make use of when and as he pleaseth; but God will have us to come and ask for every Grace, & wait on him for it, and the humble soul will do so: If you consider that you deserve nothing, you will be glad that you may have it for asking: Remember you are but Children, and have not wisdom enough to manage your own stock, but would soon prove bankrupts: this should animate you, that whatever you want, God is ready to give, if you ask, Mat. 7. 7.

5. Carry it humbly towards God though he doth not bestow so much grace upon you as on others: We are sometimes ready to say, though I deserve nothing at God's hands, yet I am as deserving as another;

God can afford such a one so much wisdom, faith, patience, comfort &c. and why may not I have it as well? This spirit of envy and emulation is contrary to Humility: and this very argument, rightly improved might make thee silent: Is God a free disposer? is it his own that he gives? and may he not deal it out at his liberty? is thy eye evil, because his is good? doth not poor man challenge as great a liberty as this is, and will you deny it God? nay, because thou art unworthy, thou hast cause to be thankful that thou hast any at all, when there are so many millions that have none, and who hath made thee to differ from them? yea, call thyself to an account, how hast thou husbanded thy little? if ill, that should humble and silence thee; if well, then comfort thyself, that he who improved his two talents well, had his master's Euge, and entered into the Lord's joy. Yea, how knowest thou, but that their work and temptation is greater than thine, and therefore stand in need of more?

2. Carry it humbly in respect of God's outward providences: We live in a world of change, and there are varieties of conditions in which we are thrown up and down, and shall never carry it right in them without Humility. And here,

1. Carry it humbly in respect of affliction: there are many changes passing over our heads, God brings many cloudy and mournful days upon his people; he sees meet ever and anon to chasten them, and it is fit that a vale of sin, be a vale of tears, All calls us to be humble: The Child should stoop, when his father is correcting him: Humble sense of our vileness is a fit posture to meet afflicting times in: For help,

1. Justify God in all the trials that he brings upon us: Hence labor feelingly to acknowledge our desert, Dan. 9. 8. Accept of the punishment of your iniquity; say the Lord is righteous: You are



Believers; what then? Christ hath satisfied God as a condemning Judge, yet he will lay his fatherly chastisements upon his faulty Children, and they have no reason to complain of being beaten.

2. Bear affliction with meekness, patience, and self-abhorrence, Mic. 7. 9. With patience, be in subjection to your father, when he doth nothing but right, we should be silent, Job 40 4, 5. He that is vile, hath nothing to say: and with self-loathing, the more we loath ourselves, the more we shall love an afflicting God: It is the Lord, &c. Look on thyself as a poor inconsiderable thing, and that will teach thee meekness: What wonder if a worm be trod on?

QUEST. But why doth God deal worse with me than with other sinful men?

ANSW. 1. Possibly some are in a worse condition than thou. 2. Dost thou know any one by nature worse than thou art. 3. Canst thou say thou art afflicted more than thy deserving, or indeed up to it? 4. Is not he the Potter and thou the clay? let him alone, if he be Sovereign thou must be silent.

3. Let every affliction help to embitter sin to thee: that is one great end of it, to wean us from sin, and make us know it evil and bitter; and we shall bear our afflictions the better, when we know and confess that our iniquities have procured them: trouble for sin will swallow up other sorrows.

4. Think not worse of God or his ways because of the afflictions you meet withal, but be willing to wait on him through all: Break not with God, nor leave him, nor abate of your love to him: believe that he can take away the affliction: and believe that he will sanctify it to you: and resolve with Job, that though he slay you, you will trust in him.

2. Carry it humbly towards God in regard of his mercies. There are many mercies which God bestows upon us, and if we would carry worthily under them, we must carry humbly: Therefore,

1. Acknowledge your unworthiness of the least outward mercy; join with Jacob in his Confession, Gen. 32. 10. A sinner is not worthy of a piece of bread, or a drop of water; all our daily refreshments are mere mercy; yea, our very life, Lam. 3. 22. You never earned your meat or drink, all the work you do is not worth a farthing.

2. Wonder that God should do anything for you: David makes a great wonderment at it, Psal. 8. 4. Art thou a Believer? that is Grace; in thyself a wretched man: There is not the best man upon earth, but hath cause to stand admiring that God should condescend to look so low as to take any notice of him, or to do him the least kindness.

3. Be exceedingly thankful for all God's mercies: Humility only is thankful: That God should give to us, such as we are, such mercies, this makes it exceeding great mercies: to see a sinner, one that deserves nothing, eating, and drinking, and compassed with mercies, this changeth gratitude.

4. Let these mercies break thy heart, and quicken thee to obedience: If we did but know ourselves, the least mercy would do this: That is a proud heart, that is not softened by mercies, and quickened to duty too: The humble souls language is, What shall I render to the Lord? Psal. 116. 12. How should I live? What manner of one should I be who enjoy such favors, who might have been a back-log in hell, or ground between the millstones of Divine revenge? See therefore that you are unspeakably in debt to God for every favor, be it never so little, yet if the soul be humble as it ought to be, it will point us to God, and put us upon obedience.

5. Be content with the portion of mercy that you enjoy: It is pride that acknowledgeth not God in what we have, because we want our wills in something that God denies us: An humble soul is content with anything: though he be poor, despised, afflicted, yet that he lives, hath any health, strength, &c. sets him down quiet: Learn to be humble, and that will teach you to close with all God's dispensations.

2. Carry humbly towards men: A true apprehension of our own vileness will make us little in our own eyes. Hence,

1. Beware of despising any, we mistake, if we think it an effect of true grace to carry it contemptuously to any: Are they unworthy? so are you, Are they Prodigals? so you have been.

2. Think better of others than yourselves, Phil. 2. 3. He that sees himself vile, will think these cannot be worse than I, it may be they are better, it may be they have better moral excellencies; or have never sinned so fearfully, so scandalously and against such means as I.

3. Think it not hard to be in low esteem with others: We are ready to be dejected when men look with low and little respect upon us; But he that reckons himself a worm, will not think it strange, if everyone treads on him, but wonder he is no more contemned.

4. Whatever esteem God gives thee among men, assume it not to thyself; let God have the whole honor of it: Boast not of thy excellencies, or graces, but choose rather to be speaking of thy infirmities: and if thou hast the praise or acclamations of others, take it not to thyself, but say, It is by the Grace of God that I am what I am; who of myself am nothing Thus are we in all respects to carry over selves humbly, and this is the way to obtain grace and favor with God; the way to grow in Grace: yea, by this we shall give God his

glory, and shall enjoy his presence here; and when he hath dwelt a while with us, to comfort and establish us, he will translate us to dwell with him in his Kingdom of Glory forever.

## **SERMON XIX.**

And he arose and came to his Father. Vers. 20. begin.

We have considered the Prodigal 's deliberation: In these words we see him putting it in execution: where it is to be observed that his practice corresponds to his purpose. He resolved to leave his far Country, and return to his Fathers house; and so he did: Such also is the practice of every true penitent. True Repentance begins at the heart, but it ends in the life: It rests not in thoughts and purposes, but proceeds to practice, Hence,

DOCT. True Repentance is practical Repentance.

In the work of Conversion, there are not only deliberate purposes but real acts. In order of nature, there must be first resolving before doing; yet where true grace is, when men are resolved, they will do. Although the will be the first mover, yet it is not the sole mover, it rests not in Elicite, but proceeds to Imperate acts. Of the nature of rising and going, I have before spoken, that which we have now to inquire into, is the inseparable connection between grace in the heart, and grace in the life. We saw before the Prodigal 's resolution was gracious, and the Reason given was, because it was the root and spring of practice; it was the beginning of the work in the superior

faculties, which was to influence the whole man: And the sincerity of it herein discovers itself, because, as he said, so he did, as he resolved, so he acted. It gives us a note of difference between false and true Repentance: Here then we may consider. 1. The evidence of the truth of the Doctrine. 2. What is this practice of Repentance?

1. For the evidence of the truth of the Doctrine, take these Conclusions.

1. There may be some kind of deliberations and purposes in the heart of a sinner that is unconverted, about repenting and returning to God. Every purpose is not an evidence of sincerity. A man held under the sting and lashes of an awakened accusing Conscience, may be made to vomit up his morsels, and (in a fright) to make forced promises of leaving off his sinful ways; and upon the hearing of the Gospel, may resolve (as John 's Generation of Vipers) to flee from the wrath to come: distressed Consciences are often hurried to it, rashly to throw themselves upon such resolutions: and some visible practice, and that violent for the while.

2. That which discovers the falsehood of these resolutions is, that they are very short-lived; they soon expire: many of them do not live long enough to make any visible show in practice, but die in the womb; many a sick man in horror, promiseth Reformation, if God will spare him: but he recovers not so fast as his resolutions decay and die. Others that have had a more forcible impulse, do a little seemingly, but are like the stony ground, Mat. 13. they are often too violent to be permanent, and by this discover, that they are acted by external force, and not an inward principle.

3. The whole man is gone away from God by sin, and therefore the whole must return by repentance, Not only the heart is defiled, but the life is polluted; not the inward man alone, but the outward too is

gone away from God, and must return to him: now true Repentance is not a partial, but a whole turning: we owe God the whole man, Soul, Body and Spirit, 1 Thess. 5. 23.

4. The declarative glory of God is the great thing which all our doings should aim at. In Conversion therefore, we are not only to praise him, but to show forth his praise; and how is this done, but in life Repentance? God only sees the heart, men observe and judge of our lives.

5. The Will, being commandress over the whole man, is not only to resolve for itself, but for the whole man. Purposing or resolving is properly an act of the will, but it is for the whole, it being representative of all, and being able to indent for all: thus the young man promiseth for himself, I will arise, true purposes are an obligation laid on the whole man for the performance of them.

6. Hence, if the Will be indeed sincere in purposing, practice will follow. This is unquestionable to him who knows what power it hath in man. You shall find in Scripture, that impenitence, or unconversion is charged here, Ezek. 33. 11. Joh. 5. 40. Psal. 81. 12. and why? but because where the Will leads the whole man naturally and necessarily follows, at least in true and real endeavors. A Believer may indeed fail in the manner of performance, when his Will is intense: but yet, where purposes have been taken, and promises made of Repentance, and not put forth in endeavor, but men sit still where they were, those promises were made with a deceitful heart, Isai. 44. 90. and this hinders thorough repentance, Psal. 78. 37. their heart was not right: where the heart is truly given to God, such an one will not sit still, but be up and doing.

2. What is the practice of Repentance which is requisite?

ANS. It is a speedy, constant, and industrious endeavor in the mortifying of Sin, and quickening of Grace, by the help of God's Holy Spirit. When the Spirit of God hath wrought the habits of Grace in the heart, he always adds the bringing of them forth into act, which is their end and use: He that works the Will, works the Deed too, Phil. 2. 13. so that the Soul no sooner is furnished for its work, but it sets about it: when Christ raised any, or healed them, they rose and walked: so that practical Repentance is nothing else but improvement of Grace.

1. The business of this Grace, or that about which it is conversant, is the mortifying of Sin, and quickening of Grace: rising out of Sin, is a rejecting, relinquishing, casting it off, which is done in mortification. Sin claims the power of a Prince in a natural man, commands him, Reigns over him, Rom. 6. 12. It must therefore be vanquished, its dominion cast off, by such as rise out of it: Sin so dwells in us, that it is no more left than it is mortified: returning to God, is an exciting of Grace, a quickening of it, it is an exerting of faith in him, and love to him, in these Repentance consists, Rom. 6. 11.

2. That which is to be done in this business, is,

1. To be using all means to strengthen hatred of Sin: the more we hate Sin, the more we are gone from it; he whose heart most abhors it is gotten furthest off from it: Hence, there is an using such helps as may make it loathsome: which are a viewing the evil nature of it as discovered in the Word of God, viz. its pollution, its contrariety to God, the wrong it doth the Soul: and also the cross of Christ, on which we should crucify the World and its Lusts, Gal. 6. 14.

2. To be by all ways engaging our hearts to God, to love and fear him; and hence to get more and more persuaded of his goodness, of the riches of Grace in Christ, of the great happiness of those whom he

admits into favor with himself: the better we are acquainted with, and persuaded of God, the more intense will be the acting's of our Grace, Psal. 9. 10.

3. The qualities of this act are these three,

1. It is a speedy work: if repentance be begun in the heart, it cannot rest there, but presently breaks forth, Psal. 39. 3. the young man no sooner purposed, but he practiced, his resolutions were no sooner sealed, but he falls upon them; the Soul that is thoroughly persuaded, sees so much reason, and feels such urgent necessity; Sin is made so bitter, and God represented so desirable, and his present state so dangerous, that he cannot be at rest till the thing be done.

2. It is a constant work: the practice of Repentance is not a transient but a permanent act: he that begins right in the work of Repentance, holds on all his life: Paul quickens his Colossians to the work of Mortification after a long standing in Christ, Col. 3. 5. there is Sin in Believers all their life, and so much Sin, so much distance from God; they had need then to be turning all their days. The true Christian is in his way, travelling out of his far Country, and he cannot sit still till he be gotten to Heaven.

3. It is an industrious work: when a thing is difficult, he that is in good earnest will take pains: it is not light skirmishes, but a warfare that must accomplish this business: his life therefore is an agony, he attends on the word with diligence, prays with all importunity, as one that is oppressed, Isai. 38. 14. sets a strict watch over his heart and life, looks to his ways, flies from temptations, endeavors that every step of his life may be a step farther from sin, and nearer to God, and in this race he runs as fast as he can.



4. The fruit of all is, Sin dies, and Grace grows daily; I mean in the progress of his Christian course: he hates Sin more, loves God more, gets more strength against temptation, and more agility in God's service; thus he renews his strength, mounts up with wings as Eagles, runs and is not weary, walks and doth not faint, Isa. 40. ult.

USE 1. For Information:

1. Here see how vain it is for men to rest in empty and impracticable purposes of repenting and returning unto God, as if therefore their state were good. True Repentance indeed begins at the Will, but it is as certain that if it be true, it rests not there but proceeds farther, and the whole man will be exercised in it; if the heart be really turned to God, that man is right; but then his life will be changed too.

This Doctrine doth not blame men for resolving and promising, but for doing no more, for sitting still and thinking they have done sufficient: beware then of resting here: ask your hearts on what grounds they purposed, & if good, why then do they not perform them? Heaven will not be won with a few empty wishes, and faint promises; but there must be wrestling, striving, overcoming: the Son promised his Father to go and work in the Vineyard, but went not, and what did that promise come to? God will not be so mocked.

2. It plainly condemns such as have relinquished or abandoned their resolutions: they promised Repentance, & practice impenitence: how many in affliction have engaged to God, to leave off their vain courses, and no longer follow foolish things, they would arise and return to God, and if he would give opportunity they would make it appear; but after a little while they get the mastery over their convictions, still their Consciences lick their wounds whole; now are their resolutions buried, their promises forgotten, their old ways

please them again, and so the Dog returns to his vomit. Let such consider,

1. God takes notice of, and keeps a record by him of all those purposes and promises and will one day call you to an account for them.

2. This is the way to be more hardened in Sin, and make your conversion the more hopeless; this is to quench the Spirit, and provoke him to strive no more.

3. It will be a sad remembrance in the bottomless pit, to think, how near you once were to Heaven, and yet thus thrust yourselves away from it.

USE 2. For Exhortation: to such as are distressed under the weight of oppressing evils and have taken up purposes, and made promises of arising and going to God; would you have the comfort of them, follow them with serious practice. For motive, consider;

1. Else they will come to nothing; they will prove but the Fools Dream, and Sluggards Wish: God will one day say to you, why did you not do as you thought? why did you stand still, or go backward?

2. These resolutions are the suggestions of the Spirit of God, calling you to your duty, and if you neglect them, you quench the Spirit, and so provoke him to forsake you.

3. These are resolutions not to be neglected or repented of: they are the best purposes that ever you made in your lives; they have a right object before them, and there lies a necessity on you, if you will ever do well to practice them: For 1. Something must be done, or else you perish: there is no lying still where you are, where there is nothing

but Famine and misery. 2. If you return to your old ways and courses, it is but to act over your old miseries: the World will never be better than a desolate Wilderness; if you go to it, you do but return to Famine and destruction. 3. Jesus Christ, and no other, can save you; and he is willing to save you, and is grieved to see you halting so long between two Opinions, faintly resolving, and dubiously promising: he waits to see you do at last as you have often said. For Help,

1. Beware of Delays: men say they will, but when? Satan is politick, our hearts are deceitful, and these seek to while off the work, and make us believe it is enough to promise now, and practice at leisure: rise and go while your resolutions are hot, they will else cool by degrees, till they have no heat nor motion in them.

2. Enter not upon debates about the business; Satan will plead, Flesh and Blood will reason; you can no way more gratify your Enemy than to enter a review, and bring the matter into question and deliberation again: thus they not only gain time, which may be an irreparable loss, but have also many advantages to break off and disannul the thoughts of your hearts.

3. Entertain not discouragements from going to Christ: Satan will say, your Sins are too great and many, or your time is past, or it is a desperate venture, being uncertain whether you shall find entertainment: and many the like stumbling blocks he will throw in your way: But fortify your resolutions.

1. By considering your own necessity: that one thought is enough to stop the mouth of every Objection, I must go or die.

2. By seriously pondering the Gospel encouragements: doth not Christ bid thee come? hath he not said, those that do come he will

not cast off? he is the fountain of living waters, hath enough to satisfy the hungry soul: mercy is above our unworthiness, as high as the heavens above the earth; he can and will abundantly pardon, what needs more? If then thou hast thoughts to return to God, fix these thoughts, and rise, and do so; if thou sit still, faint, or give back, all is lost, and thou art more miserable than ever: but if thou rise and return, this will evidence the truth of thy resolutions; and thou shalt find all kind welcome, and soul satisfying entertainment with God; which is the next thing that follows.

## **SERMON. XX.**

But when he was yet a great way off, his Father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. -  
Ver. 20.

We come now to the third part of the Parable, expressing the entertainment the Prodigal found with his Father, which was with all kindness, and highest expressions of greatest love. The purpose of it is to set forth the riches of God's Grace, and inexpressible bounty to repenting Sinners; and so expresseth the great benefit that come by believing, described, ver. 20, to 25. and here are two things to be noted: 1. The meeting and greeting between him and his Father, ver. 20, 21. 2. The Provision made for, and entertainment afforded to him, ver. 22, 23, 24. In their meeting and greeting there are two parts: 1. His Fathers carriage towards him, ver. 20. 2. His deportment towards his Father, ver. 21. In his Fathers carriage

towards him we are to observe, 1. The time of it, when he was yet, &c.  
2. The manner of it, in several circumstances.

1. To begin at the time when this entertainment or treaty was, it is expressed by the circumstance of place, at such time as he was at a great distance from him: the right meaning of which Phrase is of weight to be understood, for the confirming of the forementioned Doctrine of Repentance. Some understand it to be spoken by way of anticipation, and that this part of the Parable doth not follow the foregoing in order of time; but that as in the second part he had described the Sons repentance in the order and method of it as it was done by him; so in this third part, setting forth the Grace of God, by the Fathers entertainment, he begins it at the first discoveries of it, and that before (being the leading cause of) his Repentance, q. d. before he could rise & come to his Father, he came to himself Others suppose the order of time is here observed, and so account that here are the beginnings of saving Grace, and so put over the former to preparatory work, q. d. whiles he was resolving, and practicing to use means with a preparatory hope, God comes in with saving Grace. But I close rather with the first of these: for doubtless this arising and going, must express true Repentance; and the expression in our Text discovers the preventing Grace of God, and shows the original of his favor to be of himself, and the beginning of the application of it to be before any Repentance of ours: we might be ready to think that the Sons Repentance was that which moved his Fathers bowels, and his acknowledgement had broken his heart: Our Savior tells us no, God comes first, his Bowels out-run our Repenting's. Hence,

DOCT. In the work of Conversion God's free Grace prevents, and so becomes the first and leading cause of our Salvation.

The first expressions of God's saving love meet the Sinner when he is a great way off: nature doth not prevent Grace, but Grace nature: it is not with God as with human Fathers, whose hearts are turned with their Children's humble and submissive subjecting themselves to them. God's Grace indeed appears in receiving the truly penitent, but it is neither moved by their penitence, nor doth it here begin; but it is the first, and leads all the causes of Salvation. By the Grace of God, I here understand all that special good will which he bears to any of the Children of men, in appointing them Heirs of Glory; which Grace first appears to any in particular, when it effectually works for their Salvation: Grace neither is tied to, nor waits for, nor is consequent upon the natural operations of men. A brief opening of this Doctrine may be couched in a few Propositions.

1. The natural man cannot by his natural power move one step towards God: the highest improvements of nature by our own principles, bring us not one foot in our way towards Heaven: the Scripture expressions of man's being dead, impotent, dry bones, a carcass, &c. though Metaphors, yet are not Hyperbole's. If by the image of God on man, we understand the sanctification of his nature, fitting him for the service of God, that image is wholly defaced, and there are not so much as any relics of it left: Man is Blind, Deaf, Dumb, Dead.

2. As God hath appointed his unto Salvation, so hath he appointed a way in which he will bring them thereunto; and this way becomes by his ordination, a necessary medium to the attainment of it: Faith and Holiness are the way to glory: the Psalmist speaks of a Path of life. Psal. 16. ult. out of this way none ever come to Heaven.

3. Hence man's Salvation is wrought applicatorily, by bringing him into and keeping him in this way: Eternal life is ascertained to it, Gal.

6. 16. they that find it, and follow it, and lose it not, never miss of Glory: the promise is so firm that it cannot fail, all the difficulty lies in the performance of what is in order to the receiving it.

4. That the discovering of this way, and appointing Salvation in it is of Grace, is evident, for God and man were fallen out, and God might choose whether ever he would accept him anymore: nor is there any proportion between what is required, and the consequent Salvation: besides, Christ, by whom alone we have access to it, was freely given to open this way.

5. That the bringing of any into, and keeping of them in this way is also of Grace, is the thing which we have now to prove, and will clear the truth of the Doctrine; and indeed this alone is that which removes all legal respects from the Gospel; and the truth of it will hence appear:

1. That before the Spirit of God begins to work upon him, there is nothing in an elect person to distinguish him from another: he is dead as well as he, a child of wrath even as others, Eph. 2. 3. One hath not a better nature, or better dispositions than the other: Abraham was an Idolater, Rahab a Harlot, Mary Magdalene no better, Paul a Blasphemer and Persecutor, and in his rage the spirit met him.

2. The very common work of preparation is not of nature, but of grace. There is common, and there is special grace: the Sinner doth not so much as convince himself: it is not Conscience alone, but it is Conscience awakened, and improved by the Spirit of God, that brings a Sinner under sense of sin and misery, Joh. 16. 9. man is naturally stupid, a convinced Sinner is nearer the Kingdom than another, this is not of himself.

3. Saving Faith whereby we are entitled to Salvation, is not of man himself, but of grace: he that believes shall be saved, but God gives men to believe, Eph. 2. 8. it is the gift of God. Men would live and die in unbelief, did not he exert his Almighty power: Faith is a creating work, 2 Cor. 4. 6. and the operation of the same power which raised Christ, Eph. 1. 19, 20.

4. The saving efficacy of all the means of Grace is of God: it is not in them, they have not power in themselves to produce this grace in us, but that is according to his pleasure: it was he that touched Lydia's heart, Act. 16. the virtue of the means, lies not in the skill, grace, good-will of instruments, nor all their industry but in him, 1 Cor. 3. 6. some are converted at the first Sermon they ever heard, others have heard a thousand, and are yet in their Sins: Sermons are but the Prophets staff in the Servants hand.

5. Though God's ordinary method be, first to prepare the Soul for Faith, before he infuseth it, yet, not only the preparation is of Grace, but the soul thus prepared, is, before believing, a great way off from God, he is still in a state of nature, hath nothing in him that can challenge this Grace; but if God bestow it upon him, it is his mere favor: there are many who have a common work, and it proceeds no farther: they have had many awakenings, shakings, terrors; taken up many resolutions, made many promises; and yet never past from death to life, but have either staid here, or gone back again: nay, God is here Sovereign, the Sinner is dead still, and hath not a promise that God will give him life: God when he passeth by, may either look upon him, and say to him Live; or he may pass away.

USE 1. For Information:

1. Of the absoluteness of the Grace of God: it must needs be every way wholly free: the first cause hath no dependence upon any other,



or any other but a voluntary obligation to them: hence they undertake a vain task, that will give any reason of man's Conversion beyond God's will; or why these and not those are converted and saved: if there were any to sway that, it were not the leading cause.

2. Of the infallibility of the conversion and salvation of God's Elect; because it flows from Grace as that highest cause of it. If it did firstly depend upon anything in us, our mutability would expose it to hazard, and thence it would be dubious, and always questionable: but if Grace lead, all is certain; for who or what can be able to frustrate Grace, or disappoint it in all that it hath designed for our Salvation? of Grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed, Rom. 4. 16.

3. The reason why the means convert at one time, and not at another; and one man and not another. Many a powerful Sermon, awakening Providence, &c. pass, and the man still goeth on frowardly in his ways, but at last, that which seems to be in itself of less efficacy, awakens, melts, humbleth, healeth the Soul: but this is when Grace begins to work, and that, only that, is irresistible, man's sinful heart is too hard for everything else; and this is done when and where God pleaseth, John 3. 8.

4. That no man can lay any engagement upon God to do him any good. No man can be too soon for him: we cannot stir till he moves us; we can do nothing for him, till he first doth for us, and in us: and hence those whom God passeth by, and leaves in their sin, have no just ground of complaint, which if they could do anything first to oblige God, they might have a show for.

USE 2. For Exhortation:

1. To the unconverted; be hence advised,

1. Not to think to earn Grace and Glory by your own endeavors, or to do that of yourselves which may bring you under the Covenant promise of life; this will never be: were there no more in the Gospel, but only that counsel, believe and be saved, the grace of the Gospel would do us no good: but when God speaks of making us to believe, of working the will and deed, that is the life of Gospel Grace: Christ bids us to come, but if he come not first, he would keep his Salvation to himself.

2. Not to put away the grace of God from you till you have made yourselves fit for it. Many say, what have I to do to ask Grace, who am so vile and cannot come to God? I answer, none hath more need of it than such a one: and therefore do not say, I will wait till I have fitted myself; but wait on God for his preventing grace, to fit and prepare, and turn you unto him: say not, if I could get up yonder to him, it would be well, but wait for him to come to your pit.

3. Not to rest in means and endeavors, as if they were able to do for you what you need; but look up to Grace to help you to attend upon the means, and bless that attendance for your Spiritual good. Promise not to yourselves anything from Ordinances themselves, but only so far as he shall breathe in them: Wait therefore for the north and south wind to blow.

4. Be willing to wait the leisure of free grace. If that lead, it must not be limited, but suffered to take its own time; only it is our duty to be waiting in the use of all means, not growing weary, fainting or repining.

2. To the converted, learn you also from hence,

1. Not to be proud of your grace, or think highly of yourselves above others: He hath but a shadow of grace, and not that which is true,

who is apt to say, I am not as this Publican. It is certain, where grace is most eminent, there the creature is least in his own eyes, not arrogating or ascribing anything to itself. That Grace is the most unsuspectible and renders us most unworthy in our own esteem.

2. Would you be serviceable in your generation to the glory of God, be directed to go to him in all you have to do, for his grace, that by it alone you may undertake. Paul will engage in anything, so Christ shall stand engaged to strengthen him. It may teach us to begin every work with prayer, which we desire to have succeed; for if God be not in it, leading and strengthening, it will certainly fail: Not all other advantages of helps and means will be otherwise then abortive, if grace give them not their efficacy. If you set about anything without engaging God in it, the very spring, and rise, and strength of all is wanting.

3. If you find the work of Conversion wrought in yourselves, or see it wrought in others, be sure to ascribe it to the grace of God as the leading cause. No flesh hath any cause to glory, but all the glory is his due: you have used means, attended on ordinances, been constant in duties, & now you find grace coming in upon these, Faith to believe in Christ, and rely upon him, an heart subdued to obedience; say not now that this is your own work; you saw not how it came in, but by this effect you are led up to the cause, and must say the finger of God was in it: Others have done the like for the matter of it, and never the near. You see that your labors with your Children or your servants are blessed, your reproofs and counsels take effect; think not now that you have done the work, or deserve the praise of it; but consider it: God's blessing upon your labors which have done all: others have been as careful, and yet can see no fruit, God so dispenseth himself to the Children of men, as to take away all boasting, and when we look upon all our gains & attainments we must conclude with Paul, it

is by the grace of God we are what we are. Had not he come home to us, we had never gone forth to him; had not he been gracious to us, we had died in our sins. Have you seen your sin and misery? he opened your blind eyes; have you arose and gone to him? he saw you first, and being moved with compassion came to you, and took you up in his arms. Study therefore to live to the praise of his Grace; and still wait upon him for the continuance of it; for the completing of your Salvation, and bringing of you to glory, knowing that he who hath begun a good work in you, must also perfect it to the day of the Lord, if ever it be done; and except he leads, you can never follow.

## **SERMON XXI.**

Thus much for the season; now let us consider the manner of the Fathers carriage to his Son, according as it is described: 1. By the cause of it. 2. By the effect, or carriage itself. 1. The cause of it, he saw and had compassion. 2. The effect; He ran, &c.

1. To begin with the cause; his seeing his Son, and having compassion on him, do not decipher two acts, but only one. God chooseth miserable man to be a subject of his mercy, and makes his misery an occasion of discovering it; but man's misery is not the impulsive cause, but God's mercy: the meaning of the expression is, that he looked upon him with a compassionate eye, when lying in his misery, and his own pity moved him to do as he did. Divine Attributes, the declarative glory whereof God designs in the World, have a subject in which they are pleased to discover themselves: but this subject doth not move them, but they incline themselves to the

subject. The word [Had compassion] comes from a root that signifies bowels, and the English of it is, his bowels did earn; and the bowels being the seat of the affections, especially of pity, Hence the word is used to express great and active pity. Thence,

DOCT. The compassion of God is the only moving cause prompting him to show favor to a poor perishing sinner.

In the former Doctrine, we heard that Grace prevents; here we see what grace it is that first moves, viz. The fathers compassion, when once this begins to set itself on work, he can sit still no longer, but riseth, runs, &c. Here consider, 1. What the compassion is. 2. The evidence and reason of the Doctrine.

1. What is the compassion of God which leads him to show favor to a sinner?

ANSW. Compassion, when it is attributed to men, or reasonable creatures, is a compound affection, made up of love and grief, and admits of this description: It is an affection stirring up the soul to be grieved, at the discovery of some miserable object, and moving of him to endeavor its succor or relief. Affections are the feet of the soul, and prime mover of the will of man; hence they are moved with reason either true or apprehended, and lead unto actions suitable to that motion: now though God be in himself <G&H>, not capable of being moved with any outward object; and unchangeable in his will; and hence never more propense to anything at one time, than at another, but performs all things according to the everlasting counsel of his will which is unalterable: Yet, speaking of himself after the manner of man, he assumes affections, as love, hatred, joy, compassion, &c. And that because in operibus ad extra, or in the works of providence there are such manifest fruits, as are wont in

men to proceed from such affections: so that we may see something resembling this description, in the present case; observe then.

1. The object of compassion is a miserable thing: A creature brought into distress, groaning under his misery, and standing in need of his succor: Such an one is the sinner: he is one famishing, and ready to die; he is the forlorn creature, a miserable wretch, going without hope to the pit; an helpless creature, whom no created being can relieve and rid of his misery, he is both poor and perishing, as we before heard.

2. The affections which go into compassion are two,

1. Grief; whereby the mind is moved and troubled at the creatures misery: the sight of it oppreseth the heart, when he sees it; he cannot tell how to bear the sight of it; hence also often proceed sighs and tears of pity over the object. Thus God also (speaking in our dialect) seeing poor Sinners in their misery, expreseth himself like one whose heart is ready to burst, Hos. 11. 8. How shall I give thee up? how shall I deliver thee? my heart is turned; my repenting's are kindled. And after like manner, Jer. 31. 20. in this grief also we are wont to be troubled at ourselves if we have done anything to bring the creature into such a miserable condition, and hence we relent, and repent; and so God also speaks of himself, in the forecited, Hos. 10. 8.

2. Love; for without love there can be no compassion: hatred is inexorable; it rejoiceth and triumpheth in the misery of its enemy; and the more miserable it sees him, the more it can rejoice in it: but compassion argues good will: hence God useth such expressions concerning Ephraim, Jer. 31. 10. Is Ephraim my dear Son? is he a pleasant Child? &c.

3. The natural operation of this affection in us, is to stir us up to do what we can for the succor of the person thus in misery. If we do indeed thoroughly pity the condition of one that is in sorrow, we cannot sit still: this affection will hale men to action, they will certainly afford the best help they can: thus God by virtue of this compassion of his, succors, saves, delivers the Sinner, frees him from misery, restoreth him to a better state, this affection sets him on work, Jer. 31. 20. My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him.

2. In the clearing up of the Doctrine, consider 1. That God is a God of compassion. 2. That this is the moving cause of all the mercy which he shows to a Sinner.

1 That God is a God of Compassion appears:

1. Because it belongs to his Attributes, Exod. 34. 6, 7. merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin. Hence his People ascribe this title to him, Psal. 86. 15. But thou oh Lord art a God full of compassion.

2. Because his works declare him to be so: his works of providence towards his visible Covenant people evince it, Psal. 78. 37. But he being full of compassion forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not. His works of special favor towards his Elect, in pardoning their Sins, and accepting of them to be his Children, do more notably confirm it.

2. That this is the moving cause of all the mercy which he shows to a sinner, will appear.

1. From the nature of God: He is the first mover to his own actions, and cannot possibly be moved by anything out of himself: Hence

man's pity and God's, differ in respect of the moving cause: Man hath such an affection habitually, but it lies still till an object excite it; but God is otherwise, it moves itself: That which moves in us, hath the respect of a cause, and that which is a cause is in nature before the effect, but the good will of God to man, whence all his compassion flows, was from Eternity, Jer. 31. 3. I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore in loving kindness have I called thee.

2. God renders this is a reason of all his mercy towards his Creatures: When he speaks of pitying and relieving them, he reduceth it to our good-will, and merciful nature, Jer. 3. 12, 13. Hos. 11. 9. Rom. 9. 15. Psal. 78. 38.

3. Because there is nothing in the Creature can be rendered as a sufficient moving cause of his compassion towards it.

1. Not the Creatures misery in itself, For,

1. The sinners misery is not a fortuitous thing, or befalling an innocent person, but it is the just penalty of his sin, inflicted by God himself, and that according to the equity of an holy and just Law, Lam. 3. 39. A man for the punishment of his sin.

2. Then must God be equally moved to compassion to all sinners, who are alike miserable, and alike need succor; and then why are not all saved? That compassion which saves one, could as well save another, but there are but some sharers in this saving compassion, others suffer his rigor, Rom. 11. 7. The Elect obtained it, the rest were blinded.

2. Not their legal convictions, and tenors, and confessions and softly walking's &c, i.e. No preparatory work: For, 1. The Son was for all them a great way off, when his Father pitied him. 2. There are that



Call, and God will not hear, that seek him early, and shall not find him, Prov. 1: 28:

3. Not legal Repentance and Reformation, turning from many sinful practices, and doing many things: For these are nothing but sin: Esau repented and wept, but it profited him not, Heb. 12: 17: Herod's reformation engaged not God to him. In sum, God's compassion is according to his will, and that is absolutely free, nor to be regenerated by the creature, Rom: 9: 16, with 18:

4. Because God's design in the Salvation of a sinner is the manifestation of his Grace; which grace discovers itself in showing him compassion. Now this grace of God hath described its subjects from eternity; and therein distinguishing Grace is made to appear, when it falls upon a subject that hath nothing in it to engage him, nor could of itself do anything in the least to move him.

USE 1. Here we see how far the name and term of merit is a stranger from Gospel language; and what care we ought to take that we do not entertain any thoughts of it. God is no debtor to his creatures except voluntarily: as it was free to him to make them, so also to assign them their end and use: and it is certain that he designed or appointed no creature to any use, but withal completely furnished it for that end; and if, through its own default, that be lost, it can claim no restitution at God's hands: hence let no man think that his misery should be a sufficient ground to engage God's mercy to him; no nor his acknowledgment of his sin and misery neither: for if we stand at the tribunal of Justice (unto which merit is properly reckoned) it doth not deserve pardon for a delinquent to fall down at the Judges feet, confess his fault, and beg that it may be passed by, and not imputed to him: if the Law condemns him, and he stands guilty before the Bar, it is only a free pardon that can acquit him. Now

though a human Judge may be moved by the submiss and lamentable expressions of a justly condemned person; yet God is capable of no such impressions; but if he intends a soul good, he puts this very frame into him, and then accepts him in this way, though not for this carriage: but in all this there is not any room or occasion to speak of merit.

USE 2. Learn hence also not to be discouraged from going to God in the sense of your own misery: Though you are altogether unworthy, and have nothing of your own to plead with him, which deserves to impetrate his mercy, yet you see here that his own compassion leads him to be merciful, and that the object which it hath chosen to express itself unto, is miserable sinners, such as are every way miserable; helpless and hopeless creatures: And if thou knowest, findest, and feelest thyself to be such an one, there is no reason to be discouraged; thou art one of such whom God hath chosen to express his compassion upon; and he who knows thy condition, if he will, can have mercy on thee: Such as are helpless, he is ready to help, Isa. 63. 5.

USE. 3. It may be a ground of wonderful encouragement to poor sinners to go to God, and to wait upon him for mercy: to consider that God is a God of compassion, and that this compassion is the original of all the good which the creature receives.

1. To consider that he is a God of compassion: We have heard, say they, That the Kings of Israel are merciful Kings. He is a God that delights to exalt and magnify himself by those titles of Merciful, Gracious, Compassionate, &c. His bowels stir towards, and he pities dying sinners, and therefore he comes to their Graves and bids them live. The commendation of a pitiful and a compassionate nature in a prince, will bring in rebels apace, to come and throw themselves

upon his mercy, & sue for a pardon; who if they knew him to be pitiless and inexorable, would run utmost adventures, as those that know they can but die, and can hope for no better by submission.

2. To consider that this compassion is the root and spring of the mercy he shows: Hence we may silence all uprising of heart, and discouraging temptations, and be animated to break through all. I can do nothing; but if I could, it would but obscure his compassion. Be encouraged, Satan presents God in arms against us, & tells us we must appease him with sacrifices of obedience, but God accepts of no sacrifice but that of Christ; he looks that his mercy alone should be sought unto; learn then to make heaven ring with thy cries; ask mercy, put God in mind of these Attributes, which he hath commended himself in, to the Children of men, Exod. 34. 6, 7. put that into every prayer to encourage thy hope, Psal. 86. 5. Thou art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee. And Dan. 9. 9. To thee Lord our God belong mercies, and forgiveness.

USE. 4. For Exhortation to Believers: This truth tells you what is the work you have to do all your lives; viz. To adore, admire and magnify God's compassion, those wonderful bowels of mercy that have appeared in your delivery out of all that misery, into which Sin had cast you: This is the great subject which should take up the thoughts and words of the Saints, Grace, Grace; it should be the voice with which the Temple should resound. Think therefore often with yourselves, where you once were, what was your former condition, who it was that transformed you, when it was that he looked upon, and had regard to you; what miserable sinners you were, and how near to the pit of eternal destruction. Follow this compassion up to the beginnings of its acting's towards you; think not that it only met you as you were returning, but call to mind, that it came to your

dungeon and lifted you out thence; that it followed you into your far Country and fetched you from among the swine, or else you had still been there, and perished forever.

## **SERMON XXII.**

Thus far we have considered the cause of the Father's kind carriage to his son, the Effect follows in the carriage itself: his is expressed in three words: He ran, he fell upon his neck, and kissed him. All these acts refer to the work of Conversion and serve to express what love God applies to the soul in this work: they show us how much of Divine affection breaths forth in the first act of special grace passing from God to a sinner: They carry in them the most Pathetical intimations of the greatest love; it being a custom among the ancients, especially in those countries, to discover the superabundance of their overflowing affections in these kinds of gestures: one notes upon this ver. that although all Christ's Parables are very moving to the affections, that none carry so much in them as this doth.

[He ran] Love is active, it cannot stand still, nor yet go softly, where it seeth its object to stand in need of speedy succor; it shakes off all sloth, and rather seems to fly on wings than go.

[He fell on his neck] God takes the sinner in his arms, falls upon him: i.e., with his distinguishing Grace.

[And kissed him] Kissing was used among other things to express. 1. Intimacy and peculiar affection, and then especially, when dear friends meet, after long absence; thus Moses and Aaron, Exod. 4. 27. 2. Reconciliation, after some distance, by reason of injuries and provocations, thus David kisseth Absalom, 2 Sam. 14. ult.

DOCT. God manifests his choice and incomparable love to a sinner, then when he converts him to himself.

Here it is that God's special grace is made to appear, and such love as all comparisons are but dark shadows and resemblances of. God indeed shows a great deed of common favor to the world, the goodness's they taste of is called his hid treasures: But all this fall; incomparably short of that which he confers upon an elect person in his conversion. This love of God was from eternity, sealed up in his own breast: It began generally to be published and made known in the world, as soon as man had by his fall brought ruin and misery upon himself, and his progeny; as was whispered in that first Gospel promise, Gen. 3. 15. He shall break thy head. And more abundantly shone forth when the Lord Jesus Christ had laid down his life at the foot of Justice: but these were more general demonstrations of it. It more especially and particularly first begins to appear to the sinner himself, then when he is regenerated, and eternal life begun in him. The manner and nature of this work, was then opened when we considered the Prodigal 's return; that which is here to be observed, is the greatness of this love, and how or wherein it expresseth its self, according to the spiritual meaning of these phrases. I might here expatiate, but I shall confine this discourse to the words in our text, by a reduction of them to a spiritual sense.

1. The first expression of this love is, in that he ran to him; herein is intimated a twofold declaration of divine love; one positive, the other

comparative.

1. Positive, It points out God's coming to the sinner where he is, to bestow his grace upon him. The sinner could never have gone to God, he therefore cometh to him: He was a great way off, and could come no nearer: The rock of his salvation is higher than he is. Though as to rational and common actions, man is capable of using means, yet as to spiritual life-actions, he is void of a principle of them: like Lazarus, he is both dead, and bound in his grave cloths: God therefore by his spirit comes to his graves side, to his pits mouth, where he is perishing, and thence he fetcheth him: and is not this wonderful love? Had not God come hither, the sinner neither could nor would ever have come to him: that is Emphatical, Zech. 9. 11. I have sent forth my Prisoners out of the pit where there is no water.

2. Comparative; he not only comes, but he comes in hast, to the help of the poor dying creature, Bis dat, qui cito dat. Running is a note of speed, and signifies a great commotion of the affections: God makes great hast to bring relief to a perishing sinner. The Heathen painted love with wings, noting the swiftness of this affection in its actions. Here therefore God's wonderful love to a sinner manifests itself, in that he comes to him unsent for, and brings his grace, when it was unsought, Isa. 63. 1.

2. The next expression of his love is, He fell upon his neck. When men embraced each other in one another's arms, they were said to fall upon one another's necks: It notes embracing: And this serves to express the favor which God takes a sinner into: It holds out that union which in conversion is made between Christ and the soul: They which were at a great distance are now made near. God doth not only come and do something for his relief, but he takes him into his arms; and now those that were enemies, are in mutual embraces:

Such were the greeting between Jacob and Esau, Gen. 33. 4. Each doth now, as it were, breath himself into the others bosom; they exchange souls, manifesting by dumb signs, that love which is too great for words to express, so that by this expression we are taught.

1. That God gives himself to the sinner to be his, and takes him to himself, makes himself to be his portion, and bequeaths himself to him, and receives him into arms of mercy, making him his peculiar treasure and jewel.

2. That he now infuseth his grace into his soul, by breathing spiritual life into him: He falls upon him with his spirit and grace, and lays the foundation of spiritual life in him, by putting a principle of it into his soul, quickening him who was dead.

3. He kissed him; this is the last thing in the act; and here is great favor indeed, that when he might have killed him he kisseth him; this word hath diverse expressions of love contained under it.

1. God now opens and reveals that secret and everlasting love of his to his soul, kissing was an outward act to intimate an inward affection: Men often did it dissemblingly, but God always doth it really: Now God begins to give the soul to perceive what was his purpose of good will to him from eternity, what were his ancient thoughts about him; this is a visible confirmation of that secret love.

2. God now reveals that he is fully reconciled to, and at peace with him; that all former distances and alienations of heart are wholly taken away; he is no more angry, nor will anymore condemn him. David kissed Absalom to let him understand he was now reconciled. God never kisseth and killeth, as Joab dealt with Amasa: his heart always goes out with his promise. It is a justifying kiss, intimating that this soul shall never more have any more cause to fear the

suffering the punishment of his sins, or being exposed to condemnation.

3. The father by this manifestly takes his son into the state of a son: It is a kiss of Adoption; David thus acknowledged Absalom: The sinner had made himself an abject, God now restores him again to that inheritance which he had rooted himself out of: he is thus taken again into his fathers house, and made to enjoy the privilege of a Child.

4. God by this draws out the love of the soul to him: breaks his heart, and wins him to himself: By this testification of his love he attracts a reciprocal love from the sinner; makes him now to choose God and give himself up to him, put himself into his hands, and devote himself to his service, for all this presently follows, verse. 21. Thus it is a sanctifying kiss.

5. All this is done to restore comfort to the soul: Sense of his sin, and the great wrong that he had done to his father, by so vilely leaving him, and profusely spending his estate, had filled him with sorrow and bitterness; his Father now kisseth him to comfort him: They are called the kisses of the mouth, Can. 1. 2. which are given in the application of the promises to the soul, and enabling of him to close with them, suck the sweet out of them, and draw to his consolation the good that is in them: and thus it is also a glorifying kiss. Put altogether and it telleth us what a wonderful declaration of God's love it is that comes into the soul at the hour of Conversion.

USE 1. For Information.

1. We hence learn that the soul is passive in vocation: I do not mean as it is a Rational, but as it is a spiritual Agent. If God had not come to the sinner, he had never come to God, nor could he have done it:



As well might the widows son lying upon the bier, and carrying to the grave, have fetched back his departed soul as a sinner dead in trespasses and sins, recover the lost Image of God. Hither every Regenerate man owes his spiritual original, viz. Not to the strength of his nature, or flexibility of his will, but to God, who came to him there where he lay a dying, and whence he was not able so much as to lift up his eyes towards heaven, without God put the ability into him by reviving Grace. And this proclaims the wonderful condescendency of the great God to undone men and women, in that he is not only ready and willing to receive them when they come to him, but he runs forth to meet them, and to do them good: The condition that all men are lying in, at such time as he speaks that happy word to them, live; tends mightily to enhance or illustrate the unspeakable kindness, of God, and hence deserves a [reiteration,] Ezek. 16. 5, 6. None eye pitied thee, thou wast cast into the open field; I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, live; yea, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, live.

2. Here we see that in Regeneration the whole body of graces are brought into the soul at once and together. In effectual vocation the soul receives Christ himself, and that not only relatively, by receiving his person into such relations whereby he becomes his Redeemer and Savior, applies his righteousness to him for Justification, and by marrying him, admits him among the Adopted Children of God; but also really, by the communication of his graces, and filling him with his spirit: He falls upon his neck and kisseth him; all grace is communicated in this act: and there is great reason for it, for Christ in giving of himself to the soul becomes its life, Gal. 2. 20. Christ lives in me. And Christ thus becomes his spiritual life, not only by changing his relative state from what it was, but especially (life being a principle of operation) by putting this new principle into him, in which are contained all such habits and dispositions as are requisite

to fit him to live spiritually: i.e. the habits of all graces, for all flow from one and the same principle, viz. spiritual life.

3. As a consequence from the former, we hence see that at the instant of effectual vocation, the soul is made partaker in every grace; Justification and Adoption fully, Sanctification and Glorification inchoatively, and in their degrees: these come all together and inseparable, and are made over to the soul in the instant in which God converts him: For when God gives Christ, he gives all things with him; Rom. 8. 32. Yea, he gives him to be all to us, 1 Cor. 1. 30. He is made of God to us, Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption There is a succession of these Graces, 1. Doctrinally, they are to be handled orderly, methodically, and distinctly, in the opening of the Doctrines of the Gospel. 2. In the apprehension of a Believer, who doth not immediately discern all of them. 3. In order of nature and consequence: But in time they are contemporary: and the reason is, because the whole Covenant is sealed up in Conversion, and all that is contained in it; i.e. all grace.

4. We here see the Reason of the sudden and strange alteration which we may sometimes see wrought in a sinner: one whom the other day we saw bleeding to death in his sins, rotting in his grave, spending all in riot, slighting all counsels and persuasions, going in the ways of destruction; now changed and become another man, all new in him: yea, one that was wounded under amazement and terrors of conscience, despairing and dying under convictions; now rejoicing and ravished with the experience of the love of God. These are strange alterations, but not to be misbelieved, if we consider the hast that God makes to find out, and take into his arms dying sinners, and the ravishing embraces he affords them. When God comes, he runs; he may delay a while, and let the sinner run himself

out, and not come presently to convert him; but when he doth come, he comes without delay, nothing stops him, Hab. 2. 2. Cant. 2. 8.

USE 2. For Exhortation to the regenerate, or such as have been converted unto God; meditate much upon, and labor to be deeply affected with the discoveries of God's wonderful love to you: Think often.

1. What hast he made: I was dying, despairing, hopeless; but he speedily came, and put under an everlasting arm: or ever I was aware, &c.

2. With what ardor of affection he fell upon thy neck: Oh remember those embraces; how he took thee up in his arms, an unworthy, filthy, polluted armful; how kind were those clasping's which encircled thee? those embraces which took thee out of thy pit.

3. How he kissed thee; breathing his soul into thee, and filling thee with his love; pardoning all thy sins, taking thee to be his son again, influencing thee with his grace, in thy far Country speaking comfortably to thee. Oh! love the Lord all ye his Saints, and let your hearts boil over in ardent affections to him.

## **SERMON XXIII.**

And the Son said unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son. -  
Vers. 21.

We now come to observe the Son's deportment to his Father; or how he carried it under these large and liberal expressions of his love to him; and that is, with all humble and penitent carriage. The blotting out and pardoning of his sins, doth not blot them out of his remembrance, or make him ever the less apprehensive of his unworthiness; no, but it draws out his humble and penitent confession. This acknowledgment, is the same for substance which he had resolved upon, verse. 18, 19. He purposed, if ever he could meet his father, thus he would say; he now not only sees him, but finds himself in his embraces, and here he pours out his soul to him. There is only the last clause omitted, and why omitted is not essential to inquire; divers reasons are given, and that which seems most probable, is that his father's kind carriage, and abundant expression of his love, had left him no room for it, because he now found himself accepted in quality of a son. The particular meaning of these words, as they express the nature of true repentance hath been spoken to from, verse. 18, 19. That which we have now to consider, is only his expressing of them at this time, viz. after his father had shewn himself, fully reconciled, and so signally testified it in his carriage to him. Hence,

DOCT. When God manifests his special love to the soul of a sinner in Conversion, it will draw forth the most kindly acts of true Repentance.

God's pardoning and accepting Grace, sensibly apprehended, will make a soul more to loath his sins, accuse himself of them, and be ashamed at them. Though whiles God is kindling these resolves, he comes in with them and brings his Salvation, yet this shall not extinguish those resolutions, but help them. This is the season to express and act. Godly sorrow humiliation and repentance. We have David in this for an excellent example; whom when the Prophet had

convinced for his great sin, he confesseth it; but when he had witnessed from God that his sin was pardoned, then he breaks forth in a penitential Psalm, viz. Psal. 51. wherein he humbleth himself into the very dust.

REAS. 1. From the nature of true Repentance, sound Humiliation, and Godly sorrow; which is such as, before grace received from God, cannot act kindly, no not at all. All that the man hath before he is converted, is legal: Take the force of the reason in these particulars.

1. All acts presume their habits. It is a principle in Logic, that no effect exceeds the virtue of the cause. The tree must first be made good before it can bring forth good fruit; the thorn turned into a fig-tree, if it bear figs. There must be a habit before there can be acts correspondent: there must be an eye before there can be any sight: So there must be habitual Repentance, or a principle of it in the soul, before there can be exertion of it. Now this principle or habit is not in the soul before conversion. Conversion is the turning of a Sinner from Sin to God; this is done by changing his heart and all his faculties; it is by making him a new creature, and he is thus made by the infusion of the body of spiritual graces into him, or laying the foundation of Sanctification in his soul. Repentance is a grace, a special gift of God, and we in the former Doctrine observed, that all graces come at once, and then when God taketh a Sinner into favor, then he furnisheth him with his grace; hence, being in Christ, and being a new creature are convertible, 2 Cor. 5. 17.

2. The act of Repentance is an actual turning from Sin, and unto God: and it hath both these parts in it, as was before hinted at verse, 18, 19. If it wants one, it wants all; for man, being a dependent creature, must have, will have some object: Now here the soul utterly and everlastingly relinquisheth all its Sinful objects, Hos. 14. 8. It

freely and willingly parts with them, and it turns to God, closeth with him as the only object on whom it can rest for Salvation; this is the ultimate scope of Repentance, Jer. 4. 1. Now such an act of choosing and closing with God, which must needs accompany Repentance, necessarily supposeth faith; for a Sinner cannot close with God but by an act of faith, and if there be an act of faith in Repentance, then there was a habit, whence that act flowed.

3. Inasmuch as Repentance is a change of the affections, which are the feet of the soul, carrying it from and to its object; and hence is a fixing them upon some other object than they formerly dwelt upon; where also the prime affections mainly discover themselves viz. Love and hatred. It necessarily prerequisites to this act, a gracious disposition infused into these affections. In Repentance the soul is made to hate Sin, which before it loved as its life; and it loves God, whom before it hated; and the one of these strengthens the other: He hates Sin, because he loves God, &c. Now the setting those affections on work, and moving them to their proper object, implies a sanctified change in them; and no other reason can be given of their so acting.

4. The affections being hand-maids of the will, hence a change in them implies a change in the will, and evidenceth that that is turned: it signifies that the heart is altered from what it was; for the will exerts itself in and by the affections: When therefore we see a man truly to hate Sin and love God, we know that his will is set, fixed, his choice is certainly made: and where the will is changed, there is conversion wrought: where the soul hath indeed chosen God, there is saving grace. David therefore asserts his grace from this evidence, Psal. 73. 25.

5. Repentance is the exercise of the grace of Sanctification: It is practical holiness, which consists in this, to be going from Sin to

God. Sanctification hath two parts in it, Mortification, and Vivification; Repentance comprehends them both, brings them in to use, and continues them in practice. Now Sanctification is a benefit of the new Covenant, and a fruit of conversion, one of the things for which Christ is given to us, 1 Cor. 1. 30. and is wrought at conversion, as hath been cleared.

REAS. 2. Because, as in Conversion the soul receives a principle and power of acting repentance, so by this effect of God's wonderful love, there are given to the soul abundant advantages, for the helping forward the more kindly exercises of it. The truth is, all Evangelical motives to it, are hence derived: For,

1. Converting grace makes sin appear in its own colors. The sun-light of saving grace makes Sin look more ugly than ever: Beauty and deformity are not discerned in the dark; the candle-light of common conviction made but obscure discoveries: Now he sees it Sin, before he did not: he had two discoveries of it before; viz. 1. That it was displeasing to God, his Law being against it. 2. That it was a procuring cause of misery, by reason of the curse: These two he saw in the Glass of the Law. But now grace discovers Sin to him. 1. As contrary to the nature of God, opposite to his holiness, Hab. 1. 13. 2. Hence to be in itself an odious thing, and that separate from the hell that follows. He now sees the beauty of grace, and that shows him the deformity of Sin.

2. God's love manifested in Conversion, discovers Sin under divers aggravations, which before were not seen. 1. That it was against that God who had loved him with an everlasting love, Jer. 31. 3. 2. Against Jesus Christ who had shed his blood for his redemption from hell. 3. Against the Holy Ghost that had so often striven with him, had

waited so long, and left not till he had turned him, and now sin appears sinful, which before appeared only sorrowful.

USE. 1. For information;

1. We have here a note of distinction between a legal and a saving Repentance. The Scripture makes mention of both; it tells us of Ahab's repentance as well as of David's: It puts one name upon things vastly different; and if we would know how to distinguish them, here is it to be discerned: The one is effected by a spirit of Bondage, the other by the spirit of Adoption; the one is produced by terrors, the other by love: the one confesseth his Sin, vomits up his morsels, takes upon him a profession of holiness, driven to it by the dismal reflections of his own Conscience, and apprehensions of the wrath to come: the other is taken into embraces of amity, confirmed with a kiss of favor; and by this his heart is melted into Godly sorrow, in his fathers arms he bemoans himself. The truly broken heart, is a heart broken with love.

2. Here we see when is the genuine season of godly sorrow; and the reason why a soul that is newly converted is so full of bitterness, complaints and self-accusations. If a soul do not repent and bitterly mourn for Sin now, when shall he? before he could not, in heaven there will be no room for it. God the father, the great Husband man of his Vineyard, deals in great skill with the soul: For having broken up the fallow ground of the heart, and sown the seed of grace in it, he now sends seasonable showers upon it, to water the ridges thereof, that it may be made to bring forth a plentiful Harvest, Psalm. 126. 5. When should showers more seasonably fall on the ground than when the seed is cast in? Hence,

1. They mistake themselves greatly who think that after Conversion the soul should do nothing but rejoice; as if there were now no room



for sorrow for Sin, and self-abasement, because their Sin is pardoned: Whereas, what doth more break an ingenious heart, than the pardoning of so great offense, and receiving him to favor after such grievous provocations? God therefore when he hath made large promises of what he will do for his People, tells us what shall be the fruit of this love of his, Ezek 36. 31. Then shall you remember your evil ways, and loath yourselves.

2. Let it be for caution to such as are newly converted; though now they are and ought to be in bitterness for Sin, and to mourn for it before God, yet have a care of giving Satan advantage thereby to weaken your faith, and undermine the consolation arising from your interest in this grace. Godly sorrow, humility, repentance, are so to be exercised, as to be helpful to the strengthening, and not become impediments to the exercise of and activity of faith: Hence make that the great incentive to Godly sorrow, viz. the consideration that is against that God that loved you; let Divine love be set against Sin, and that will help both Faith and Repentance.

3. Let others beware of irregular applications to such as are mourning for Sin, and full of sorrow by reason of it: Do not take pains to dry up those tears; be not troubled at them, but rejoice: It is a very pleasant sight, a heart-comforting sight, to see any truly mourning for Sin. to give wise relief against despair, is prudence, but rather help and encourage godly sorrow. Though fair weather be pleasant, yet showers may be more suitable, and make the earth more fertile: Paul repents not to have been instrumental to so good a work, 2 Cor. 7. 9, 10.

3. Here we see a reason why those that have tasted most of the love of God, and manifestations of his grace to their souls, are most low and vile in their eyes: The reason is, because the more a soul hath

had experience of the wonderful undeserved love of God, it feels the more sensible convictions of its own unworthiness and vileness. God's large expressions to David, made him reflect upon himself, and lay himself very low, 2 Sam. 7. 18, 19. If you are indeed truly converted, and have received the grace of God, you shall find this effect upon your own hearts; it will put the meanest and most abasing thoughts of yourselves into you; it will draw out humble confessions, self-accusations, and acknowledgments of your own unworthiness: This must needs put you in mind of your low estate, sinful and miserable condition, and the unspeakably free grace of God thereon appearing.

USE. 2. For Exhortation: This may serve to excite all true Believers to live in the constant exercise of Humility and Repentance: You here see it is the proper work of a Convert: Faith and Repentance are graces for exercise, and should take up our whole lives. And to help to this duty, often ponder.

1. Who it was that converted thee; not thyself but God, he came to thee and saved thee.
2. What a one thou wert before conversion, a poor Prodigal, that had wasted all away, and flagitiously provoked, and dishonored the Name of God.
3. What it cost to make way for thy Conversion, the cursed death of the Son of God.
4. How obstinately thou didst oppose thine own Conversion: Thou wert horribly averse to it, and didst long withstand the strivings of the holy spirit.

5. What love God hath expressed to thee in thy Conversion: Words fall short, and similitudes are too strait to demonstrate or give color to it. Set the love of God before thee as a glass in which to see and hate thy Sin, and love thy God: Let this make thee worthless in thine own eyes and account. What expressions doth this love draw out from Paul? 1 Tim. 1. 13, 14. Act therefore these thoughts upon thy heart, and get thy soul warmed with this sense: And more especially,

1. Art thou a young Convert, newly of a Prodigal made, and entertained as a Son? This great change now requires a humble heart, now thou art in the arms of mercy, pour out thy confessions, and bemoan thyself.

2. Hast thou at any time more than ordinary discoveries of God's love to thee? Now be improving this as an argument to abase thee: Ask thy heart, who hath done this? and then, who am I that he should do thus for me?

3. Especially if these applications are after some fall or relapse into such Sins as have wounded thy peace, and hidden his face for a season from thee. Doth he after this notwithstanding come again? Wonder, and be ashamed of thyself, when thou feelest his kisses and embraces again, empty thy soul in confessions, and self-judging acknowledgments into his bosom; so shalt thou be led on to more and more experiences of his wonderful loving kindness.

## **SERMON XXIV.**

But the Father said to his Servants, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a Ring on his hand, and Shoes on his feet. Vers. 22.

And bring hither the fatted Calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry. Vers. 23.

For this my Son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Vers. 24.

The next thing to be considered is the Provision which the Father made for, and the entertainment which he gave to his returned Son, described in these Verses. I shall briefly insist on these things. Here we may observe an Allegorical description of the great benefits which God bestows upon a sinner on believing, or the wonderful change of his condition on Conversion. Whiles the Son is complaining of his unworthiness, and accusing his own prodigality, his father, not so much by words, but by real acts gives him to find what favor he is received into. In the words observe, 1. The things that were done for him, verse. 22, 23. in which are, 1. The instruments used in doing them; his servants. 2. What they were to do; bring forth, &c. What these things allude to will be considered of in their place. 3. To what end; let us eat, and be merry. 2. The reason given to it, verse. 24. for this my son, &c. 3. The fruit consequent upon it. verse. 24. and they began to be merry. Christ under the welcome given by a tender father to his returning son, would shadow to us the welcome that a penitent finds with God, expressed with the greatest signs and tokens of a perfect reconciliation, and deepest affection, not only of love, but of joy too at his return: hence the servants are set to work; the best robe is brought forth to cover his nakedness, the fatted Calf killed, not only to feed, but feast him; a Ring is put on his hand, Shoes on his

feet, and the whole house is filled with songs and mirth, and the very fields made to ring with acclamations of joy. In general observe this.

DOCT. The day of a sinners Conversion to God is a day of great rejoicing.

When God comes to receive a penitent Prodigal into favor again, it is a time of singing and mirth. It is a day of joy.

1. To God himself the father testified his joy for his Son's recovery, by his entertainment; so doth God by his of a sinner: though God properly have no affections, which are passions, and tokens of imperfection, yet he assumes such things to himself for our instruction: and not only so, but providentially in the application of himself to the soul, he doth such things, as are witnesses of such affections in men: Where men love much, they will do much: Feasts are tokens of joy, great feasts of great joy.

REAS. 1. From his relation; he is a son, though he hath been a Prodigal; he was chosen from Eternity; and this relation blots out all. Alexander told Antipater, accusing his mother of vile actions, one tear of a mother will obliterate all anger: God useth this argument for Paul, when Ananias speak hard of him, Act. 9. 15. He is a chosen vessel.

REAS. 2. From the great change wrought: His son was dead and is alive, was lost and is found. With what joy did those women whose sons Elisha and Christ raised, entertain them: How glad is a tender Parent to find a Child that hath been lost? here is matter of much joy: Thus it is with a sinner: he is raised from a grave of sin, and found in the wilderness of his wandering.

REAS. 3. Because now God's great design of glorifying his grace in this sinners recovery is brought about, the foundation of that work is laid in his heart; now all men are glad when their main designs are accomplished.

2. To the blessed Angels: These may in part be looked upon as the servants here employed, who attended cheerfully in this service; for they are ministering spirits for the heirs of Salvation, Heb. 1. 14. And that Angels are glad at a sinners Conversion is asserted, context, verse. 10.

REAS. 1. From their relation to Believers, they are their brethren, fellow Servants, fellow Citizens, and such for whose salvation they do minister.

REAS. 2. From the great delight they take in the glory of God, for which as they were made, so they lay out their utmost labor and endeavor.

3. If the spirits of just men made perfect could have any acquaintance with the affairs of this lower World, they would certainly shout and sing for joy; such is their love to their brethren now it is perfected, but,

4. It is certainly a joy to the Saints on earth, to them that love God, to such as are true Believers: and thus our goodness in one respect extends to them, Psal. 16. 2. It cannot but affect their hearts with great joy when they see or hear of any that are brought home to God, the family of Saints are much refreshed with it.

REAS. 1. Because God is glorified by it, and Satan defeated: God hath one more subject, and Satan loseth a vassal by it: It adds to the

enlargement of the Kingdom of Christ, and his Name is so much the less dishonored in the world.

REAS. 2. Because they have now one more fellow citizen of the new Jerusalem: the Church militant is augmented, and the Church triumphant shall be increased by it: Believers are called Citizens, Eph. 2. 19.

REAS. 3. Because it is that they have prayed for, and in their places endeavored: All Christians pray for it when they say, Thy Kingdom come: and some have prayed for it in particular: Their Godly Ministers have labored earnestly about it, with God, and with them: And these are the Servants that ministerially apply these things to them, even all consolation, and it is a joy to them to do it. Their Godly Parents and Neighbors have long waited for this day, and therefore it brings to them the glad tidings of great joy.

5. And that I chiefly aim at, It is a day of great joy to the Convert himself. I do not say that he is always immediately under the clear apprehension of it, though often great measures of comfort are for the present given him; but now the foundation of all his joy is laid: God now applies his great love to him; for,

1. The best robe is put upon him. [Gr. the first robe.] There is no other like it, and that is the robe of Christ's Righteousness, whereby his rages are removed, and the shame of his nakedness covered: The poor Prodigal had worn himself out, was all in tatters; he is not only clothed, but royally appareled, Psal. 45. 13, 14. The word [[H&G](#)] signifies a long garment that comes to the ankles covering the whole body: This hides all his spiritual deformity, covers all his imperfections.

2. A ring is put on his hand: Some understand it of Adoption: A ring with his fathers seal, acknowledging him to be of his family: others, to the same purpose, take it to be a token of his enfranchisement. Among the Romans, none but free Citizens were to wear rings: others, for his ennoblement, among the Oriental nations, none but the Nobility had this privilege: others for the seal of the spirit: The Wedding Ring was given as a ratification of Marriage; so now the union between Christ and the soul is sealed and confirmed.

3. Shoes are put upon his feet: The feet are the affections, shoes are both for Ornament, and for saving the feet from harm: These shoes are the preparation of the Gospel of peace, Eph. 6. 15. The soul is adorned with sanctifying grace, and the affections preserved from being graveled, and galled with the pebbles of carnal desires.

4. The fatted Calf is killed [Gr. the fatted Calf, sacrifice it] This intends Christ, and may bear some respect to the Sacrament of the Supper: the soul is now spiritually fit for it, and to be invited to it. In sum, the best preparation is made, the soul is feasted: i.e. Divine love is shed abroad, Rom. 5. 5. God gives him all his favors in titles and communicates of them to him, according to that measure which is best for him; and so much (at least) of Divine light is irradiated upon him, as enables him to rely upon Christ alone for life, and hope in his Grace. This must needs be a joyful day; for,

1. It is the day of Jubilee, which was always joyful: Now the servant of sin goes out free; he that had before bound himself to a stranger, to Satan and his lusts, is set at liberty.

2. It is his Wedding Day: which is always celebrated with symptoms of joy; more especially, when a Beggar is married to a Prince; when a condemned prisoner of Justice is honorably espoused, to the eternal Son of God.



3. It is his Birth day; the day wherein he was new born: his Resurrection Day in which he riseth out of his grave, verse. 24. He was dead and is now alive. And that is a blessed day, Rev. 20. 6. Blessed is he that hath part in the first Resurrection.

4. It is the day of his Adoption; the day wherein the King of Glory entitles him his son, gives him a new Name, and seals up to him an irreversible deed of conveyance, wherein he confirms him in title to an inheritance worth many Worlds.

USE. 1: For Information.

1. Here we see how sincerely God speaketh, when he saith, As I live I delight not in the death of a sinner, but had rather he should repent and live. The satisfaction which he expresseth himself to take in a sinners conversion, is an abundant confirmation of it. If after God hath said and sworn it in his Word, there should any make a doubt of it, let him go to the converted sinner, and he shall tell him such a story of God's abundant love, and that precious entertainment that he gave him, as shall make it evidently appear. If God did not take great delight in our Conversion, can we think that he would make such a royal feast to entertain us, & confer so many & such unspeakable benefits and blessings upon us? Do men use to kill and slay, to make noble feasts for the entertainment of those whom they have no delight to see?

2. Here we see a reason why the affections of the soul do often appear more ardent and overflowing towards God, about, or quickly after Conversion, than afterwards, and discover themselves, both,

1. In an extraordinary delight in spiritual duties: The soul now can scarce find opportunity to do anything else, but read, hear pray, meditate, confer with Christians, &c. Why is it their Wedding Day, it

is a feast day with them, and they cannot but be ravished with it: It is a new world with a Prodigal, when come from a famine to such plenty and delicacy.

2. In a contempt of the world and things of it in comparison of these things; slighting and scarce regarding of anything here below; only taken with heavenly things, and desirous, to depart and be with Christ; willing to have no more to do here if might be: How can it almost be otherwise? Who can but think it good seeing, tasting, enjoying the love of God? and relishing the sweetness of the streams, to long to be at the Well head of all this? but when these treats are something over, and he go from his feast to his work, and there meets with difficulties, and many temptations; now he is sometimes at a stand, his affections cooled with carnal things, and his heart distracted with worldly cares: Hence it is that we sometimes hear God calling his people back to their first love, Rev. 2. 5.

3. Here also see a Reason why Believers have usually more ravishments and ecstasies, and abounding comforts at first Conversion, than afterwards: It is because the robe is now brought out to them and put on, &c. It is the most glorious entertainment they were ever at, and they themselves the occasion of it; as long as this feast lasts it must needs be so: therefore,

1. Be sure if it be thus at this time, lay in against a time of want: that may come before you think of it. Store yourselves now with the experiences of the love expressions which God reveals himself to you in: It is not impossible but it may be such a time with you, as you shall never have the like opportunity while you live again.

2. And if at any time afterwards in your Christian race, you meet with doubts and darkness, and are put to a stand in regard of your spiritual state, be sure to have recourse to the day of espousals: Call

to mind the Garment, the Ring, the fatted Calf, &c. Psal. 77. 10. I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.

USE. 2. For Exhortation and encouragement unto awakened Sinners in special, to repent, and return to God; to fall down at his feet and beg his grace and favor, to confess your unworthiness: Oh, long for the day of Conversion, it will be a joyful day. God himself will rejoice in thee; it is well pleasing to God, it is his delight, he takes pleasure in the Sinners return; thou canst not give him greater content by anything. Thou wilt afford matter of joy to the blessed Angels, who are exceedingly satisfied in the glory of God, and Salvation of Sinners. Thou wilt glad the souls of glorified Saints, if not now because they know it not, yet when thou shalt go to them, and thy presence in that General Assembly of the first born shall be a witness to it, then will they magnify God for it, and take pleasure in thee. Thou shalt wondrously refresh the souls of militant saints; thy Godly Parents, faithful Ministers, pious neighbors, these shall have smiles instead of tears; and shall take delight in reaping the fruit of their many prayers, and counsels. Thou wilt grieve none but Devils and devilish men. Nay, it is thy own concern; thou art now mourning, thou shalt then rejoice and be filled with unspeakable gladness of heart: Nay, God himself will make a feast for thee, a Wedding day shall be kept with greatest solemnity, and thou thyself shall be the subject of all those triumphs and songs of joy: Oh then all! forsake Satan's camp, come over unto the Lord Jesus Christ; then shall those that have been grieved for your sin and obstinacy, have their hearts refreshed by you; and all rejoice together with you in your Conversion.

## SERMON XXV.

There are some other more particular useful observations may be here made, viz.

DOCT. I. God useth his Servants as instruments in bestowing his spiritual blessing upon his Children.

He doth not usually dispense these things immediately, but in and with the means. We may here consider. 1. Who are these Servants. 2. The confirmation of the Doctrine.

1. Who are these Servants?

ANSW. Touching the Ministry of the Holy Angels, though the thing be a truth, Heb. 1. 14. Yet the way is more secret: and I verily believe they do more for the Saints than they are aware of, and may be as active in suggestion of that which is good, as Satan that which is evil: But I shall not adventure here to particularize, therefore,

2. By these servants we may understand the Ministers of the Gospel, who are appointed to this end, to be laborers under Christ for the help of the Elect, and bringing of them to Glory, Eph. 4. 10, 11, 12. these are therefore called Ambassadors for Christ, 2 Cor. 5. 20. Now Ambassadors are the representatives of their Princes, and manage foreign affairs in their name; and these do dispense for Christ the Gospel of Reconciliation. verse. 19. Hence they are called Ministers, and Stewards, 1 Cor. 4. 1. Whose work is to distribute their Masters Estate according to order. They are also called Deacons, 1 Cor. 3. 5. Because as they do by office distribute the outward, so do these the spiritual treasures.

2. For Confirmation of the Doctrine: The Scripture gives us clear light for this truth; besides that Allegorical direction, Cant. 1. 7, 8. See, Mal. 2. 7: The Priests lips should keep knowledge, and they should ask the Law at his mouth. Which is spoken of Gospel times: besides illustrious examples add confirmation to it; that of Paul, Act. 9: 14: of Cornelius, Act: 10: of the Eunuch, Act: 8: show what care God takes to ratify this way. Though Paul be enlightened and awakened extraordinarily, he must be confirmed and comforted by a Minister: Though an Angel appear to comfort Cornelius and counsel him, yet his instruction and receiving the spirit, must be under Peter's ministry: Though God works a miracle upon Philip to bring him to him, yet the Eunuch must receive the Gospel by ordinary means: and the ground is,

1: Negatively; not for want of power in God; he needs not the assistance of Angels or men; he sometimes doth without them; though to keep up and credit his appointed order, it is but seldom.

2: Positively; God doth it:

1: To suit our nature: the People begged that Moses might speak to them: God speaks to us familiarly when he speaks by men like ourselves.

2: To honor his servants: it is an honor to any creature to be used by God in any service of his; but to be used in the greatest work, that is so much more; this is it which so elevates Paul, Eph: 3: 8: To me, who am less than the least of all Saints, is this grace given, &c.

USE. 1: For Information,

1: See their folly who, contemning the servants of Christ, expect all their comforts and benefits to come from himself immediately: They

scorn to receive the best robe, &c. at the hands of Christ's Servants, but must have it from him without means, though (should God grant us our desire) it is most suitable that his Servants should be helpful in it; yet it is a strange frame in a Prodigal, that he will be limiting his Father, and telling him how he shall relieve him, or not at all? What? Can we not see the father's love in the gift, because it is sent by the hand of a Messenger? Well; if God's own way cannot content men, they are like to go without his blessing.

2. That those are likely to receive the greatest manifestations of God's love to their soul, that are most careful and diligent in giving attendance to the Ordinances. In heaven indeed, we shall derive all immediately from Christ, but upon earth it is otherwise: Hence that promise, Prov. 8. 35, 36. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my Gates, &c. It is vain for men to depend upon immediate revelations; Moses and the Prophets they have, let them use them. God's way is in his Temple. David desires to dwell in God's house, there to behold his beauty, Psal. 27. 4. and declares such as do so, to be blessed, because they will still be praising him, Psal. 84. 4. i.e., they will be always finding matter of praise.

USE. For Exhortation: It may advise all such as would receive the spiritual blessings of the Gospel, to make use of the help of Christ's Servants, his Ministers. Do you want help, relief, comfort? repair to them. Though it be true that God only can give it, and all means avail not without his blessing, yet is also true, that by them he dispenseth it ordinarily: Now, as the means are appointed by God, so he honors them with the presence and efficacy of his spirit, which else is not to be expected, where there are such advantages. Truth may be the same, spoken by a Minister and another, and yet it may come with more efficacy from such a one, than from another; not from any virtue in him, but from the grace of God, who will thus own his own

appointments. Are you in trouble and want help? May you not blame yourselves? You say, Alas! What can such a one stead me? I answer, not at all of himself, but God comes where he will, and may justly leave you without the blessing, if you despise his way: Let then the messages of peace be welcome to you; if God sends you comfort by his Servants, do not refuse, but receive it.

DOCT. II. God testifieth his love to a penitent sinner, not so much in words as in deeds.

We do not here observe that the Father is mentioned to say anything, to his humble son, weeping out his confessions to him in his arms; but he calls for his servants, and commands them presently to do for him, that which shall be a real testimony of his entire love: What is done for him shall speak his affection better than ten thousand complemental professions.

USE. This may show us the difference between God and men: These make many proffers and protestations: say be fed, be clothed; but mean while the needy creature may perish for all them: But now God seeing a miserable soul in distress, he takes it up into his arms, gives him what he wants, cloths his nakedness, feeds his hunger, takes away his disgrace. It may also direct us in clearing up our evidences; you are ready to say, could I but hear or understand him to speak to me in this or that promise, it would greatly satisfy my doubts; but I reply, is there not a convincing language in deeds? and do you find that to be wrought in you which the promise speaks of? is there suitable spiritual supply brought into your souls? Do you find that there which answers your wants? and shall not this satisfy and certify you of your fathers love, and your interest in the Promise: Nay, you may safely thus argue the case, could he do this for me if he loved me

not? Am I not dealt with as a son, and shall I any longer doubt of my sonship.

DOCT. III. There is a very eminent and glorious change wrought in Conversion.

This is expressed, verse. 24. under two resemblances, wherein the state of man before and after conversion is opposed;

1. Of one that was dead, and is now alive: the natural man is spiritually dead, Eph. 2. 1. This part of the curse actually fell upon Adam, as soon as he fell, and falls on his posterity as soon as they are born, or have a being. They are every way like one that is dead, have no principle of spiritual life, being wholly without Sanctification, which was the informing principle of their Theological life: he can do nothing that is good, can neither stir hand or foot to the service of God; he stinks in the nostrils of God, all that comes from him is rotten and noisome, he sees, hears, understands nothing spiritually. But the convert is alive, Gal. 2. 20. I live; the Image of God is restored, his eyes are opened, ears bored, and he is made capable of doing God service, and glorifying of him in his life; he can now savor the things of God, and walk in his ways.

2. Of one that was lost, and is found: Every Son and Daughter of Adam is lost, gone astray, knows not the way of peace; is in a wilderness and cannot find the way out of it; cannot tell where he is, nor what he is doing, nor whither he is going, and will certainly be lost forever, if grace follow him not into the Wilderness: seek him out, take him up into arms of mercy and bring him home: But the Convert is found; grace hath sought and found him in the mountains, set him in his right way, and becomes his conductor; and now he is going to eternal happiness, and shall arrive at glory.



USE. 1. To teach us how unjustly they boast of their conversion, who are still the same that they were; no-changling's; whose lives and conversations are as dead and sapless and unsavory as ever; who are wandering from God and from his ways: Let us assure ourselves, that where grace hath been at work it will not be so, if men have received spiritual life, they will live; if they are found, they will seek and endeavor to keep in the way of peace, in Tit. 1. 16. See a vast difference between some that say they are converted, and such as are so indeed.

USE. 2. For comfort to those that find this change wrought in them: these are the beginnings of eternal life: This the father gives as the reason of the joyful feast; can you say you were dead and are alive? you have the ground of all consolation in you, and may rejoice in the midst of all other sorrows and troubles. He that lives spiritually, shall live eternally, and him whom Christ hath found, he will save, and he shall be lost no more: He may have his wanderings, but he shall never wholly swerve.

DOCT. IV. The Believers joy is but begun in this life.

They began to be merry. They are but the sips and foretastes, inchoation's of joy which they partake in in this world: The Saints have joy here transcending all the worlds pleasures and delights, such as indeed they cannot so much as apprehend, 1 Cor. 2. 9. but compared with those that are to come, they are but drops, essays, inchoation's.

REAS. 1. From the different manner of their fruition of the object of their joy: Their joy here, is for the most part a joy of hope, but afterwards it shall be a joy of possession, Rom. 8. 24. 2 Cor. 5. 7. For we walk by faith, not by sight. They are now heirs, and their inheritance is glorious, and the fore-thought of it affords them great

joy, but they are under Tutors, and Guardians the while; but then they shall take possession of all the Glories of Heaven, and fullness of Christ: they now rejoice that their names are written in Heaven; then they shall themselves be there placed upon thrones, and wear Crowns.

REAS. 2. From the different degrees of their fruition: They have something now to live upon by Faith, there is something of heaven that doth come down into the souls of Believers here upon earth, but they are but earnest, like a bunch of grapes to refresh them in a wilderness; which, though it be sweeter than all that is in the world, yet it is but little to that Canaan where these grow in abundance: they have spiced draughts here, but then the mountain of spices, Psal. 16. ult. fullness of joy is in thy presence.

REAS. 3. From the mixture and allays of their joys here, which shall not be in another world. The joys of Believers are here sometimes interrupted, a cloud intercepts the Sun, a curtain is drawn before their window, they are in the dark and see no light: Though Faith be never lost, yet sense is many times taken away; they have broken bones to pain them: Yea, all along the presence of sin, that captivating power of the body of death, put them into mourning; their clearest sunshine is attended with showers, so that their present joys cannot be full: but there no cloud doth arise, that upper world enjoys a perpetual serenity; There is no sin to molest them, no frown of a father to deject them, nothing to cut off their full and endless communion with Jesus Christ the fountain of life and glory.

USE. 1. This may help to strengthen and augment a Believers present joy: There is a vast difference between a mere penny, and an earnest penny: Though we see but a little light just at day breaking, yet this is the comfort of it, that it is an harbinger to, and witness of the Suns

rising shortly; so, though they be but weak and faint beams of comfort that are glimmering upon our hearts, yet this is our happiness that they dart in to tell us that we shall ere long be put into possession of all that felicity which Christ hath bought and paid for.

USE. 2. Let this also serve to sweeten to our thoughts, the apprehension of our change: If a drop doth so refresh thy soul, as to fetch it again to life, when just dying, think how blessed then are they who dwell by the fountain, and drink their fill of it every day? Ah what will it be to be in his arms everlastingly? Didst thou hear his voice in an Ordinance, it was so full of charms, that thy ravished soul could hardly keep in from quitting its mortal tabernacle? What will it then be to feel his everlasting embraces? How welcome should this make the messenger of Death; yea, how pleasantly may it make thee to meditate upon and put into thee a desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ which is best of all.

## **SERMON XXVI.**

Now his elder Son was in the field, and as he came out and drew nigh unto the house, he heard music and dancing. Vers. 25.

And he called one of the servants, and asked him what these things meant. Vers. 26.

And he said unto him, thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted Calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. Vers. 27.

And he was angry. —Vers. 28.

The third part of the Parable hath been spoken to, and therein I have given an account of the main matter intended in the this discourse; viz. To make discovery of the wretchedness and unworthiness of a sinner, the riches of the grace of God in his Conversion, the nature also and quality of converting grace. I shall very briefly pass over this fourth and last part; in which we have described the carriage of the elder son; by whom, we observed in the beginning, our Savior aims at the scribes and Pharisees, whose murmuring at his familiarizing of himself with Publicans and sinners, gave occasion to this and the foregoing Parable: He is called the Elder, because these men looked upon themselves as the proper heirs and inheritors of the Promises; took themselves to be the only men of merit, and thought that all favor shewn to Publicans was misapplied.

In this part of the Parable there are two parts. 1. The offense which this son took at his father's carriage to his younger brother, verse. 25. to 31. 2. The Father's vindicating the righteousness and equity of the carriage, verse, 31, 32.

1. In the offense we may observe, 1. The ground of it, viz. The information given him of his brothers entertainment, partly by his ears, confused, verse. 25. and partly by information upon enquiry, verse. 26, 27. further illustrated by the place where he was, when all this was done, verse. 25. 2. The offense itself described, 1. Positively, verse. 28. 2. In its aggravations, verse. 28, 29, 30. where he justifieth himself against his father's entreaties, condemns his brother, and accuseth his father of ingratitude, if not injustice. I shall give you some brief hints from these several passages.

1. We may take notice where this Elder son was, when all this was done, viz. in the field, about his business, following his vocation,

hard at work: Hence,

DOCT. I. Outward careful attendance upon the visible service of God, is no sure sign of a sincere Christian.

The eldest son was in the field, and where could he have been better? He was getting money, while the other was spending it. The Scribes & Pharisees were great sticklers in the law and outward worship of God: hear how he boasts of himself, Luk. 18. 11. and yet all this may be where there is no sincerity; see, Mat. 5. 20. A man may do abundance and be a stranger to saving grace.

REAS. 1. Because a man may do all this upon false and unsound principles, for,

1. There may be bodily service where there is not the heart, Ezek. 33. 31. It is the censure which our Savior passed upon the Pharisees of his time, applying the saying of the Prophet to them, Mat. 15. 7, 8. and declared it to be vain service, verse. 9. Hence that, 1 Tim. 4. 8. Bodily exercise profiteth little.

2. Men may do all this for outward credit and applause: When Religion is in fashion, there are many that court it merely for fashion sake, many love to be as the times are; Many are very Religious only in complement, to be talked of, commended, &c. This fault also our Savior found in the Pharisees, and chargeth hypocrisy on them for it, Mat. 6. 1, and 5.

3. Men may do a great deal because they hope to be saved for their doing: As there is in all men a reaching desire after happiness, so there is also a natural pride, they are willing to be their own saviors, in quest of which men will take much pains; and when they apprehend life to be had by doing, they will do much: this also was

another ground of, and defect in the doings of these Pharisees, Mat. 6. 7. Rom. 9. 31, 32.

USE. 1. Here see the Reason why some that have in their time been great Professors, and careful, do afterwards degenerate, and grow licentious: for if all that so profess are not sincere, do not act from a sound principle, no wonder if they decline: If the seed that hath no rooting, though it grow a while, and out-grow many, do at last die, wither, decay, we are not to wonder, nor ought this any way to discourage those that are sinners.

USE. 2. Let it counsel us, to have a care that we do not ground our confidence in this, that we do more than others: think not ourselves better, or surer merely for this: Though God will not reprove you for your sacrifices, yet he may for your hypocrisy, and so you may weary him with your vain oblations, Isa. 1. 13. Remember there is no Justification legal, by the work we do.

DOCT. II. The Hypocrite is not acquainted with, nor invited to the solemnization of the great joy which is at the conversion of a sinner.

Whiles this joyful entertainments is provided for and afforded to this younger son, his elder brother is in the field, the father doth not send and call him in unto it: This is not without its spiritual meaning; hypocrites may seemingly do a great deal, but still they are strangers to, and have no share in the joy of true Believers, Prov. 14. 10.

REAS. Because he is a mere stranger to that which is the cause of his joy, viz. converting grace; he doth not know what it is, what is the worth and excellency of it, nor what are those grounds of spiritual joy which proceed from it: these are spiritual things, and therefore a natural man cannot receive them, 1 Cor. 2. 14. The hypocrite is truly unregenerate, and hence he moves in an inferior orb, and can no

more know what the joys of a Believer are, than a beast can understand the nature and advantages of a life of reason: he is in the flesh, but these are not fleshly joys.

USE. 1. This may show us the true reason why hypocritical men are so little affected with the conversion of a sinner to God: when the report of it comes to them, it may be they are angry and envious, however they are not stirred up by it to praise God for them, to congratulate with them their happiness, and partake in their joys: Alas, they were not invited, they do not see nor know what it is to have been dead, and be alive, to be restored from spiritual death, to be brought home to God, of a Prodigal to be made a son.

USE. 2. Here we also see a reason why unconverted men wonder when they hear the People of God speak of their joys and comforts; whereas they look upon them as sorrowful and miserable men, and think them mad to please themselves with phantasms and dreams; whereas their own blindness and ignorance is the cause of their admiration. Felix thinks Paul is distracted, whereas he himself is distempered; Hence let not the People of God judge themselves by, or think worse of themselves for worldly men's opinion concerning them.

USE. 3. If Hypocrites may not feast it with the People of God here, much less shall they do it in the Kingdom of Glory: If they may not partake with them in the feast of Tabernacles, much less in their consummation: How miserable a thing then is it to be a professor and no more? to hew wood and draw water with the Gibeonites? to do the drudgery of the Law, but not to partake of the joys of the Gospel? a legal life is a life of much business, but of no comfort; there are many terrors which may oppress the conscience for defaults, and much labor in striving to attain an unattainable legal perfection; but

no true joys, which can only flow from the sense of God's love and pardon in Jesus Christ; beware than of Hypocrisy.

2. We may observe the ground of the offense, viz. The information he had of his brothers kind entertainment: this he guessth at by the noise he heard of joy, but waits for further information, which he receives by one of the servants, who readily informs him of it, and fully acquaints him with the occasion.

The action of this servant, is exemplary; it tells us thus much;

OBSERV. That in our relation of matters of fact, we should do it with all fidelity and candor, to make the best of things and not the worst; The servant both tells what his master had done, and gives a good reason for it, that one would think might have been convincing, however it is otherwise taken. It is very certain that a story may be true, and yet so told as may be advantageous or prejudicial to him whom it concerns. Doeg, for all that we read, spake true of Ahimelech, but in such manner as was pernicious, and carried a lie in it, and is therefore called a lying tongue, Psal. 52. begin. Which may give us warning to beware how we represent matters in our relation of them: have a care therefore of a spirit of detraction, else its certain the most spotless actions of the most innocent persons, may be laid open to the malice and spite of men: and the rather avoid it, because it is a disease the times labor of. There is something also commendable and imitable in the action of the eldest son; he enquires before he determines, he doth not presently conclude, from what he hears, but seeks to be certified in the truth; which if it were more practiced amongst Christians, would prevent many unjust censures which are, by over credulity, past upon the innocent. But I especially intend to take notice of the ground itself of his offense, whence observe this,



DOCT. III. It is the guise and Character of a hypocrite, that he is offended and angry at the grace of God, manifested to those whom he converts and takes into favor.

They cannot bear that God should show any love to repenting Prodigals: The elder brother is angry that his father should make a feast for his returning son: The comforts and consolations of a Penitent are his great eyesores: The Scribes and Pharisees could not bear that Christ should converse with Publicans and sinners,: Hence the more they observe of God's love to any, the more they hate and abhor them. This was Cain 's sin, and for this very cause he murdered his innocent brother, because God had more respect to his sacrifice, than to Cain 's: this is the ground of persecution, and their prosecuting them with all malice, and studying by all means to do them injury: they are the joys of the People of God that these men cannot bear.

I shall give the evidence of the Doctrine in two things.

1. The natural enmity of the wicked against the Godly, makes them to grieve at all their prosperity which they partake in; Wicked men are of the evil one; who, next to God himself, hates his Children; and as there is war betwixt Christ and the Devil, so also there is opposition betwixt their seed: There is a spirit of envy in the nature of fallen man, Jam 4. 5. It hath for its objects persons and things: The persons whom it most expresseth itself against are the People of God, because they are not of them, Joh. 15. 19. And the things are, all their prosperity so far as they apprehend it: Sorrow and misery is not envied, at that they can rejoice, and say, Aha! so would we have it: But their prosperity, the singular favors of God, their comfort, their hopes, their professed assurance; these they cannot bear, and hence they are spitefully enraged, and gnash their teeth, Psal. 112. 8. 9, 10.

2. Where this spirit is found ruling in a professor, it is a certain note of a Hypocrite. I know there is no sin but hath its motions in a Believer, but it doth not there reign; but where it so doth, let a man's profession be what it will, it proves it vain and dissembling: and the reason is plain, because it contradicts this property of a Believers grace, which is to rejoice both in the glory of God, and in our neighbors good; both of which are herein so eminently manifested, that if there be any grace stirring, it will be raised by it: God most prizeth the glory of his grace, which that more appears, the more vile and unworthy the subject hath been: And the joy of Conversion is the realest and best joy that a soul can have, that of glory differs from it but in degree; and he that envies God's Glory, and his neighbors good, he breaks the whole Law at once.

USE. 1. Here we see a Reason why the faithful People of God meet with so much opposition, in the world, not only from the professed enemies of Godliness, but also from many pretenders to it; they cannot bear the prosperity of the righteous, the more God favors them, the more they envy them; alas, all are not Israel that are of Israel: There are many that profess God, and yet hate godliness; and then no wonder if they cannot endure that God should bless the Godly: they therefore persecute them, and do all they can to disturb them in their quiet and tranquility: Let not these things amuse us, bet let it satisfy us if God love us, though men hate us: if God give us joy in himself, peace in our consciences, though others seek to trouble us, be not discontent, nor let us seek men's favor but God's; yea, let that always be our prayer, Psal. 109. 28. Though they curse, do thou bless.

USE. 2. For Examination; here we have one Rule for the trial of our sincerity, i.e. How are we affected when we see and hear, that this or that poor Prodigal that was lying in sin, and had dishonored God, is

converted and brought home, and made partake in his grace, and rich benefits? Do we truly rejoice with them, and bless God for them? or do we envy them, and grow angry that anything should be done for them? do we hate them, and the more because we think God loves them? this is a dangerous note of hypocrisy: and truly if men would search their own hearts, they might find too much of this spirit: God's people are hated for their liberties, privileges, their communion with God, and acquaintance with him: Men pretend other reasons, but this is the true reason: But let me expostulate with such spirits, as God did with Cain: If you do well, if you also are converted, there is enough for you, God can fill all souls with joy, there can be nothing wanting; if you are not converted, you have more need to mourn than envy: The fault is your own, not theirs, do as they have done, return and humble yourselves before God, and you may fare as they do.

USE. 3. To Exhort Believers to show a spirit contrary to the envious spirit of wicked men: do you therefore pray for, and by all means in your compass, endeavor the Conversion of Prodigals, long and travel for the regeneration of sinners; and when you see it, rejoice in it, and glorify God for it; so shall you approve yourselves to be the People of God, and not only so, but you shall also share in their joy, and it shall be a complement of your happiness to be fellow commoners with them, in the blessed things which God prepared for those that love him.

## **SERMON XXVII.**

And he was angry and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. Vers. 28.

And he answering said to his father, Lo those many years I do serve thee, neither at any time transgressed I thy commandment, & yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. Vers. 29.

But as soon as this thy son was come, which had devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. Vers. 30.

It follows now to consider the offense itself, and that which we have here principally to take notice of, is the plea which his son useth to justify his anger. In particular we may observe. 1. Wherein he discovered his anger, he would not go in. 2: His fathers meekness and condescendency to him, he went out and entreated him. 3. His resolute refusal, grounded upon a pretended plea of just offense, where he chargeth his father for a double partiality; 1. In neglecting of him; and not rewarding of his faithful service, wherein he accuseth him of great unkindness, verse. 29. 2. In showing such extraordinary favor to his younger brother, who deserved ill at his hands; hence, 1. He reviseth his former wicked carriage. 2. Adds his fathers kind entertainment to it, to make it look odious, verse. 30. as if his father had by this approved of his prodigality; he therefore takes no notice of his repentance and return. Hence,

DOCT. I. It is the Hypocrites own fault that he doth not partake with the People of God in their joys.

The father did not shut the elder son out, but he would not come in; yea, though his father entreated him he still refused.

OBJECT. But he was not invited, how then should he come?

ANS. But if he had had an ingenious and brotherly spirit, he might have come when he heard of it: The word tacitly insinuate that the servant did entreat him, but he would not hear him. But to give a closer decision of the case; unregenerate men are not, and yet they are invited: There is not the inward, spiritual, powerful invitation which compels them, and by particular application of grace draws them: But there is a general, doctrinal, conditional invitation presented to all where the Gospel comes, in which God by his Servants speaks seriously, pleads earnestly, expostulates industriously, waits patiently, as one that is willing and desirous that they should come in; this is the invitation which they reject: and of such it is that our Savior useth those expressions, Joh. 3. 29. Men choose darkness. Chap. 5. 20. Ye will not come unto me. Rom. 10. 2. All day long have I stretched forth my hand, unto a disobedient and gainsaying People.

REAS. Because they refuse to come up to the terms upon which they are invited. God bids all come, but he tells them how he expects they should come; but these terms are hard, and they cannot bear them: Men will not leave their farms and merchandize, they will not part with their darling lusts, they will not suffer loss of their own righteousness; the company doth not please them, the Saints ere the People they hate: The eldest son its like would have come in, if his father would have turned his brother out of the doors: Men, instead of embracing the Gospel, pick quarrels with it, they will not come at all unless they may come in their own strength, bring their righteousness with them, &c. Rom. 10. 3.

USE. Hence how inexcusable will wicked men be, and without any Apology, when they shall be condemned to everlasting separation from the Saints and their joy? Time was when they might if they would, but they would not; they scorned the communion of the

Saints here, and shall be justly denied it forever: Then shall they remember the time when they were striven with, pleaded withal, earnestly entreated to be reconciled to God, but they scornfully refused, or pleaded impotency, and because they could not come of themselves, they would not let Christ help them, but kept off by unbelief: And if men thus despise the feast of the Gospel, and will not part with their lusts, vanities, carnal confidences, that they may feast it with Christ and his People, can they charge unjust dealing, or undue severity upon the master of the feast, if he swear against them that they shall never taste of his Supper? Is not the law of retaliation just? Prov. 1. 2. &c. Beware then how you despise, or envy, or find fault with the dispensations of the Gospel unto a willful exclusion of yourselves; it will be bitterness in the latter end.

DOCT. II. It is the disposition of false and hypocritical Professors to be finding fault with God's dispensations of providence.

The fathers dealings seem very irregular and unrighteous to his eldest son: This was the frame of that self-cheating people, Isa. 58. 2. They think God doth them wrong: thus it was with Cain, he counted himself injured, because his brother was accepted before him; yea, it was too common a thing among the Jews to say, God's ways are not equal, Ezek. 18. 25.—29: &c.

REAS. 1. Negatively; not because God doth any wrong, for he who is the judge of the whole earth cannot but do that which is right, though he often acts sovereignly, yet he never acts injuriously: he will plead his cause and vindicate it one day, to the silencing of all those who now seek to impute injustice to him.

Positively: The ground of it is,

REAS. 2. Because Hypocrites judge of things only by outward appearance, and that cannot be righteous Judgment: the causes of God's providence are many times obscure, but never irregular: He that looks upon the outward face of things may be amazed, but he that beholds that an all-wise hand of God doth all, will suspend, his Judgment, and wait till the time when all things shall be made clear.

2. Because of their ignorance of the ways of God: they are above them, and they cannot see into them: Ignorance and a good opinion of themselves, meeting together, is the reason of all the mis-judging of carnal men: Through self-conceit they argue thus, that because they cannot see the reason, therefore there is none; as if we were bound to confess that the sun shineth not, because a blind man sees it not: Wisdom is too high for a fool, therefore he condemneth it of folly.

USE. 2. It may teach us that if we would escape the just censure of being hypocrites, we labor to have reverend thoughts of all God's ways: Though you cannot always discern the depth of them, yet be not rash in censuring them: condemn not the things you know not, but rather admire them; and when you cannot give a reason of this or that providence, remember you are men, and then you need not to wonder at it: When many parts of Divine wisdom are too high for you, and with the Psalmist, Psal. 72. you are pained within you, with searching into them, then satisfy yourselves in this, that it is God that sits at helm, and he is good, and cannot do ought but good.

DOCT. III. Legalists look upon their own works to be meritorious, and think God unjust if he do not reward them eminently.

The Son is angry that his faithful service is not rewarded so much as with a kid: The Jews thought their fastings ill laid out, Isa. 58. begin.

If they do not prosper, and all things go as their hearts can wish, legal spirited men think themselves abused.

REAS. Because such as rely upon their own works and doings, though they may have taken up an Evangelical profession, and have gotten the name of Christ in their mouths as a word of course; yet they were never truly broken off from themselves; they never saw the emptiness of their own righteousness, nor understood what unprofitable servants they are, when they have done all: There is a root of pride remaining in all unconverted men, they are not humbled as they ought to be: As long as a man thinks his doings to be of so much worth, he will consequently count himself injured, if they be not rewarded according to his expectation.

USE. 1. Here we see the very root and ground of all our repining's, and murmurings at the providences of God which do befall us; it proceeds from a legal spirit: It is because we set up our counters for gold, and rate our poor sorry doings beyond their desert: and particularly many grumble and complain that they have no fatted calf; i. e. feasting and joy, though they labor hard, and live conscientiously, yet they spend all their time in the dark, have not the provision and entertainment which others have. It is true, a Believer may walk in darkness, and want light; but to envy others theirs, and to find fault with God that they themselves enjoy it not, and though they have waited long for it, yet it comes not, hath too much of a legal spirit in it.

USE. 2. It may teach us, that if we would justify God in all his dealings to ourselves and to others, we must learn to despise, and see the emptiness, and nothingness of all our own performances: They that had labored all day, are angry that loiterers, and idle persons, that came in but at the eleventh hour, had their penny too as well as



they; they judged their work worth something: Whereas an humble soul that counts his own righteousness rags, and polluted, that acknowledgeth free grace to preside in all the dispensations of Divine favors; he will adore that grace which appears to others, and patiently wait on God for the like favor, not repining that it comes not yet, but counting and confessing it an high favor if ever it comes.

DOCT. IV. A man may live a long while in Christ's visible family, and also in a careful outward attendance to duty, and yet never be made to partake in his special love and favor.

Never be feasted with his special spiritual grace, never have a kid killed for him to feast it with his friends: The hypocrite never tastes one crumb of the Children's bread,

REAS. 1. From their incapacity; they are not in a state and condition to be feasted: joys and feasts are for the living, and not for the dead; whereas these men are not alive: they are painted sepulchers, but full of dead men's bones, they are really dead, though seemingly alive.

REAS. 2. Because the dispensation of God's special love and favor are not Legal, but Evangelical dispensations. God doth nothing for any of Adam 's sinful progeny for the sake of their righteousness, but only of his free grace as long therefore as men boast of their doings they may do all their lives long, and God no whit regard so as to accept of them: the proud Pharisee is not justified.

USE. 1. To teach us that when man hath done his utmost, still grace is free, and not owing to him: The father had not been unkind, much less injurious to his son, though he served him, and he killed no kid for him: God owes not conversion, nor the benefits that come by it to our endeavors.

USE. 2. Hence wonder not if many Professors in the visible Church are lifeless, and sapless, hold no spiritual communion with Jesus Christ: It is not to be wondered at, if we consider how great difference and distance there is between being a son in the visible family, and a son received into special grace, and favor with his father.

USE. 3. It may also teach us to beware that we rely not upon ourselves and our duties, but to renounce all, and fly to the Grace of God in Christ, that is the only way to come by, and be partakers in special and soul refreshing grace.

DOCT. V. Wicked men delight in aspersing the People of God with their former, follies.

How eloquent is the elder son in rehearsing the wickedness of his brother? but not a word of his repentance. They love to remember what the Saints were, not what they are; if in their youth they have been vain, profuse, prodigal, this shall never be forgotten; but their reformation, deep sorrow, and sincere repentance shall never be taken notice of; they are like Scarabees that live upon dung hills, and suck nothing but corruption, like flies that live upon sores: And this they do,

1. In enmity against the grace of God: The eldest son doth it to cast a blemish upon his fathers kindness, as if he therefore favored such wickedness: When one objected against Beza, some wanton youthful Poems, he said, *Hic homo invidet mihi gratiam Dei.*

2. To justify themselves, they hope by this means to gain the better reputation, they that have no real goodness of their own, think to shine by comparison: I am not as this Publican.

USE. To teach those that are the People of God to avoid this frame of spirit: Consider not what the People of God were, but what they are; if they have been Prodigals, yet if now they are Converts, acknowledge the grace of God, and magnify it: If God hath blotted his sins out of his book of remembrance, do not you record them: Remember, if you yourselves have not been such in your outward conversation, you had as bad hearts, and it was only restraining grace that did prevert you, else your like natures had appeared in as bad actions: Be sure consider always that it is the grace of God by which you are what you are; be not envious at them, but labor to strengthen your faith by their example: Think how glorious a God you serve, that is able to pass by and pardon such sins; trust him the more, love him the better, rely on him with the greater confidence.

DOCT. VI. God's converting grace many times meets the profane Prodigal in his Career and turns him, when it passeth by the moral and legal Professor.

God finds the Prodigal in his far Country; his eldest brother is at home, and yet passed by. In our Savior's time there were more Publicans converted than Scribes and Pharisees; afterwards the Heathen Gentiles came flocking in upon the preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles, whiles the Jews obstinately refused it: So true is that of our Savior, Luk. 13. 28, 29, 30. Mat. 21. 31, 32. The Publicans and the Harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you, &c.

REAS. 1. From the deep interest of self in a legal Professor: The profane persons sins are almost convincible; whereas the other thinks his righteousness to be of great worth, and is not easily persuaded of the unprofitableness of it, Rom. 9. 31, 32.

REAS. 2. From the wisdom of God, to make his free grace thus the more manifest, The more profuse any have been, the more visible

and observable is that grace which is made to appear to be in them: The Physician gets no credit by administering to one that thinks himself well already; the more desperate the disease is apprehended, the more eminent is the cure acknowledged to be, Luk. 5. 31.

USE. 1. To awaken carnal Professors; you may easily be cheated: Why are you no more concerned with the awakening means which you enjoy? you think yourselves to be whole and sound, and these warnings are for the vain and profane; beware! you may be lost, when those whom you despise may be saved.

USE. 2. To advise us not to despair of, but to pray for the worst sinners: God both knows how to magnify his mercy upon them, and not only so, but is often pleased to single out these to make illustrious monuments of his saving grace, despair not then of them, but pray hard for them, that they may be converted, and believe.

USE. 3. To encourage any that have been grievous sinners against God; despair not, such are often chosen to be the subjects of grace, and if God hath awakened and humbled you, hope in his mercy; he knows how to get him a name in your Salvation.

## **SERMON XXVIII.**

And he said unto him, Son thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine. Vers. 31.

It was meet that we should make mercy, and be glad. for this thy Brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost, and is found. Vers. 32.

In the last place we have to consider of the fathers vindication of the righteousness and equity of his carriage to his younger son, in which he asserts three things. 1. That there was no such occasion offered of making such a feast for him, thou art ever with me. 2. That there was no wrong done to him by thus entertaining of his brother, it diminished not his Portion, nor put him besides his own, all that I have is thine. 3. That there was sufficient cause for the joyful reception of his Prodigal son; It was meet, &c. and he gives the reason of it, verse. 32.

Before I come to particular observations, it is needful to clear these words from an objection. I have in this discourse interpreted the elder son to aim firstly at the Scribes and Pharisees, and so under them at hypocritical Professors, legal men, and vain boasters; but here seems to be a scruple, viz. How comes it then that his father saith, All that I have is thine? Have unregenerate men a title to God's, spiritual grace and favor? This objection seems at first blush to carry some force with it, and hath so far prevailed with some, as to make them interpret this eldest son to signify the Godly, who (by a religious education) have not fallen into, but been kept from such foul enormities; and through infirmity are sometimes stumbled at such providences of God: But then as great a scruple may arise on the other hand, viz. Shall the penitent Prodigal have no portion again? Is not all repaired in Christ, which we lost in Adam? Was not Paul, though he had been a persecutor, &c. upon his conversion made a just heir? But to come to some resolution: It is certain Christ must aim at the Pharisees in this eldest son, else the scope and purport of the Parable had been Alien from his present design, and so to no purpose; for his business is to silence their murmurings: You have the occasion of the Parable, verse. 1. 2. Hence the interpretation of every particular must be such, as may be reduced to the general, and may bear & suit with it according to the Analogy of faith. It is a

good rule in Divinity, That all expressions in Parables must be so interpreted as to agree with other plain Scriptures, referring to the same thing. Parables are similitudes, in which spiritual things are familiarized to us by earthly things, by way of allusion: Now though there be a vast disproportion between God and the Creature, between heavenly and earthly things, yet there is some shadow of those in these, and that is all that we seek in a Parable. Our Savior's design is to convince the Pharisees of the unreasonableness of their murmurings; and he doth it by an argument *â majori ad minus*. q.d. The Son might seem to have some plea against his Father, but indeed had none, much less have you against me: Though his son had been faithful, and careful, and was heir, yet his father could make a feast, and receive his younger son without detriment to the other; much more may I entertain Publicans and Sinners, without injuring you, who deserve nothing, who are holy only in pretense. Or the argument may be by way of Concession: We know the Pharisees thought well of themselves, but saith our Savior, put case you are the men you pretend, yet what wrong is this? Is there not room left for free grace to a Prodigal? So Tertullian glosseth it, *Posuit illos in parabold, non quales erant, sed quales esse debuerant*. Except we take this rule, we shall scarce find any Parable, but will involve us in difficulty. We must not think, because every laborer had his penny, therefore the degrees of glory are all equal: because the Master bid the servants let the tares grow till harvest, therefore Churches are to suffer manifest hypocrites without censuring of them: but this may suffice. I now proceed to make some observations.

DOCT. I. There is never any occasion of special joy over a Hypocrite. Son thou art ever with me.

The father insinuates that he was not wont to do things superfluously or without occasion: And we may see the evidence of the Doctrine, if

we consider what is the ground of extraordinary expressions of joy among men. Now, though men that are given to excess will make occasions of feasting, and great shows of jocundity, where there is no reason; yet as joy is an affection moved by the apprehension of some present good; so, the extraordinary signifying of it by feasts, mirth, great entertainments, is when the reason of it is more than usual: Hence the most of those occasions recorded in Scripture are either, 1. The revolution of birth days, so Herod kept his birth day, Mat. 14. 6. and Pharaoh, Gen. 40. 20. 2. The time of weaning Children; so Abraham for Isaac, Gen. 21. 8. 3. Marriages; Christ honored with his presence a wedding feast, and with his first miracle, Joh. 2. begin. 4. Great victories and deliverances, hence days of thanksgiving appointed, and hence the passover. 5. God's signal blessing upon their labors, in giving them the fruit of the earth. Hence the feast of ingathering. 6. The entertainment of strangers, or occasional visitation of friends; thus Lot made a feast for the Angels, Gen. 19. 3. and David for Abner, 2 Sam. 3. 20. 7. The finding of that which was lost, Luk. 15. 6-9. But there is no such respect in one or another kind, on a spiritual account, with a hypocrite: whereupon God should make him a joyful entertainment: For,

1. He hath no birth day; was never born again, but lives and lies in sin: All his legal and moral duties are but splendida peccata: He is the same he was, there is no gracious change wrought in him: There is more reason to mourn over him as a dead man; than to rejoice over him as a living man; to celebrate his funeral, than his birth: The state of nature is a state of death, Eph. 2. 1.

2. He was never weaned from the world and vanities of it, but still hangs upon its breasts, seeking his contentment among creatures, and to satisfy his appetite upon these things; His name is written in

the earth, he lives upon lying vanities, cannot say as David, Psal. 131.

2. I am like a weaned Child.

3. He is not married to Christ; his league with sin and Satan was never broken, he was never dead to the law that he might be united to a Savior: How should there be a marriage feast without a marriage? Christ indeed hath wooed him, but he never gave his consent, nor will leave playing the harlot with other lovers; never embraced that call, Jer. 3. 2.

4. He never was a conqueror over his lusts, nor got victory upon his corruptions; but remains a slave of sin and Satan, led about at his pleasure, and serving divers lusts: Sin rules him, his Chains were never knocked off, nor his prison doors broken open, but he lives under the power and condemnation of sin.

5. He hath brought forth no fruit to God, or to his own souls comfort; is a dry heath and barren ground, a fig tree, which if it have the leaves of a profession, yet hath no fruit of sanctification; a vine, which if it bear any grapes, they are sour wild grapes; a fig-tree long waited on for fruit, and ready for that sentence, Cut it down, why cumberst it the ground, Luk. 13. 7. A piece of ground that is nigh unto cursing. Heb. 6. 8.

6. He never came to God for entertainment, not so much as like a stranger to ask his friendship and favor: much less as a son who had absented himself, to seek his fathers pardon; but he lieth out from him, keeps at a distance, will not come to Christ for life, Joh. 5. 40.

7. Though he be a lost creature in himself, yet he was never found, but is lost still; he is yet in the wilderness, wandering upon the mountains: and whiles it is thus, what occasion can there be of special joy over him?



Use, 1. Hence the joys and boastings of unregenerate men are groundless: Many talk of their hopes, and comforts, and soul satisfactions; they tell how God refreshed them at this and that time with these and those promises; nay, they have had tastes of the powers of the world to come: Alas! infatuated souls! God doth not scatter his joys promiscuously: Though men may, God will not make a needless feast.

USE. 2. It may put men upon enquiry, when they cannot find that comfort and joy in their service which they expect, whither this may not be the reason of it: I do not say it is always so, the best Saint may sit in the dark, Isa. 50. 10. And there are other reasons why the all-wise God will make his own Children to fast, and to mourn too: Many falls, much heedlessness; yea, their weakness to bear much of this new wine; God stints his own People, and will not kill them with Cordials: But I say, it is a good enquiry, hast thou not, nor ever hadst any taste of these joys? ask then, am I new born, &c? If there be none of this, wonder not, there was no occasion: most men act preposterously, they try their grace by their joys, whereas they ought to try their joys by their Grace.

DOCT. II. Unregenerate men have no cause to complain that God shows more special favor to repenting sinners, that he doth to them.

Whatever they think they have to say for themselves, yet God wrongs them not: The father could entertain the younger son, without injuring his elder: This will appear if we consider,

1. That God in the dispensing of his grace, acts as a free Agent. This is insinuated in that Parable, Mat. 20. 15. A Father is not bound to give an account to his Children how he improves his estate; much less is God to sinful men how he distributes his grace. The Creature cannot oblige the Creator, much less a sinful creature, who hath forfeited all:

It is the Apostles Challenge, Rom. 11. 31. Who hath given to him at any time? There cannot be respect of persons in gratuitis; there is no binding rule of justice in the bestowing of kindness, and where the benefit is a free favor, the choosing one, and passing by another is arbitrary, and depends on the will of the Doner. In God's bestowing of Grace on the Children of men, there can be none worthy, and if he will pitch upon the most unworthy, to make his favor the more notable, who shall call him to an account?

2. That the best works of the most refined hypocrites are no ways obliging or deserving. An unregenerate man may do many things materially good, he may pray, confess his sins, read the word, attend upon ordinances, carry fair among men, abstain from many evils, do many duties; but still they deserve no favor, nay, they deserve the wrath of God; Their prayer is abomination, their plowing sin, their oblations detestable, Isa. 66. begin. If the Godly do confess their best to be rags, their holy duties dung; what then must we say of what the unregenerate do, who have no saving principle of holiness, no mediator through whom to obtain acceptance, no good end in their performances?

3. That the same grace is tendered to them, and the same means of obtaining it are afforded them; if therefore they go without it, it is their own fault. Men are indeed ready to say, God's ways are unequal, when their own ways are so: The proffer of Grace in the Gospel is universal; if men thirst, God shows them the waters, and bids them come freely; if they thirst not, and will not come, who is to blame? God stretcheth out his hand all the day long, but they gain say: God saith, If they will repent and believe they shall be saved; but they say, These many years have I served thee, neither at any time transgressed I thy commandment; God saith, if you be sick, here is a Physician, they say we are well and need him not. And what wrong

then is it to them, if when a company of sick souls, who feel their malady, and are ready to dy of it, come to him for healing, he shows his skill; if when a company of hunger-starved beggars come to him for food, he feeds them; yea, plentifully feasts them?

USE. Learn we hence instead of quarreling with, to admire the free grace of God, which opens a door of hope to the greatest and worst of sinners: Do not discourage or dash the hopes of any; be not afraid to invite the worst to come to Christ upon Gospel-terms; nor let any poor soul that is stung with sin, that sees it lie as mountains between him and God, despair of Salvation: Lo, Christ came skipping over the mountains, and leaping over the hills: Say not, can God save me and be just? He hath satisfied his own Justice, and will silence the cavils of Men and Devils: Say not there is no hope for me; think therefore of the Prodigal: Are there such bowels in men? and are not God's thoughts above ours? This Parable was written for thy sake, who hast been a chief sinner, and now art humbled, to encourage thee to go to God in the name of Christ, and to hope for his mercy.

DOCT. III. Then, and not till then is there true cause of rejoicing over a sinner, when he is converted and brought home to God.

This the father thinks enough to silence all the grumblings of his discontented son, verse. 32. What cause there is of joy at such time, hath been expressed under a former Doctrine, that there is none before, may in a word be cleared, from the consideration of what every sinner is before conversion. I confess men may differ in many things of an inferior nature, one may be better morally disposed than another, one may have more restraining grace, a more affable nature, carry it more obediently to his Parents, be more reformed, &c. than another: But in this the state of all unregenerate men before conversion is alike, viz. that they are,

1. Dead creatures, under the power of spiritual death, rotting in the grave of sin; we do not use to rejoice over our dead Children and relations, but to weep and mourn. They can do nothing for God, nor for their own souls Salvation; they cannot glorify him, &c.

2. They are Children of wrath, Eph, 2. 3. They are blasted by the curse, held under condemnation, liable every moment to fall into hells flames; yea, going to execution: and what mother could ever rejoice over her son that was going to suffer for his deserts, or not wring her hands?

USE. 1. This may give check to the mad mirth of ungodly sinners: Hearken you merry Greeks, that sport yourselves in the world as the fishes do in the sea, that cannot spare time from your jollity to have one serious thought: Stay a little, let me ask, what cause? why so jovial and facetious? are you converted? ah no! I know you will plead, it is lawful to be cheerful, & that civilly in the enjoyment of the outward comforts of this life: True, but when? when they are sanctified by the grace of God, and made yours in the New-Covenant: Get this title, and then you may rejoice in all God's goodness; till then take this bitter pill; all the curses written in the book of God are upon you, and all the things that you rejoice in are tainted with them; you are going to the pit, and all these are but fattening you to the slaughter; treasures of mercy are thus turned into treasures of wrath.

USE. 2. Let this direct those that are the People of God, what chiefly to rejoice in: It is our saviors advice, Luk. 10. 20. In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice, because your names are written in Heaven. Count that your only joy, that the love of God hath appeared in translating of you from death to life: and in regard of your Children, do not take too much carnal delight in them; one is comely and beautiful, another active and sprightly, a third

witty and pleasant; they are good natured: all these are good in their place, and mercies of God; but oh remember the want of saving grace dasheth the joy of all those, and takes away their pleasancy: If they are not converted, as they were born under the curse, so they are still held by it: Oh then travail with pangs of holy care and sorrow for them, till Christ be formed in them; then will you have cause to rejoice indeed: till then think solemnly, what if they may still be damned, and separated from God forever? what then will all these things avail? Long for their conversion, and when once you see it, now rejoice as a mother over her first born son: here is ground for that joy which shall never end, but increase till it grow up to Everlasting Hallelujah.

FINIS.

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